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Revealing the Role of Higher Education in a Diverse Democracy: A Theory of College Student Political Identity Development

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Revealing the Role of Higher Education in a Diverse Democracy: A Theory of College Student Political Identity Development

Abstract

ABSTRACT

REVEALING THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A DIVERSE DEMOCRACY: A THEORY OF COLLEGE STUDENT

POLITICAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Demetri L. Morgan

J. Matthew Hartley

This dissertation sought to investigate how students make meaning of their curricular and cocurricular educational experiences while in college to better theorize how and why these experiences influence the development of their political identity. To date, research has shown that people who attend college are more likely to be civically and politically engaged compared to those who do not attend college. Yet few studies have sought to ascertain what about the totality of a person's college experiences lead to these outcomes. Using multiple qualitative data sources and constructivist grounded theory analysis, this study develops a framework to explain the intrapersonal process of developing a political identity in college. Additionally, drawing on data sources that illuminate the socio-political environment of the state as well as aspects of the institutions' culture, this study provides new insights into the ways in which a student's political identity is shaped by the political culture of an institution and state. This led to the production of a theory that argues that postsecondary institutions can be critical democratic institutions that remediate or perpetuate political inequities in society in nuanced ways. Implications and future research that stem from this theory are relevant to faculty, student affairs professionals, students, policymakers, and those concerned with higher education's role in a diverse democracy.

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REVEALING THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A DIVERSE
DEMOCRACY: A THEORY OF COLLEGE STUDENT POLITICAL
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Demetri L. Morgan

A DISSERTATION

in

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REVEALING THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A DIVERSE
DEMOCRACY: A THEORY OF COLLEGE STUDENT POLITICAL IDENTITY
DEVELOPMENT

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Demetri Lloyd Livingstone Morgan

DEDICATION

For my mom, Georgiene B. Morgan –

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I read recently that, “it takes a village to make it through a PhD program” and you all are and have been my village over years. I can’t count the amount of times (especially during 10-hour writing days) that I drew inspiration from seeing others make moves to follow their dreams or the timely messages checking in on me to see how I was doing. If I forgot anyone, please charge it to my head and not my heart:

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation sought to investigate how students make meaning of their curricular and cocurricular educational experiences while in college to better theorize how and why these experiences influence the development of their political identity. To date, research has shown that people who attend college are more likely to be civically and politically engaged compared to those who do not attend college. Yet few studies have sought to ascertain what about the totality of a person's college experiences lead to these outcomes. Using multiple qualitative data sources and constructivist grounded theory analysis; this study develops a framework to explain the intrapersonal process of developing a political identity in college. Additionally, drawing on data sources that illuminate the socio-political environment of the state as well as aspects of the institutions' culture, this study provides new insights into the ways in which a student's political identity is shaped by the political culture of an institution and state. This led to the production of a theory that argues that postsecondary institutions can be critical democratic institutions that remediate or perpetuate political inequities in society in nuanced ways. Implications and future research that stem from this theory are relevant to

faculty, student affairs professionals, students, policymakers, and those concerned with higher education's role in a diverse democracy.

Keywords: student political identity, political engagement, colleges and universities

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	IV
ABSTRACT	X
LIST OF TABLES	XVI
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	XVII
PREFACE	XVIII
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	1
Research Phenomenon	10
Research Questions	13
Audience of the Study	15
Overview of Dissertation	18
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	20
Chronology of Civic Engagement Efforts in Higher Education	20
History of the Civic Purposes of Higher Education	20
Civic Engagement on College and University Campuses	25
Debate on the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement	27
Classic View	27
Alternative View	29
Middle-Ground Explanations	30
Resolving the Debate	32
Student Identity Development in College	34
Intersectionality/Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity	36
Theory of Self-Authorship	38
Theories of Cognitive Development	41
Summary of Student Development Theory	42
Insights from the Literature on Political Socialization	44
The (Contested) Role of the K-12 Environment	45
The Role of Family Background and Community	48
Limitations of the Political Socialization Literature	50
Postsecondary Organizational Culture and Student Identity Development	51
Campus Climate/Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments	51
Organizational Culture	55
Integration	58
Conclusion	59
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN	61
Overview	61
Research Questions	62
Inquiry Paradigm	63
Research Approach	65

Dealing with (de)Contextualization	67
Summary	69
Methods	70
Institution Sampling Strategy	70
Student Participant Sampling	75
Data Sources	83
Interviews	83
Demographic Questionnaire	84
Direct Observations	85
Institutional Documents and Archival Materials	86
Researcher Journal	87
Data Analysis Strategy	87
Segment 1: Grounded Theory Analysis and Construction	88
Segment 2: Comprehensive Site Overview Analysis and Construction	94
Segment 3: Theoretical Analysis of Links between the Emergent Process and Comprehensive Site Overviews	95
Establishing Trustworthiness	96
Researcher Reflexivity: Rejoinder to the Preface	103
Conclusion	108
CHAPTER IV: STATE SOCIO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS	109
Political Context of Florida	110
Politics of Higher Education in Florida	112
Political Context of Indiana	114
Politics of Higher Education in Indiana	116
Political Context of California	118
Politics of Higher Education in California	121
Political Context of New Jersey	123
Politics of Higher Education in New Jersey	125
CHAPTER V: CONTEXTUALIZING INSTITUTIONS WITHIN STATE SOCIO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS: THE ROLE OF THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF CAMPUS CLIMATE	128
Section I: Campus Profiles	131
University of Florida Institutional Vignette	131
University of Florida Campus Overview	133
Indiana University, Bloomington Institutional Vignette	137
Indiana University-Bloomington Campus Overview	140
University of California, Los Angeles Institutional Vignette	145
University of California, Los Angeles Campus Overview	152
Rutgers University, New Brunswick Institutional Vignette	156
Rutgers University, New Brunswick Campus Overview	160
Section II: Commonalities Across Campuses: The Political Dimension of Campus Climate	163
Overview	165
Public	166
Semi-Public/Private	168

Private	171
Summary of Comprehensive Site Overview Findings	172
CHAPTER VI: MODEL OF COLLEGE STUDENT POLITICAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT	174
Introduction and Overview	174
Precursors to the Political Identity Development Process	175
Core Category: Acquiring an Attitude of Political Fluency	179
Finding Psychological and Behavioral Congruence in Political Systems	186
Politically Motivating Experiences	191
Cognitive Negotiation	196
Applying Political Identity(ies)	199
Modifiers	203
Salient Social Identities	204
Career Aspirations/Purpose of College	208
Summary	211
CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION	214
Towards a Theory about the Role of Higher Education in a Diverse Democracy	215
Integrating the <i>Political Dimension of Campus Climate</i> & College Student Political Identity Development Process	215
The Façade of Neutral Space	216
Remediating Political Inequities	218
Contextualizing Student Development	219
Summary	221
Discussion: Bridging the Role of Higher Education in a Diverse Democracy to Existing Literature	222
Complicating Research on Political Group Membership	222
Civic Literacy → Political Fluency	230
Politics, Campus Climate, and Campus Space: The Necessity of the <i>Political Dimension of Campus Climate</i>	233
Dimension of Campus Climate	233
Implications	236
Student Affairs Professionals	237
Faculty	241
Policymakers	244
Future Research	245
Explore Different Institutional Types and Regions	246
Focus on Different Student Populations	246
Development of Quantitative Constructs or Multi-Institutional Survey	247
Reinvigorating Research on Campus Space	249
Study Limitations	250
Conclusion	252
APPENDIX A: STUDENT RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO NOMINATORS	253
APPENDIX B: TYPES OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS CONTACTED	255
APPENDIX C: STUDENT RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO STUDENTS	256

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE	256
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	263
APPENDIX F: EXAMPLES OF INITIAL CODES	267
BIBLIOGRAPHY	269

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Participant Demographics	79
Table 4.1: Political Climate of States	109
Table 5.1: Snapshot of Institutions	129
Table 5.2: Key Aspects of Political Dimension of Campus Climate	165

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1.1: Voter Turnout by Age, 1972-2012	3
Figure 1.2: Percent Voting by Educational Attainment	4
Figure 1.3: Voting Trends of Citizens with Some College Experience	5
Figure 2.1: Pictorial Representation of Sensitizing Concepts	59
Figure 3.1: Early Rendering of Political Identity Process During Axial Coding	91
Figure 4.1: 2012 Presidential Election Winner by Florida County	111
Figure 4.2: 2012 Presidential Election Winner by Indiana County	116
Figure 4.3: 2012 Presidential Election Winner by California County	118
Figure 4.4: 2012 Presidential Election Winner by New Jersey County	124
Figure 5.1: UF SG President Discussing Efforts to Register Student Voters	131
Figure 5.2: UF SG President Discussing Lobbying Efforts in Tallahassee	132
Figure 5.3: Political Spaces on UF's Campus	137
Figure 5.4: Indiana University's Memorial Union Board Meeting	139
Figure 5.5: Political Spaces on IU's Campus	143
Figure 5.6: A Screenshot of an Op-Ed About TradYouth at IU	144
Figure 5.7: Images from UCLA "Kanye Western Party."	147
Figure 5.8: Student Protester Speaks About UCLA Hostile Racial Climate	148
Figure 5.9: Student Protesters Occupying UCLA Administration Building	149
Figure 5.10: Students Posing with Signs Used During Protest	150
Figure 5.11: Political Space on UCLA's Campus	155
Figure 5.12: Map of the RU College Avenue Campus	157
Figure 5.13: NJ PIRG Flyer on the RU College Avenue Campus	159
Figure 5.14: Political Spaces on RU's Campus	161
Figure 5.15: Campus Newspaper Headline Capturing Muslim & Jewish Tensions	162
Figure 5.16: Model of College Student Political Identity Development	212

PREFACE

A Story of Becoming

“How did you become a Black Conservative” is a question that I have been asked over and over again since I labeled myself as such while studying abroad in Brazil in 2008 between my first and second years as an undergraduate student at the University of Florida. At first, a sense of unease would come over me, as I was unable to marshal the proper words and phrases to convey the process I felt I underwent to arrive at my political identity and understandings. I turned to books on the topic to help me understand my political identity development, and my unease quickly grew into frustration as I concluded that the books and articles on the topic did not adequately capture my experiences or upbringing. In hindsight, my rather unsophisticated search yielded literature that conveyed to me that my political perceptions, attitudes, skills, and knowledge were the sum total of what my parents passed on to me and the education I received during my primary schooling years. This did not resonate with me, because I grew up in a single parent household where political issues were rarely, if ever, discussed outside of the few that clearly intersected with my family’s religious values. I wondered then how my political identity became so important to me when I did not receive the “political socializing” from the primary sources the books and articles suggested I should.

Furthermore, my experience in K-12 schools shied away from grappling with the rich complexities of political life in the United States and took a more decided focus on promoting volunteerism and service work with only a cursory explanation of a tame version of the political process. After reflection on these gaps, the question still remained

“How did I end up like this?” With this dead end, I began to ask friends and mentors how they developed their political identities. Listening to their stories fascinated me. My frustration with my own process slowly turned into intrigue at how other people developed their own political identity. Some stories fit the narratives I had read in books, but for many students the retelling of their political identity was messier, multi-directional, and informed by many more institutions than the literature on the topic suggested. In addition, I pondered how the place and unique moment in time that encapsulated the dialogues I was having contributed to others and my understanding of our political identity.

The moment in time is important to note because in 2008, the United States was experiencing its worst economic recession since the Great Depression, and the country’s military was engaged in two unpopular wars. In higher education, state legislators were slashing college budgets and most institutions had to implement some sort of budget reduction measures in response to declining allocations or lower endowment returns. Nationally, in addition to the recession and wars, the topics of torture related to the War on Terror, immigration reform, pushes for marriage equality in many states, tenuous race relations due to the way the government handled Hurricane Katrina, and the ever-present abortion debate were also present themes. On top of that, the 2008 presidential election featured a woman and an African-American male, both of whom had serious chances of becoming their party’s nominee and the next president of the U.S. For these reasons and many more, the national media situated the 2008 election as a turning point election for the country.

In the midst of this particular moment in time, I happened to be a 2nd year student majoring in political science at the University of Florida (UF). UF is not only embedded in a state that is sharply divided between Republicans and Democrats, with its unique age and race demographics, but many pundits and scholars see it as a national bellwether state. This meant that a lot of focus and attention was put on Florida and heightened the political tensions during discussions and events around campus.

When the election returns came back and it was trumpeted that more young citizens (18-24) voted in the election than the past few elections, I wondered why? Not only did more young people vote, but many argue that President Obama was able to secure the presidential bid *because of the youth vote* coupled with the votes of racial and ethnic minoritized populations. The outcome left me with a host of questions that I longed to answer.

On a meta-level, my primary question was whether there are connections between the ways that someone identifies politically and the time and effort they put into being politically engaged. After many hours of research and many more hours of discussion, I realized that this question presupposes everyone has a salient political identity and that there is a normative notion of political identity. With this realization squarely in mind, my research focus came back to the process of developing a political identity, because it makes allowances for the complexities of identity formation and the interplay between self and environment.

I situate this question in higher education for two reasons. On a personal level, my political identity was most shaped by my college experiences. On broader scale, as

later chapters will address more fully, many postsecondary institutions espouse commitments to developing students holistically. Some go so far as to cite civic skills specifically, but it can be reasonably argued that helping students develop a civic identity broadly speaking and the requisite knowledge and skills to perform their identity is an important function of postsecondary education (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Thus, this project is in part research that is deeply personal to me but also relevant to the way that scholars and practitioners think about higher education's role in a diverse democratic society.

Chapter I: Introduction and Overview

In President Barack Obama's final State of the Union Address in January 2016, he posed to those gathered on Capitol Hill and people watching at home across the nation four big questions for the future of the country. They were: (1) How do we give everyone a fair shot in the economy? (2) How do we make technology work for us and not against us? (3) How do we keep America safe? And central to this study – (4) *How can we make our politics reflect the best in us and not the worst?* To drive home this final point President Obama (2016) declared:

We need every American to stay active in our public life – and not just during election time – so that our public life reflects the goodness and the decency that I see in the American people every single day. It is not easy. Our brand of democracy is hard.

President Obama's message to the country reflects a recurring reality of democracies. The vitality of a democratic political system is in part predicated on how engaged people are within the system over time. Yet President Obama's question is rooted in a reality that a democratic political system is constantly changing, and thus requires those within the system and certain institutions that shape the system, such as educational institutions like colleges and universities, to continually change and adapt to the needs and demands that the democratic experiment presents. This is not a new call for action that has been placed at the feet of democratic institutions in general and educational institutions in particular. Indeed, from the birth of the U.S., instrumental founders such as Thomas Jefferson acknowledged education as the key to "advancing the power, prosperity, and happiness of the nation" (Conant, 1962). Similarly, Benjamin

Franklin (1749) wrote in a pamphlet that led to the creation of the University of Pennsylvania in which he asserts:

The good Education of Youth has been esteemed by wise Men in all Ages, as the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of private Families and of Common-wealths. Almost all Governments have therefore made it a principal Object of their Attention, to establish and endow with proper Revenues, such Seminaries of Learning, as might supply the succeeding Age with Men qualified to serve the Publick with Honour, to themselves, and to their Country.

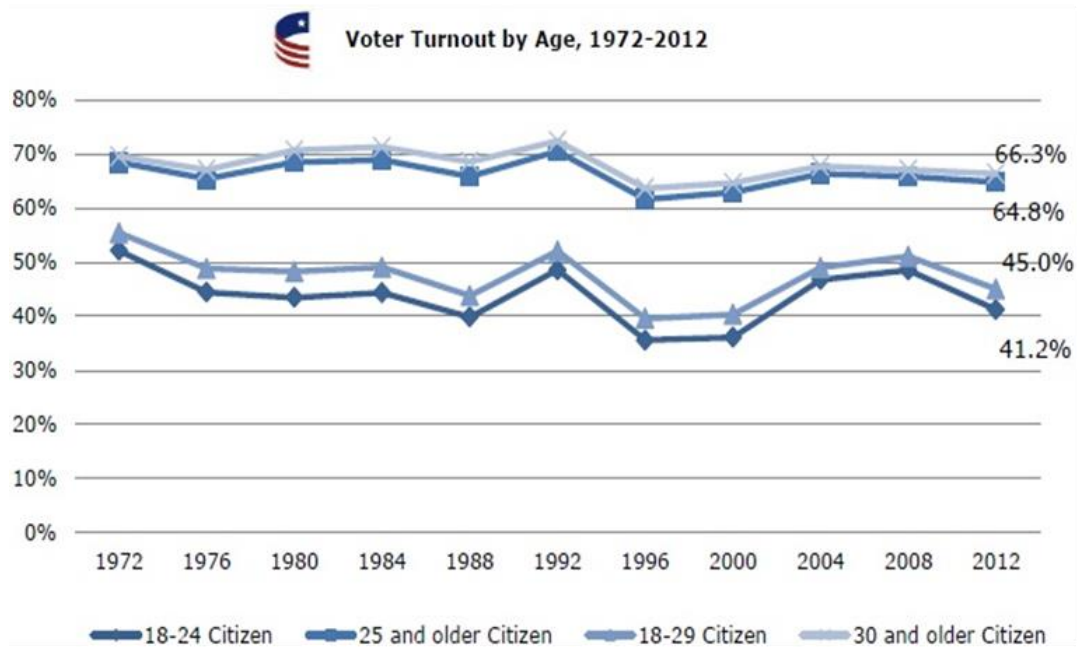
Likewise, on September 27, 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt released a message to the nation honoring American Education Week. In his brief reflection on the role of the education system in the U.S. democracy, President Roosevelt declared that the “paramount function of schools in a democracy was to prepare each citizen to choose wisely and to enable him to choose freely” (Roosevelt, 1938). In this message, Roosevelt was simply reaffirming the longstanding philosophy that the American education system plays a critical role in shaping and safeguarding the American democracy (Dewey, 1916).

What is evident from these declarations and others from notable scholars such as John Dewey (1916), W.E.B. DuBois (1932, 1935), Amy Gutmann (1990, 1993), bell hooks (1994a), and Sylvia Hurtado (2007), who are equally concerned with education and democracy but invariably more inclusive of people of color, women, and other identity groups relative to whom the “Founding Fathers” had in mind when calling for an educated citizenry, is that the education system and the strength of the U.S. democracy are inextricably linked. Given this, the necessity to determine *how* the education system contributes to a healthy democracy becomes a never-ending task as the needs and challenges of shaping and improving our democratic system remain fluid. As scholars

have pointed out over the years, democracy in the U.S. continues to change due to constant fluctuations in laws and citizen demographics (R. M. Smith, 1999), social values (Putnam, 2000), and economic conditions (de Tocqueville, 2002).

Yet, there is widespread concern that institutions in society are not effectively adapting to shifts in democracy, which is allowing political inequities to persist unchecked. For instance, over the last thirty years report after report (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004; Saguaro Seminar, 2000), book after book (e.g., Boyer, 1998; Levine, 2013; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006), and organization after organization have sought to call attention and allocate resources in response to the “civic malaise” affecting the U.S. The prevailing wisdom that supports this notion stems from low levels of voting in national elections among the youngest cohort of Americans (see Figure 1.1). In the 2014 mid-term election, people age 18-24 voted at the lowest rate in 40 years (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2015).

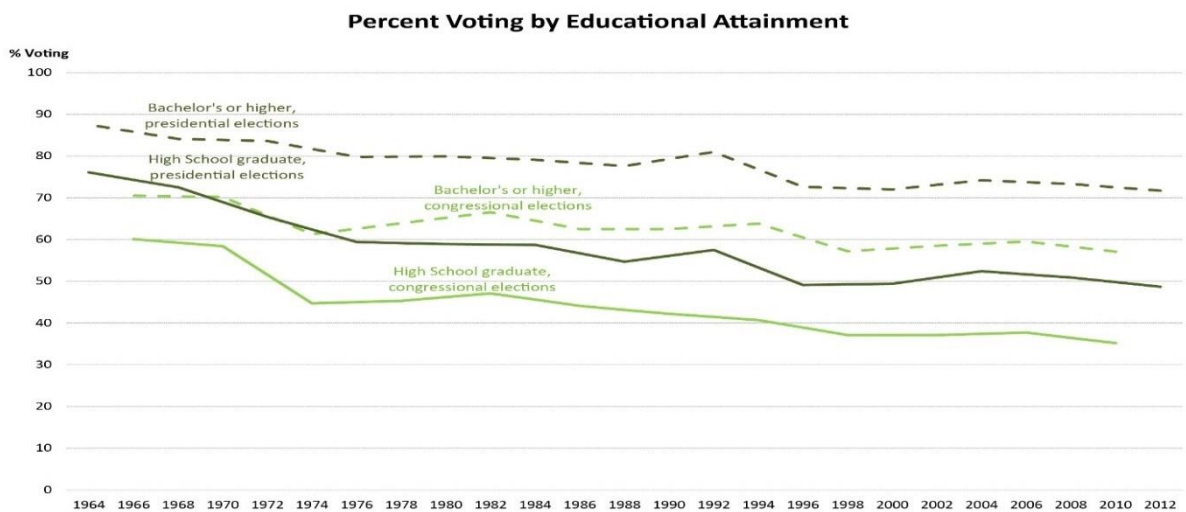
Figure 1.1: Voter Turnout by Age, 1972-2012



.Source:(The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2012)

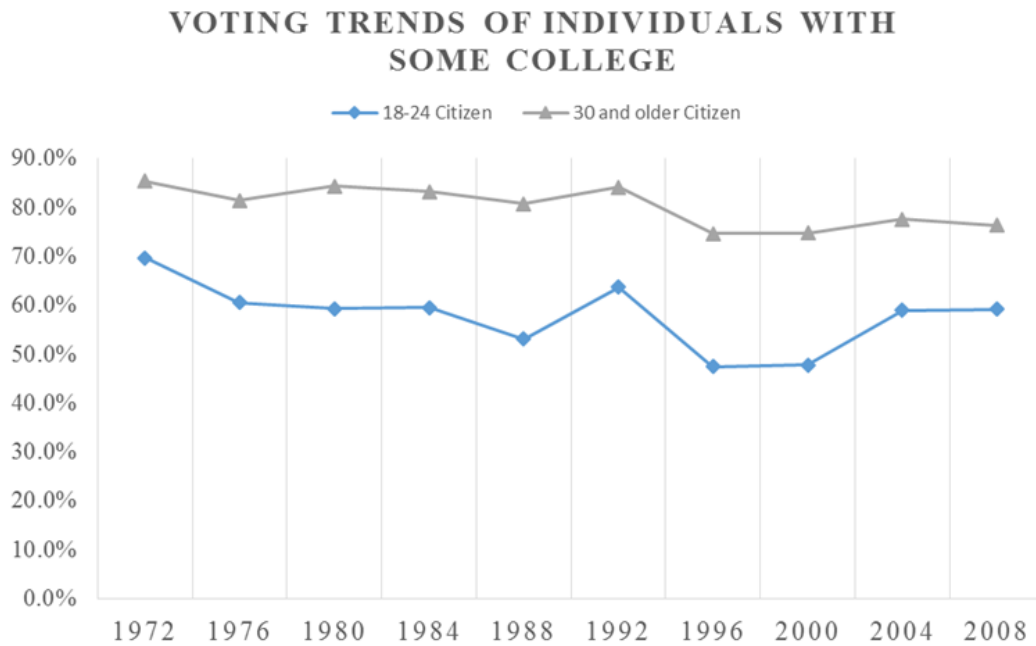
Furthermore, while younger Americans who have at least some college experience are more likely to vote than their peers who have not attended college (see Figure 1.2), when comparing college educated age cohorts to each other, the youngest generation still appears relatively less inclined to vote (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.2: Percent Voting by Educational Attainment



Source: Current Population Survey, Historical Table A-2

Figure 1.3: Voting Trends of Individuals With Some College



Source: (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2012)

What is interesting about these trends is that while scholars and the media have documented declines in voting, they have also identified increases in apolitical forms of civic engagement (Galston, 2001; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Zukin et al., 2006). The most recent national report on the topic, *The Crucible Moment: College learning and Democracy's Future* (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012) concludes, “there is not a shortage of individual acts of generosity, but rather of civic knowledge and action” (p. 8).

Relatedly, a report from the American Political Science Association (2004) laments that “ours is an era of sharp partisan differences and increasing political rancor” (p. 27). For instance, according to the Pew Research Center (2014b), the number of people with a highly negative view of the opposing political party has more than doubled

since 1994. Where there is agreement is that only 19% of Americans trust government “almost always” or “most of the time,” down from 77% in 1957, and Pew classifies 1 in 10 Americans as “political bystanders” or fully disengaged from American political life. They maintain that 18-29 year olds make up 38% of this group (Pew Research Center, 2014a).

Throughout U.S. history, both the K-12 and postsecondary education systems have experienced progress and stagnation in terms of their collective ability to respond to calls by those who see the education system as a critical democratic institution in responding to political inequities like those laid out in the preceding paragraph (Dewey, 1916; Gutmann, 1993; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). A major reason for the difficulty educational institutions have had in trying to address these sorts of issues is that “democracy”¹ is a decidedly contested concept that is the convergence of numerous types of laws, activities, dispositions, and knowledge, which are continuously redefined (Keyssar, 2009; R. M. Smith, 1999). Hence, it is not well understood how or why education influences democracy, just that there are indicators that suggest there are important relationships between increasing levels of education and desirable civic behaviors. For example, research in education has found a relationship between level of education and volunteerism (Astin & Sax, 1998; Sax, 2004), level of education and political knowledge (Galston, 2001; H. Milner, 2002), level of education and voting behavior (D. E. Campbell, 2010; Dalton, 2013), and level of education and philanthropic

¹ A broad and simple definition of democracy: “correspondence between acts of governance and the desires with respect to those acts of the persons who are affected.” (May, 1978)

tendencies (Leslie & Ramey, 1988). Each of these relationships have been argued to be vitally important to a functioning democracy.

While important to acknowledge the various relationships between education and activities that contribute to a healthy democracy, the overlooked reality remains that scholars know far less about *why* the correlation between education and civic behavior exists. In other words, what happens during the course of a person's educational experience that leads some to be civically and politically engaged, and others not to be? This is a fundamental issue with consequences inside and out of academia since, as argued thus far, educational institutions have and continue to be tasked with preparing people to be politically and civically engaged to respond to shifts in the U.S. democratic system. Consequently, the focus of this dissertation is specifically on the connection between postsecondary education institutions and the political identity development of students who pass through these institutional environments.

A person's political identity is concerned with how they perceive and understand who they are relative to how they perceive and understand the political systems they operate in. Similar to other social identities, a person's political identity is consciously and subconsciously constructed throughout their life and influenced by a host of factors such as their personality, their social standing, and the environments they operate in. A focus on college student political identity development and postsecondary educational institutions centers a key developmental timespan in a person's life and a prominent democratic institution in order to gain new empirical insights that further understanding about what happens within one's educational experience that leads some to be politically

engaged and others not to be. The result of this political identity development within higher education and the central finding of this study is that higher education both remediates and perpetuates political inequities because of the relationship between where and how students' political identities are developed while in college.

This claim is consequential to the U.S. democracy, because the outcome of developing a political identity within higher education rests at the heart of many contemporary political debates and social movements because of how linked one's perception and understanding of their political self is to the actions they take or do not take and the ways in which they align themselves within the political system (Dalton, 2013; Huddy, 2001; R. M. Smith, 2003). Yet, since there is little written in the literature about how students develop political identities in general, much less within their postsecondary educational experiences, it remains underspecified if and how educational institutions can play a role in a rapidly changing democratic system.

This unclear understanding of political identity is also of consequence because of the United States' detailed history of political exclusion and manipulation (R. M. Smith, 1999). Accordingly, part of the rhetoric on how to address these persistent political inequities has been to focus on increasing access to college for women, low income, first generation, and students of color, in hopes that greater access will lead to not only better economic standing, but improved outcomes on a host of measures including civic and political participation (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012; Hurtado, 2007; Perna, 2005). While college access efforts are one piece of the puzzle, once students enroll at higher education institutions, it has been unclear if in fact these

students receive equitable educational experiences that might develop their political identities. The findings from this study make it clear that institutions have the capacity and potential to remediate political inequities but students are often left to their own devices as they develop their political identities. This caters to and privileges students who come to college with political knowledge and skills and ends up perpetuating political inequities. Hence, it simply is not enough to just get students to college, intentional focus must be given to students' experiences in college to insure opportunities for political learning.

It is important to recognize briefly, that some disagree with my core assertion that postsecondary educational institutions should be involved in cultivating the civic and political sensibilities of students (D'Souza, 1991; Fish, 2004). However, the outcome of this line of thinking is that political inequities around polarization, disengagement from the political system and others mentioned earlier are left unaddressed, which benefits those that have louder voices in, or know how to navigate, the political system to their exclusive benefit. In effect, this view does nothing to help people or institutions adapt to changes in democracy or make democracy more inclusive and as a result more vibrant and healthy, a central concern of mine.

Nevertheless, this tension is useful because it unearths a critical question that clarifies the key contribution of this study: do educational institutions and the higher education system in particular, need to change and adapt to better address the issues that are plaguing the U.S. democracy? As this dissertation will make abundantly clear, the answer is yes, because a diverse democracy needs institutions that can play a role in

remediating political inequities. Yet, as political scientist Rogers Smith (2004) astutely argues, we still poorly understand the foundational “issue of how human beings come to see themselves as having certain identities that are ‘political’” (p. 50).

Thus, since little is known about how political identities are formed in general, and specifically how students develop political identities while in college, this dissertation describes the process of how students at four, large, public universities develop their political identity. Grounded in various forms of data, I constructed a theory that illuminates how that developmental process intersects with and is shaped by the organizational climate and culture of their institutions as well as the socio-political environment of the states that the institutions are situated in. Ultimately, this study moves multiple fields forward as it advances a specific and contextually nuanced model of how students develop while in college subsequently refining our understanding of the role higher education plays in a diverse democracy.

Research Phenomenon

Explicating a precise research phenomenon is critical to demonstrating how this study is unique and pushes the intellectual understanding of higher education’s role in a diverse democracy (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). Therefore, it is important to make explicit that this study is centrally concerned with the concept of *student political identity development*. This term was chosen early on in the study after the review of numerous bodies of literature in an effort to more fully capture a student’s lived political realities that are at times bounded by an institution’s climate and culture.

Defining this term was also necessary to help demarcate the relevant fields that this study engages.

Throughout this project then, when a student's political identity is referred to I formally mean *the combination of a student's sense of, connection with, adherence to, and participation in the political norms, institutions, groups, and practices of a politically diverse community* (adapted from Sapiro, 2004). In other words, a student's political identity is who they understand themselves to be given their understanding of the political systems they operate within. This term is different from the more popular term "political engagement," which Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) define as "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make the policies" (p. 38). The political engagement definition differs from my definition of political identity because of the latter's focus on "activity" or the effort one puts into enacting their political identity (or not). Whereas, political identity is concerned with the totality of the cognitive knowledge, intrapersonal understanding, and the ways in which these perceptions lead to political action or performance within a political system. Hence, I focus on identity development because of how it precedes many of the consequential outcomes (e.g., voting, disengaging, choosing a political party, protesting, etc.) in a political system that receives relatively more scholarly attention.

Consequently, this study sought a more nuanced understanding of how the college experience contributes to a student's political identity development. Based on a review

of research that is more fully fleshed out in Chapter II, scholars have found that a person's political identity continues to be developed well into their early adulthood years, and that a person's political identity is shaped by many factors including the educational space they operate in. Yet, how this development of a political identity continues once a person enters into a college culture that is located in a particular state socio-political environment has not been explored before.

As Chapter II will also make plain, the primary reason for the dearth of research on this phenomenon is that much of the scholarship focuses on political engagement or the acting out of one's political identity. However, the limitations with these approaches are that they privilege certain types of political activities and performances while overlooking the beliefs and understandings that contribute to and undergird these actions. For instance, there are bodies of literature that are concerned with the political behavior of voting or college student activism (Altbach, 1989; Galston, 2007; Niemi & Hanmer, 2010). Although important political activities, these studies leave out students who take up other means of being politically engaged such as working on campaigns, donating to elected officials, and staying informed about political events. More importantly, these types of studies ignore how one's political identity might lead them towards some forms of political engagement and away from others. It is an unfortunate reality that when operationalizing political engagement (most often in quantitative studies), it is necessary to define a set of variables that favor certain types of political activity and ignores political identity all together.

Centering student political identity as the phenomenon in this study responds directly to these issues and pushes scholars to consider the complexity of a student's political meaning making, which contributes to all the various ways they can be politically engaged. Additionally, a focus on student political identity positions this study between the macro and micro layers of an institution's culture. As a result, I considered both the student's sense-making, actions, and scrutinized how the norms, policies, and environments that make up an institution's culture contribute to the development of a student's political identity (or not).

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this project are: 1) What is the process of political identity development for actively involved² sophomores and above³ attending 4-year, not-for-profit, public institutions in geographically diverse regions⁴ of the United States of America; and 2) In what ways does an institution's structure⁵ and culture shape the political identity development of students?

In order to steer away from confusion, in addition to political identity and political engagement, which are defined above, I will briefly operationalize two more terms that

² I define "actively involved" as students who hold leadership positions in student organizations, work on campus, have studied abroad, conducted undergraduate research, or done an internship and are knowledgeable about the culture and climate of their institution (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2010).

³ I define "sophomores and above" as students who have been in college for more than two semesters of full-time study at an institution.

⁴ I classify "regions" by the broad socio-political environment as determined by voting trends, media coverage, historical narratives, and state legislation.

⁵ By "structure," I refer to the historical, organizational, compositional, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of a campus' climate related to political engagement (Hurtado et al., 2012, 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005).

are used in the research questions and throughout this study. A crucial aspect with identity development is that the setting in which the development occurs shapes the process because of the interchange between a student's sense making and the characteristics of the setting they are operating with. Hence, to fully understand political identity, it is necessary to explore the campuses and the state socio-political environments that students experience as they develop. Over the last 30 years, higher education researchers have used the terms "campus climate" and "culture" to describe the different settings that students experience. Thus, when referring to the "campus climate" of an institution, similar to others, I build on Peterson and Spencer's (1990) definition of the term which is "the *current* common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members' perceptions of and attitudes toward those dimensions" (p. 7) [emphasis added]. The literature review section delves further into the dimensions that are most relevant to this study, but it is crucial to take away that the importance of campus climate stems from its immediacy and malleability.

Alternatively, an institution's "organizational culture" is slower to change and at times less identifiable than the campus climate. Peterson and Spencer (1990) demarcate "culture" from "climate" by describing culture as the "deeply held meanings, beliefs, and values" of an organization (p. 7). Schein (1985) provides a more comprehensive definition of organizational culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group has learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 9)

Thus, an institution's culture undergirds its campus climate because the culture is the totality of all the dimensions of an organization's life including the structures that make up the campus layout such as buildings, walkways, and campus décor. The campus climate then mediates the organizational culture as shifts take place in the current attitudes, perceptions, and structures that shape the experiences of students, faculty, and staff. This study is mindful of the interplay between these two concepts because of how student political identity is influenced by aspects of both the campus climate and the organizational culture.

Audience of the Study

The findings of this project are relevant to four different but overlapping groups of people. First, since this study is concerned with student development and organizational culture, student affairs educators stand to gain much from the findings and implications of the study. Seminal documents in the field of student affairs allude to the importance of fostering the civic competencies of students (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004, 2010; American College Personnel Association & The Higher Education Project, 1975). Yet no models or theories exist to help guide student affairs educators practice. Thus the "theory to practice" dynamic is underdeveloped, and much of the work done in this area relies on informal theory and experience. While not problematic in and of itself, one could argue that the lack of a better guiding framework and the over reliance on practical experience (affected by hegemonic forces) contributes to political engagement inequities that reify normative practices such as apolitical forms of civic engagement.

Furthermore, student affairs graduate programs or professional development opportunities do not readily teach student affairs educators how to promote student political identity development (Morgan & Orphan, 2015). This study helps inculcate political identity as a core identity for educators to be concerned with, similar to other social identities such as gender, race, spirituality, sexual orientation, and ability (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Finally, this study uncovers a need for an examination into the pedagogical approaches student affairs educators take with students to insure that the political implications of their practices are equitable for all students with whom they work (Morgan & Orphan, 2015).

The second group this study pertains to is scholars and researchers with interest in politics in the United States. For higher education scholars in particular this study makes theoretical advancements because intentional focus is applied to both student development theory and organizational theory. Most studies usually take an either or approach, so this study contributes to the genesis of a new line of inquiry that seeks to complicate binary approaches to studying higher education. Furthermore, this study has implications for the ways that scholars think about space and the structural dynamics of a campus. Using the lens of political identity provides more nuanced understandings into these topics that challenge conventional wisdom and lead to more informed scholarship.

For scholars outside of higher education, this study fits into a larger body of work concerned with United States politics and political engagement toward sustaining a democracy. Accordingly, K-12 researchers, political scientists, psychologists, and

sociologists will learn about the ways in which one particular democratic institution (i.e., colleges and universities) facilitates the political identity development of a particular group of people in society⁶ (i.e., college students). This exploration should help complement and supplement work in other fields and disciplines concerned with the development of political attitudes and behaviors needed to participate in democratic society (Beaumont, 2010; D. E. Campbell, 2010; Dalton, 2013; R. M. Smith, 2003), the role of education in a democracy (Ben-Porath, 2012; Dodson, 2014; Gutmann, 1993; Hillygus, 2005), and the accrual of social capital and civic literacy (H. Milner, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Settle, Bond, & Levitt, 2010; E. S. Smith, 1999).

The third group this study should be relevant to is policymakers, such as boards of trustees, state legislators, campus administrators, and the federal government. Findings and implications from the study make clear to policymakers that their decisions have impacts not only at the organizational level, but also in the way that students come to make sense of their political identity. The effects of this are important in light of attention given to college access and affordability, college completion, and the college curriculum design (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perna, 2005). It is evident from this study that in the midst of these competing priorities, the influence higher education has on the future trajectory of the country related to policy and political participation should be carefully intentionally cultivated.

⁶ I intentionally refrain from using the word “citizen” because of the ways in which it has been used to marginalize undocumented students and individuals. While undocumented individuals cannot vote, we know that they attend colleges and universities across the country, we know they are politically engaged, and I believe that they possess political identities that are important to consider in my work.

Lastly, this project was intended to directly engage college students. Often, researchers and policymakers do not consider students as experts in their experiences. This project seeks to challenge this line of thinking. This dissertation validates students' political sense-making and use of language and provides evidence that students might need to push their universities or colleges to better address political realities that are salient to them. Finally, this project helps students locate themselves in the larger political milieu and to better understand how their political identity and engagement matter to the health and wellness of the country.

Overview of Dissertation

The following chapter situates this study in its historical moment in time and presents a review of related research that provides sensitizing concepts for the study. This chapter highlights the empirical and theoretical gap in the literature and places emphasis on the critical need for this specific dissertation. Chapter III describes the research design that responds to this empirical and theoretical gap. It details the requisite methodological stance and methods that were integral to helping realize the aims of the study in a comprehensive and rigorous fashion. Chapter IV introduces the state contexts that each of the institutions studied reside in, to establish the unique socio-political environment of each state. Likewise, Chapter V describes the structure, culture, and climate of each of the institutions in the study, leading to a typology of political space on campus that stems from an analysis of similarities that exist at each institution. Chapter VI presents the major concepts that make up the *College Student Political Identity Development* process, which explains and models how students develop their political

identity. The final chapter integrates the findings from Chapters IV-VI to construct a theory of higher education's role in a diverse democracy. Simply put, the theory explains how higher education institutions are complicit in perpetuating political inequities while also being sites that sometimes rectify political disparities. This theory complicates and extends previous research on universities, college student development, and organizational theory, while laying out future research and implications for policy and practice.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The following sections highlight the limitations and critiques found within literature areas and formal theories relevant to the research phenomenon, situates the study in its unique macro and micro-historical location, and assembles a theoretical framework made up of sensitizing concepts that shape the contours of the study. These components move towards a conclusion that affirms the need for qualitative research to uncover and add nuance to the process of student political identity development within higher education's organizational culture.

Chronology of Civic Engagement Efforts in Higher Education

As the Introduction made clear, concepts in democracy and within education are constantly changing. Since higher education's role in a democracy has ebbed and flowed throughout history, it is crucial to situate this study in time since all empirical work is inherently a snapshot of a particular phenomenon. This necessitates delineating how the history of democracy and higher education has contributed to the culture and climate of institutions today and subsequently, the political identity development of students. While not exhaustive, this jaunt through important markers in the history of the civic purpose of higher education is to aid the reader in understanding how the postsecondary system in general and many institutions in particular have arrived at the realities that students and institutions experience today.

History of the Civic Purposes of Higher Education

It is well established that the earliest forms of postsecondary education in the U.S. were developed for wealthy, White, Christian, men (A. Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin,

2011). Furthermore, these early institutions were primarily concerned with providing students with “an analytical or intellectual edge in the discourse and writing associated with public life” (Thelin & Gasman, 2011, p. 6). In other words, higher education was the training grounds for those who would go on to deal in politics (i.e., become ‘the elite’) among other aspects of public life, so their education was intent on equipping them with skills and dispositions to engage effectively in this space. In contrast, as the population of the U.S. grew, Congress slowly recognized the necessity to expand educational access and the scope of instruction and thus we see the revolutionary Morrill Acts in 1862 and 1890, which establish land-grant institutions in many states (A. Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2011). The land-grants were developed with the specific purpose of increasing educational access and responding to the needs of the public via practical and applied training without losing a focus on traditional and classical studies (A. Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Richter, 1962; Thelin, 2011). The enduring influence of these universities’ commitment to the public good⁷ implanted a philosophy in the public consciousness that postsecondary education needed to play an important and multifaceted role in society in order to sustain the U.S. democracy (Hartley & Harkavy, 2011; Loss, 2012). As then President of the University of Illinois, David D. Henry remarked when reflecting on what traits would carry land-grant institutions into their next hundred years he cited:

faith in the efficacy of learning by the many, vigorous applications of the democratic idea to educational service, adaptability in meeting each new task so as best to serve the welfare of the State, loyalty to the high mission

⁷ For a thorough review of the term “public good” in higher education see (Marginson, 2011)

of the university in any setting at any time, the advancement of knowledge and the search for truth. (Richter, 1962, p. 239)

These land-grant ideals pervaded the U.S. system of higher education and were expanded by the 1940s GI Bill (A. Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2011), then disrupted by campus activism and unrest of the 1960s and 1970s (Altbach, 1989), and then expanded again with increased Federal research dollars to universities during the height of the cold war (A. Cohen & Kisker, 2010). It was not until arguably the 1980s that the U.S. society began to reflect on the role and purpose of postsecondary education as it relates to contributing to the public good (A. Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2011). Regrettably, the belief that postsecondary education was in fact a private, not a public good, began to proliferate and muddy institutional efforts that sought to promote democratic engagement (Bloom, Hartley, & Rosovsky, 2007; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Furthermore, the continued reality that many postsecondary institutions were inaccessible to wide swaths of the college eligible population, particularly people from low socioeconomic statuses, women, and people of color, obfuscated higher education's role in contributing to the public good and developing citizens (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Jacobs, 1996). Coupled with the renewed momentum that the K-12 and community contexts were gaining around developing people to be civically engaged (Galston, 2007; M. Levinson, 2012; Torney-Purta, 2002), a shared, albeit apolitical, consciousness began to develop in response to the sense that postsecondary institutions had abdicated their role in making important contributions to the public good (Boyer, 1998; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

In the mid-1990s, higher education scholars, presidents, and a host of emerging networks began to recognize and more boldly assert the coming challenges that could be attributed to the uncoupling of the higher education system and its larger democratic purposes (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Resultantly, over the last twenty years, there have been multiple reports (Saguaro Seminar, 2000; The Corporation for National and Community Service & National Conference on Citizenship, 2010; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012), books (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2010; Ehrlich, 2000; Levine, 2013; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), and organizations such as Campus Compact, The American Democracy Project, the Association for American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), NASPA, The Democracy Imperative and The Democracy Commitment that have all sought to rally postsecondary institutions from a national stand-point to respond to the “civic malaise” facing the U.S. (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Scholars have loosely conceptualized this increased effort and activity as the “civic engagement movement” within higher education (for a more thorough review see Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

As with any movement though, the purpose and outcomes of the civic engagement movement in higher education have never been coherent or agreed upon (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). There are some that have chosen to focus on service-learning and volunteerism (Jacoby, 1996, 2003, 2009), others that have focused on the classroom environment and pedagogy (Hurtado, 2007; Spiezio, Baker, & Boland, 2006),

and still others have tried to integrate multiple stands of what it means to be civically engaged (Colby et al., 2010; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

Despite the multipronged and valiant efforts in the movement to help higher education reclaim the ideal of contributing to the public good but in a more inclusive and socially just sense, as Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) note, “the movement largely sidestepped the *political* dimensions of civic engagement” (p. 6). So while the civic engagement movement has progressed in some areas, it has largely avoided issues related to political engagement (Butin, 2003; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Zukin et al., 2006). One result of the apolitical orientation of the civic engagement movement and its lack of concern with political engagement is that researchers and educators have paid little attention to how postsecondary institutions influence, inform, or develop the political identity of students. Furthermore, the apolitical ethos of the movement has allowed critics of higher education to assert that postsecondary institutions are engaging in “liberal indoctrination” of students (Gross, 2013; Horowitz, 2007; Navarro, Worthington, Hart, & Khairallah, 2009), rather than these institutions being able to articulate how they contribute, if at all, to all students political identity development, regardless of their unique political orientation.

This macro-historical review of the civic purposes of higher education begins to reveal the inherent complexity of student political identity development on college campuses because we see that institutions were once concerned with cultivating explicit political skills and habits that would help only certain people contribute to the public good on political grounds. However, over time, this ideal was lost as more diverse

students entered into the system and the overarching purpose of higher education came into debate, subsequently disrupting the normative functions of higher education (Loss, 2012; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). We then see that in the recent movement to help higher education reclaim this focus on contributing to the public good, the political dimension of the movement has been lost. This question of higher education's role in a diverse democracy is shaped by the reality that it has always had a role. However, with a privileging of civic engagement over political engagement, the relationship between higher education and student political identity development is less clear. While this insight is helpful in orienting this review, the bird's eye take is too broad to capture how these dynamics were playing out on campuses. Individual institutions also exist in a certain time and space contexts that can aid in ascertaining if and how postsecondary institutions contribute to student political identity development.

Civic Engagement on College and University Campuses

There are over 4,000 institutions of postsecondary education in the U.S. that each have a particular mission, different arrangements of financial and human capital, and varying levels of institutional commitment to the ideal of contributing to the public good and buying into the civic engagement movement outlined in the previous section (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; Morpew & Hartley, 2006). For example, at the turn of the century, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Institutions (1999) issued a report that concluded that it was time for those institutions to “go beyond extension to engagement” (p. 9). In their assertion, they profiled 11 institutions that were “wrestling with broader concepts of outreach and service and struggling to infuse

engagement into the life of the institution and its curriculum” (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999, p. 11). Others have found that institutions put a varying amount of financial and human capital towards civic engagement efforts (Ostrander, 2004). The result, Ostrander (2004) argues, is that institutions invest in civic engagement initiatives to foster some combination of: students’ self-development and personal transformation, space for campus and communities to engage with each other, and to apply knowledge to help solve issues in the community. These things have led to an increase in normative and apolitical civic engagement activity evident via the proliferation of centers for civic engagement or public service on many campuses (Hartley & Orphan, 2013). Yet, these departments often lack a shared understanding of how civic engagement ought to look and similar to the national civic engagement movement, these centers often conflate or ignore political aspects of civic engagement work (Dempsey, 2009; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Saltmarsh, 2004).

Even how administrators, students, and faculty operationalize an institution’s commitment to the civic engagement movement is complex and varied. Whereas, some institutions try or hope to infuse a civic ethos throughout the curricular and cocurricular realms of an institution (Harkavy, 2006), some simply relegate civic engagement efforts to the general education curriculum, student affairs departments, or choose not to do anything (Hartley, Harkavy, & Benson, 2005). Taken together these points suggest that, postsecondary institutions are at least somewhat concerned with helping students become more civically engaged, although to a highly variable degree. However, and potentially a result of the macro-level influences outlined above, there remains a lack of coherence

around what is involved when campus stakeholders speak about civic engagement activity and programs on many campuses. Consequently, it remains difficult to determine whether and to what extent postsecondary institutions foster political engagement, much less, if they help to develop a student's sense of political identity. Thus, a deeper review into what the current literature has to say about the influence of college on student's political engagement is warranted to continue to hone into how a student's political identity is formed in college and to ascertain what aspects of the university are involved in that socialization process.

Debate on the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement

Classic View

For many years, the dominant narrative among scholars has been that postsecondary education plays a prominent role in the development of a person's political knowledge and level of political engagement (Colby et al., 2010; H. Milner, 2002; Verba et al., 1995; Zukin et al., 2006). The underlying view is that "what students do while they are in college" matters to their political engagement (Zukin et al., 2006, p. 153).

Similarly, Binder and Wood (2013) in their qualitative study that investigated the style or performance of Conservative students' political identities⁸ conclude that students draw on a:

⁸ Important to note that they did not study conservative student identity development. Students were asked questions about what it was like to be a conservative on their campus, not how their experiences

set of widely available discourses to craft their political identities, but in so doing, they are both enabled and constrained by the distinctive cultural practices and ideas shared locally on their campuses, as well as by the organizational structures that create the daily rhythms of their lives (large or small class sizes, on – or off-campus housing, and the like) (p. 268).

The prevailing wisdom holds that higher education: (a) brings students into contact with people who do not think like them and this difference is good for contributing to one's political engagement (Binder & Wood, 2013; Bobo & Licari, 1989; Hurtado, 2007); (b) higher education allows space and time for critical thinking and reasoning, which facilitate active political engagement (Galston, 2001; Verba et al., 1995; Zukin et al., 2006); and (c) higher education allows students to practice good political habits, such as voting in student government elections, participating in student organizations, and learning how to critically engage media (Colby et al., 2010; van Dyke, 1998; Zukin et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, the classic view of the relationship between higher education and political engagement is not without its flaws. Much of the empirical research is quantitative in nature and lacks the ability to pick up on important nuances that are inherent in the development of one's political identity or the organizational structure of a university (Binder & Wood, 2013). Furthermore, the classic view struggles to take into account the vast differences between types of students and the additive effect of experiencing more higher education (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While controlling for variables supposedly allows researchers to

contributed to their identity. Binder and Woods' main argument is that the institution shapes the performance or style of a student's political identity, not the (continued) development of that identity, hence, why I classify it as a political engagement study.

account for these dynamics, there are epistemological gaps that remain difficult to overcome. For example, in explaining why certain variables were included over others, Zukin and colleagues note that there are “tradeoffs between the importance of a [political] activity and how common it is” (p. 56). As a result, their surveys only included measures of political engagement that they deemed “common” and “politically important.” The problem with making this distinction is that research shows that there are many forms of political engagement and activities might differ depending on age, gender, ethnic group affiliation, and other variables (Beaumont, 2011; Dalton, 2008; Galston, 2001; Harris-Lacewell, 2010). Thus, measuring a student’s political engagement with certain variables and not others might miss students who are politically engaged in ways not captured with quantitative measures.

Alternative View

There are even more critiques of the classical view of the relationship between higher education and political engagement. Recently, scholars have begun to question if postsecondary institutions have any influence at all on political engagement (Dodson, 2014). The alternative theory goes that students most likely to or that attend college are pre-disposed to being politically engaged. Accordingly, college is a proxy for pre-adult experiences and has no effect on political engagement. To test this claim, Kam and Palmer (2008) use propensity score matching to control for pre-college experiences and find that there are no significant differences in political engagement between those that attend college and those who do not. These findings build empirical support for the theory that college does not make a difference to political engagement, what happens to a

student before college does. Brand's (2010) findings add nuance to the Kam and Palmer (2008) study by conveying how, with regards to civic engagement, going to college has little to no impact for students who are from higher socio-economic backgrounds and most likely to attend college, but a significant impact for those least likely to attend and succeed in college. Furthermore, Berinsky and Lenz (2010) determined that increased education does not lead a person to be more likely to vote and go on to state that in regards to the theory that education is the "great leveler" in terms of reducing political inequities, in actuality education may just be the "great proxy" (p. 371).

This more recent strand of scholarship is not without its detractors though. In direct response to the studies overviewed at the start of this section, Mayer (2011) took issue with the amount of bias involved in using propensity score matching. Mayer (2011) questions whether the Kam and Palmer (2008) findings could have overlooked effects that were actually there. Henderson and Chatfield (2011) also caution against the "education as a proxy" theoretical camp because of the inability to subject quantitative research designs to robustness and sensitivity checks that reduce bias and present conclusions that are more rigorous. These authors suggest that scholars concerned about the effect that higher education has on political engagement should make new concerted efforts "to return to research design, theory building, and data collection" that helps better identify the role and impact of education in college (p. 657).

Middle-Ground Explanations

The debate between the classical view of higher education and political engagement and the alternative view does not necessarily need to be viewed through

mutually exclusive sides; in fact, there are arguments that blend the two approaches. For instance, political scientist, David Campbell (2010) puts forth an explanation about school environments and voting behavior that ends with an alternative take on education and political engagement. He argues that the “civic climate” of a school, defined as a school environment that has a high percentage of students who value voting, has a strong impact on other student’s voting behavior. Secondly, he suggests that schools have a set of civic norms, or organizational characteristics, that contribute to a student’s sense of civic duty. These two findings, he concludes, “reach into the future” and have long lasting influences on students, well into their adult life” (D. E. Campbell, 2010, p. 174). Coupled with his argument earlier in his book that who ends up voting depends on where they are in life, his contribution to the debate reasons that while there are differences in levels of political engagement between people, addressing contextual factors in schools could have long lasting influences to redress political inequities among demographic groups (D. E. Campbell, 2010). Put simply, a person’s upbringing matters in their political engagement, but so too does their current life situation. Modified into the higher education context then, this suggests that what experiences and characteristics students bring with them to college matters, but so do the norms and political culture of their institution and the two cannot be divorced. The major caution with this study is that when Campbell refers to “school” he is speaking strictly of the high school environment. While his arguments can logically be extended to the postsecondary environment, there are unique characteristics of the postsecondary space that warrant an explicit focus on that context’s role in the debate about higher education and political engagement.

With the postsecondary environment squarely in mind, recently, Dodson (2014) proposed a “contingent view” on this debate that suggests that student’s pre-existing characteristics matter but so do the postsecondary environments that students are engaged in. Using Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) survey data from UCLA, Dodson (2014) found that students who were engaged in academically stimulating environments were more likely to be politically engaged, regardless of what experiences and identities they brought into college. The major takeaway from this study is that because of the highly dynamic nature of postsecondary institutions, it is problematic to treat all students and all institutions as a monolith. Dodson’s study is important to bear in mind because it begins to illuminate the complexity of studying students and their political identity and why a new investigation is warranted given that an absolutist stance that higher education completely matters or completely does not, is insufficient to capture the development of peoples’ political engagement, much less their political identity.

Resolving the Debate

Despite these many arguments, the core issue remains – while we know a lot about the relationship between higher education and political engagement, we know very little about how the postsecondary environment contributes to a student’s political identity development. Simply put, the major studies in this area either tacitly assumed or ignored the presence of a student’s political identity and decided that political engagement should be the main focus in their analysis. Given that the majority of the studies in this area rely on quantitative measures, it makes sense that researchers would choose to focus on concepts that are easier to measure. Exploring a student’s identity

through measurable variables would prove challenging to do at this point with the appropriate theoretical rigor and arguably the ethical nuance necessary to capture the complexity of a student's background, current experiences, assumptions, and knowledge and how those pieces combine to make up their current political identity. Additionally, while some of the studies make mention of the importance of considering the educational environment, none of them seek to deal with the intricate interaction of how students' experience the postsecondary organizational setting, while at the same time parsing out how institutions (and other forces such as the state socio-political environment) are influencing the setting towards helping students develop their political identity.

The reality of these two considerations, coupled with the dearth of research on the specific topic of political identity development means that a deeper review of literatures that border student political identity development is crucial to situate the study's contribution to higher education and democracy in the U.S. The next subsection responds to the first consideration by examining how students develop social identities in general and political identities in particular. The subsection following that one takes up the second consideration by exploring what aspects of a postsecondary institution's organizational culture contribute to student identity development. The final subsections integrate these two bodies of literature and suggest a way forward for studying this topic that theorizes how postsecondary institutions influence a student's political identity development and ultimately play a role in a diverse democracy.

Student Identity Development in College

Initially, faculty had the responsibility of dealing with students and were responsible for their development (Milem, Berger, & Dey, 2000). However, as faculty began to specialize and concentrate more on their research in their disciplines and less on students, student affairs professionals were hired to contribute to the development and success of students in college outside the classroom (Dungy & Gordon, 2011; Milem et al., 2000). Documents such as the Student Personnel Point of View reports (The American Council on Education, 1937, 1949), Tomorrow's Higher Education Project (American College Personnel Association & The Higher Education Project, 1975), Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs (Blimling & Whitt, 1998), and Learning Reconsidered (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004), together with early student development researchers such as Nevitt Sanford (1966) and Arthur Chickering (1993) were all instrumental in establishing student development theory as a useful tool-kit that could help educators understand, prepare for, and respond to the complex needs of a diverse array of students on their campus.

It is essential to clarify exactly what is meant by student development theory and why it is relevant before continuing. Rodgers (1990) defined student development as “the way that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (pg. 27). Admittedly, a broad definition, Kniefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) provide four specific questions that

are worthwhile to consider when thinking about developmental theory and college students:

1. What interpersonal and intrapersonal changes occur while the student is in college?
2. What factors lead to this development?
3. What aspects of the college environment encourage or retard growth?
4. What developmental outcomes should we strive to achieve in college?

With this framework in mind, we begin to see why student development theory might be a valuable tool in helping educators structure environments that are conducive to students developing their political identities. Unlike theories on racial identity development (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Helms, 1994; Horse, 2001; Kim, 2012), sexual identity development (Cass, 1984; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), or gender identity development (Bem, 1993), no formal, comprehensive, theory exists on how students develop their political identity in college. If the debate on the relationship between higher education and political engagement is compelling and the subsequent implications of the debate map onto important consequences for the future of U.S. democracy, then the lack of a college student political identity theory that stands up to Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker's (1978) guiding questions is a critical gap in the literature. Fortunately, there are some theories of student development that, while not explicitly dealing with political identity development in college, are useful beacons that illuminate important traits of students that may potentially be involved in the development of their political identity. The remaining parts of this subsection will focus on the applicability and limitations of theories of *intersectionality/multiple identities, self-*

authorship, and cognitive development in relation to how they inform political identity development.

Intersectionality/Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Applicability. In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality of identities to explain how women of color are often marginalized in feminist and anti-racist discourses (Crenshaw, 1989). The magnitude of this contribution is that it pushed scholars to consider how social identities intersect and how the unique formation of these intersecting identities causes social hierarchies that shape the experiences of people. Thus, Crenshaw calls for scholars to allow “the differences among us” to be fully acknowledged and explored even in the midst of “constructing group politics” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1299). Adapted a bit then, intersectionality is useful when considering a person’s political identity because it asserts that political identity is socially constructed and highly variable depending on the experiences and other identities that a person possesses. Furthermore, it grounds how coalitions and groups are formed around certain identities that are helpful when thinking about terms such as “Liberal, Conservative, Libertarian, etc.,” that are simultaneously useful and problematic, similar to Crenshaw’s critique of “Feminism” and “Antiracist” in the original intersectionality literature. Despite the proliferation of intersectionality as framework and method over the last thirty years, it is not without its intellectual limits. Accordingly, Nash (2008) raises the issue that it is unclear whether intersectionality fully accounts for how social identities are *formed* and deployed. Given that the focus of this study is on political

identity *development*, it is important to consider how multiple identities operate but also the ways in which they are developed.

Jones and McEwen (2000) along with Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity is helpful because it builds on the intersectionality literature and seeks to also account for how social identities are developed while a person is in college. They present a "meaning-making filter" that seeks to describe how different identity dimensions are shaped over time by contextual influences. Contextual influences include: peers, family, norms, stereotypes, and sociopolitical conditions (Abes et al., 2007). The multiple dimensions of identities framework also reaffirms that social identities are fluid, performed, and differently salient (Abes et al., 2007). This means that identities are not static or developed in a linear way but change over time. By performance, this framework reminds us that although two students might identify as Liberal, how they act out this label might be very different and thus studying identities must take into account how performance manifests itself and to what degree and in what contexts. Finally, it is useful to consider that different social identities are salient to different people. In the context of this study, that means that even though a student's political identity might not be salient, they still can be located in the process of developing a political identity.

Limitations. Although the intersectionality and multiple dimensions of identity frameworks are helpful, taken alone, they are inadequate to speak to student political identity development. One reason for this is that they vaguely allude to political identity but do not fully take up political identity in the same ways that they explicitly handle

race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. This omission is problematic because a person's political identity benefits or suffers from political hegemony just as much as other forms of hegemony privilege and oppress other identities (Connolly, 2002). Second, these frameworks are decoupled from the postsecondary environment. This is not a critique per se; so much as it is an opportunity to stress the restricted utility of theories that do not decidedly integrate the organizational context into the theory. Finally, these literatures are based, in part, on specific populations and adapting them to other populations has to be done with caution. As a result, it is important to remain sensitive to the specific origins of these frameworks and how they converge and diverge from the study of political identity development that will be based, in part, on students that may not possess any marginalized identities.

Theory of Self-Authorship

Applicability. While intersectionality and multiple dimensions of identities are worthwhile descriptive frameworks that help explain how identities *operate*, the limitation around fully explaining how identities are *developed* is one that another prominent student development theory takes up as its focus. Marcia Baxter Magolda's (2008) *Theory of Self-Authorship* defined as "the internal capacity to define one's own beliefs, *identity*, and social relationships, is centrally concerned with the developmental aspect of identity formation (p. 269). The theory's utility in relation to student political identity development is rooted in how Baxter Magolda explains the components and conditions necessary to help students on their journey towards self-authorship. There are three dimensions, cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal, in which students develop.

The intrapersonal dimension is concerned with an individual's sense of who they are and what they believe and relates most closely to this study's definition of political identity (Baxter Magolda, 2001). These dimensions then journey through four phases: following formulas, crossroads, becoming the author of one's life, and internal foundation (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Finally, Baxter Magolda and King (2004) devised the learning partnerships model to demonstrate how faculty, student affairs professionals, and campuses in general can structure environments and learning opportunities for students that will enable them to develop their self-authored identities. The model is based, in part, on three key assumptions: portraying knowledge as complex and socially constructed, 'self' being central to knowledge construction, and mutual expertise. The other half of the model is based on three key principles, validating the learner's capacity to know, situating learning in their experience, and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning (p. 41). Together these six ideas contribute to the notion that context matters in the journey towards self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

Although the theory of self-authorship and the learning partnerships model are not explicitly concerned with the development of a political identity there are two valuable abstractions that one can draw from these frameworks. First, given that a student's political identity is socially constructed similar to their gender, race, sexual orientation, and other relevant identities, it is plausible, although not substantiated, that the development of a political identity follows Baxter Magolda's four phases. For example, following formulas is akin to a student copying the political beliefs and behaviors that their family or community exhibit. Likewise, becoming the author of one's life is similar

to a student redefining and clarifying their political identity to insure that it is aligned with their values, motivations, and capital. Second, the learning partnerships model holds the context, or the institution, accountable for fostering the journey towards self-authorship. Thus, we are not only reminded of how the development of identity and the structuring of a context are inextricably linked but we also take the idea that the context can be augmented with an intentional focus on fostering experiences and learning that contribute to development. This is important because of the middle-ground explanation of higher education's impact on political engagement that notes that what a student does in the educational environment matters. The theory of self-authorship and the learning partnerships model helps us see why that may be the case.

Limitations. While there is obvious value in this framework as a compliment to the intersectionality/multiple identities literature, there are a host of cautions that have been raised that are important to acknowledge. First, Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2008) initial sample of students on which the theory of self-authorship was developed is based almost entirely on White, privileged students (Hernandez, in-press.; Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). This calls into question how applicable the theory and framework are for different types of students. For example, Torres and Hernandez (2007) found that Latina/o students must navigate cultural oppression that serves as a propelling force towards self-authorship that is not evident in the initial sample. In addition, the learning partnerships model has some limitations in that it is not structured to attend to students who are in a "pre-crossroads" phase of development (Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007).

Theories of Cognitive Development

Applicability. The first two bodies of student development reviewed above are useful for offering parallels for how we might think about describing how a student's political identity develops, how it intersects with other identities, and shapes the contours of their life. However, the previous two literature areas fail to respond adequately to the ontological question of why does a student, or anyone for that matter, develop a political identity in the first place? As will be addressed in this section, overall student development theory is limited in providing a framework that allows researchers to draw plausible conclusions in response to why students develop identities. Those cautions notwithstanding, cognitive development theories broadly can be useful, albeit provisionally, towards understanding why students might be compelled to develop a political identity. Cognitive structural theories of student development are concerned with how students perceive and make sense of their experiences towards forming opinions about the social world (Kegan, 1994; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1998). These theories posit that as students develop cognitive complexity they move from dualistic ways of knowing towards seeing knowledge as relative and continually evolving (Kegan, 1994; Perry, 1997). Development occurs when students are introduced to increasingly complex ways of thinking that challenge their understating and create moments of cognitive dissonance (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Kegan, 1994).

A potential critique of situating political identity as a social identity is that some might seek to distinguish it from the "primary" U.S. social identities of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation because of the belief that the "primary"

identities are not chosen by an individual, whereas, “secondary” identities such as one’s religious preference or political identity are indeed chosen. While, later sections will complicate this binary thinking of social identity construction, for now, the cognitive theories offer utility because they propose that whether a person develops a salient political identity could rest on how they view what is “right or necessary” in response to what it means to be a politically engaged person in the U.S. Put plainly, similar to Snell (2010), I contend that people develop salient political identities, or not, based somewhat on whether they believe having a political identity and being politically engaged are things that are “morally right or necessary” given their prior socialization experiences and current context. Given this, theories of cognitive development help to highlight how students go about determining what is right and necessary for them and provide some clues into how a political identity is developed.

Summary of Student Development Theory

In summation, the three sections above that focus on student development theory provide four important considerations that situate this study in the literature. First, the intersectionality/multiple identities literature asserts that students possess a range of social identities that are differentially salient and produced by the socio-cultural hegemonic forces that a person experiences. Thus, a student’s political identity is just one of many ways a student may see the world and how a student responds to these hegemonic forces will presumably shape their identity. Second, the self-authorship literature presents the concepts that move students through identity development broadly and points to how institutions create learning environments that challenge and support

students. Accordingly, we are informed that the environment matters in identity development, a point that the final section of this review will take up with much greater detail. Third, the cognitive development literature focuses in on a plausible explanation for why students might feel it necessary to adopt or adapt a political identity. Since no theories exist as to why college fosters political engagement among students, it was important to identify a cognitive theory that sheds light onto why political identities exist and potentially develop.

The final and most significant point is that the student development literature is insufficient to grapple with all the complexities of student political identity development. As mentioned in each section, the student development literature reviewed here and in general lacks a focus on political identity and thus cannot be neatly packaged into a study on the topic. In addition, student development theory is problematic to apply in emergent research because of the tendency to place students, especially marginalized ones, into categories that may not accurately reflect their views and orientations (Torres et al., 2003). Finally, these theories do not fully account for the experiences, characteristics, and beliefs that students enter into the college environment with (Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002). The debate on the relationship between higher education and political engagement also highlights the significance of pre-college factors, which this body of research alludes to but notes that it remains outside of the scope of focus. Thus, to effectively answer how a person develops a political identity in college, it is imperative to know what the research says about the political identity of students before they enter into college.

Insights from the Literature on Political Socialization

Student development theory in college has its roots in developmental psychology and education (Evans et al., 2009). Another body of literature in developmental psychology that interfaces with political science and education is research on political socialization⁹. The literature on political socialization is useful because it is explicitly concerned with the ways in which people develop their political identities over the course of their lives. Accordingly, there are two subsets of this literature, the *Kindergarten-12 (K-12) context* and a *person's family background and community* that are helpful compliments to the student development literature because they inform us about the aspects of political identity that students bring with them to college. As Zukin and colleagues (2006) make explicit in their seminal book, political engagement and as an extension, political identity, are shaped both by the life-cycle process¹⁰ and prominent generational experiences¹¹. While this literature review is primarily concerned with the political identity development process that occurs when a person is in college, it would be negligent to not consider the influence of students' life cycle and generational experiences before they enter into college. These insights may help delineate the role of the postsecondary environment relative to the K-12 context and family background and community experiences.

⁹ For a review of the different ways "political socialization" is used in the literature see (Greenstein, 1970).

¹⁰ The life-cycle thesis posits that the life stage a person is in shapes their political engagement (e.g., having children, receiving social security benefits, etc.) (Zukin et al., 2006).

¹¹ The generational experiences thesis asserts that adolescent socialization experiences in schools, families, and communities, key socio-political events (e.g., wars, depressions, etc.), and long term contextual changes (e.g., technology advances) are the main shapers of political engagement (Zukin et al., 2006).

The (Contested) Role of the K-12 Environment

Political scientist David Sears (1990) makes the argument that the late 1950s and early 1960s was the golden age of political socialization research for four distinct reasons. First, Sears contends that early scholars trained in the subfield of political socialization adhered to the behavioristic and psychoanalytic psychological theories, which both emphasized the lasting effects of early experiences on adults. Thus, a normative outgrowth of this thinking was to study the “roots of political behavior” in the early experience of children (Sears, 1990, p. 70). Secondly, Sears pinpoints a “perfect storm” of post-war optimism and a renewed interest in education and child rearing, as a culmination of factors that could contribute to alleviating racism, anti-Semitism, poverty, and other human problems. Moreover, Sears highlights how the rise of political socialization research coincided with the rise of political science as an academic discipline. Accordingly, one of the field’s early concerns was to explain how a citizenry could develop democratic institutions in a post-colonial world. To this point, they focused on early experiences and family socialization since much of the early work suggested that adult voting behavior and party identification were “stable products of pre-adult family socialization” (A. Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Easton & Dennis, 1969; Sears, 1990, p. 70)

Sears (1990) goes on to note that the early work on political socialization was met with a backlash that called into question whether early experiences in a person’s life truly had an impact on their political identity (Marsh, 1971; S. A. Peterson & Somit, 1982). The major argument was that the data that the early work in this area used to make

conclusions was overstated and inconclusive on whether early socialization truly mattered (Searing, Schwartz, & Lind, 1973; Searing, Wright, & Rabinowitz, 1976). Unsurprisingly, this backlash to the early scholarship did not emerge without its own group of critics who concluded that not only were early experiences only partially consequential to political socialization but people constantly revise their political orientation in response to their current formulation of how to maximize benefit for themselves and the communities they care for the most (Fiorina, 1981; Greenstein, 1970; Merelman, 1972). These epochs in the political socialization research led Sears (1990) to conclude from his exhaustive review of the literature that:

most researchers have simply concluded that children's political attitudes are not very strong or very persistent and therefore have little impact in adult life. If they do not have much impact on adult attitudes or behavior, why study them? (p. 73)

Given this relevant, yet dated intellectual impasse, what, if anything should be gleaned from this literature on the relationship between schools and political identity development towards framing this investigation? John J. Patrick (1977) theorizes that there are four main dimensions of pedagogy that can be used to evaluate schools on their ability to facilitate political socialization. Patrick (1977) notes that an enduring goal of schools has been to promote democratic citizenship but the interpretation of how to actualize this goal has been highly variable. As a result, determining how school contexts socialize students' (a) political knowledge, (b) intellectual skills, (c) participation skills, and (d) political attitudes, can do much to help researchers and practitioners ascertain to what extent K-12 schools play into the political identity development of students.

Although these characteristics are almost forty years old, the dimensions reveal important insights about students in the K-12 system. First, studies conducted during the 1970s found that most K-12 students are ignorant about basic facts of how politics and government operate (for an overview see Merelman, 1972). While more current studies have tempered this view to an extent (Hess & Torney-Purta, 2005; Torney-Purta, 2002), there still remains a concern that a majority of the young people in the United States do not learn basic political facts while in school. Second, a review of the literature concludes that high school students, in particular, contain the capacity to exhibit high levels of political skills, but most do not (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Galston, 2001, 2007). Finally, Patrick's (1977) review underscores that most young people in the U.S. do not experience instruction in schools that leads to robust political attitudes or learning. Patrick (1977) contends that too much focus is placed on the formal curriculum and that the hidden curriculum or the "conditions of learning surrounding teachers and students" is a major force in shaping students on the four dimensions that often is overlooked. His conclusion is that by more readily examining the hidden instructional context of schools, the potential to fully ascertain the importance of schools will be more readily apparent.

The important takeaways from this review are that the K-12 experience provides the initial foundation for student's political identity; however, it is not fully crystalized when a student leaves the K-12 context and matriculates into a postsecondary education. Consequently, a researcher can be more attuned to the dimensions that shape a student's identity and know that depending on a student's K-12 experience they will bring with

them to the postsecondary environment an assortment of knowledge about politics, motivations, skills, and attitudes. Accordingly, determining how stakeholders structure postsecondary institutions to respond to this diversity of political identity “inputs” is crucial.

The Role of Family Background and Community

While the K-12 context is vitally important, research also suggests that a person’s family background and community experiences are important inputs into their political identity and engagement (Putnam, 2000; Verba et al., 1995; Yates & Youniss, 1998, 1999). For example, research has found that a person’s family background plays an important role in shaping their attitudes towards government, their political orientation, and civic behavior (Andolina et al., 2003; Dalhouse & Frideres, 1996; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; McIntosh, Hart, & Youniss, 2007). Zukin, and colleagues (2006) found homes where politics was regularly discussed to be a significant predictor of political engagement among their survey responders. Simply put, “engaged parents tend to raise engaged children” (Zukin et al., 2006, p. 153).

Additionally, much work has been done on the importance of social capital and social networks, loosely operationalized as one’s community, in the shaping of one’s political identity (D. E. Campbell, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Sander & Putnam, 2009; E. S. Smith, 1999; Wicks, Wicks, Morimoto, Maxwell, & Schulte, 2013). A recent study of youth political behavior during the 2012 election concluded that those who are most engaged “come from families with more resources, may anticipate attending college

fulltime, and have the resources to access more traditional and new information sources” (Wicks et al., 2013, p. 638).

Furthermore, Campbell’s (2010) study mentioned earlier also highlights that the political variability of the community matters. Politically homogenous communities tend to foster political voice and adherence to civic norms, whereas politically heterogeneous communities tend to foster political efficacy. The assertion made here is that exposure to “difference” in social networks begins to foster the skills and dispositions necessary to effectively navigate political contexts (Mutz, 2006; Wicks et al., 2013). Other studies also cite homogeneity and heterogeneity of political ideology in a person’s social network as an important mechanism in “making” citizens (Conover & Searing, 2000; Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003).

From the family background and community literature, there are two important insights relative to studying student political identity development. First, students entering into postsecondary spaces are bringing with them an array of skills and attitudes that have begun to shape their political identity related to not only their school environment but also their family structure and experiences in their surrounding community. There is some evidence that postsecondary institutions make attempts to account for the differences in schooling experiences with the way the academic curriculum is structured (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Tierney & Garcia, 2007), however, the literature is much more silent about the ways in which institutions seek to address differences related to family background and community on student political engagement. Relatedly, the K-12, family background, and community

research highlights how vital it is to not only remain sensitive to the relationship between people's development and their physical environment, but the importance of the broader geographical setting¹² that the physical environment is situated in. Put a different way, if where a student comes from matters to their political development, then the place where a student attends college should also matter and be accounted for in their political development. Especially since most students attend universities that are close to where they consider home (Perna & Titus, 2004).

Limitations of the Political Socialization Literature

Despite the usefulness of this body of literature, it is not without its faults. Most glaringly, this literature, while alluding to a life-cycle orientation, does not consider the postsecondary context into the analysis of their data sets. As a result, the applicability of their findings has to be taken with great restraint because of the inherent differences between the family context, the K-12 context, and the postsecondary context (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Also important to note is that these studies are not explicitly concerned with the traditional college-aged years, despite the previous literature that was reviewed that suggest that significant development continues to occur once students leave high school and home. Finally, the literature is largely out-of-date and needs to be understood in the socio-political and historical time-period that it was conducted in, which is obviously much different from the socio-political climate of 2015-2016. For those

¹² By geographical setting, I mean more than just a place on a map. I believe as Gieryn (2000) asserts, a particular "space" (or geographical setting) not only has a geographic location, it has material form, and it is invested with meaning and value. Gieryn's definition of "place" captures succinctly the interaction between person and the broader setting.

reasons, delving into higher education organizational literature should serve as the final piece necessary to fully augment a researcher's understanding of how students develop political identities and what institutional contexts contribute to that development.

Postsecondary Organizational Culture and Student Identity Development

Campus Climate/Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments

In their important and massive synthesis of the most up to date literature on the educational benefits of diversity, Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, and Arellano (2012) contend that one of the most important outcomes of a positive and healthy campus climate is the development of “competencies for a multicultural world.” A component of this competency that they specifically point out is the development of democratic outcomes, which they define as “the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for participation in a diverse and pluralistic democracy (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 53). Herein is the entry point for why this body of literature, which is broadly concerned with the organizational environment of postsecondary institutions, is relevant to the political identity development of students. If diverse learning environments do indeed foster democratic outcomes such as political engagement, as a well-developed literature base suggest (Colby et al., 2010; Hillygus, 2005; Hurtado et al., 2002; Hurtado, 2007; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), then determining why and how the culture and campus climate factors into this development is critical. While an exhaustive review of the multicontextual model of diverse learning environment model (MMDLE) is beyond the purview of this section, there are four important points to highlight. First, the MMDLE is

useful because it integrates macro (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1977), meso, and micro levels (Renn & Arnold, 2003; Renn, 2004) of postsecondary institutions to frame the processes, policies, and influences that shape institutions and the people who operate in them.

In the original (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998, 1999; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005) and subsequent reconceptualization of the dimensions of campus climate, Hurtado et al. (2012) presented 5 dimensions that coalesce to shape postsecondary environments in prominent ways. The macro-level of an institution's climate includes the historical, organizational/structural, and compositional dimensions (Hurtado et al., 2012). The meso and micro-levels are made up of the behavioral and psychological dimensions of climate (Hurtado et al., 2012). The dimensions help situate and link together how students' identities are developed. For example, the historical dimension of an institution highlights the vestiges of practices and norms that shape how faculty and staff might think about and shape environments towards fostering opportunities for political development. Whereas, the psychological dimension captures an individual's perceptions of their environment and could reveal student's feelings about hostility to people that do not share their political identity. The behavioral dimension helps explain the important and desirable educational outcomes associated with students who interact with other students that possess social identities different from them.

Third, the MMDLE separates but links how students experience the curricular and co-curricular environment. This is key because some studies have found that students are differentially affected by the range of expectations, practices, and experiences in these two environments (Astin, 1993; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 2005). For instance, much is known about how the general education curriculum relates to civic engagement or how service-learning is a reliable indicator of civic engagement (Jacoby, 1996, 2009; Spiezio et al., 2006). Additionally, the Political Engagement Project (PEP) found that courses that contain political concepts and challenge students to be engaged outside of the classroom relate to increases in the student's understanding of their political capacity¹³ (Colby et al., 2010). There is also evidence that involvement in student organizations leads to political engagement (Alcantar, 2014; Bowman, 2010; Reyes Verduzco, 2015). However, it is not as clear how these experiences lead to the development of a political identity. The final major insight from the MMDLE model is the way in which the model neatly ties in a robust array of external factors that shape the policies and practices of postsecondary institutions that ultimately help develop students. As noted earlier, the communities and geographic settings that postsecondary institutions are situated in have influences on the institution and subsequently on the student's identity development. However, conceptualizing the dynamic processes is difficult. The MMDLE suggest that researchers pay particular attention to:

¹³The PEP project was concerned with political learning in the postsecondary environment, which makes it very closely related to my proposed study. Political learning as defined by Colby et al., (2010), is concerned with political, understanding, skills, motivation and expected future political election, summarized as a student's political capacity. Thus, similar to Binder & Woods (2013), these researchers are ultimately concerned with forms of political engagement. Political learning in their study is a means to an end. In fact, they note interestingly that political learning does not lead to changes in student's political orientation or ideology. A statement, that I think may be overstated and in need of nuance. To that point, they note that their discussion of the political learning towards fostering political development does "not address explicitly the institutional context to any significant degree" (Colby et al., 2010, p. 20). Hence, the major distinction in my future work and the PEP project is that I attend to the ways in which the postsecondary organizational culture contributes to a student's political identity development, with attention to all the ways, no matter how little, the political identity is changed while in college.

- The relationships institutions have with their constituent communities (e.g., local, regional, state, national, and global): How institutions choose to serve, engage, and contribute to their surrounding communities (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).
- The climate of the community: The tangible and intangible elements of the immediately surrounding community that combine to influence the relevant stakeholders of an institution (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000; Harkavy & Hartley, 2012).
- External push and pull factors: The reasons certain students and faculty are attracted to and retained at an institution, or not, that are attributed to forces outside the control of the institution (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2004; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).
- The policy context: The ways in which external policies and requirements shape the institutional (McLendon, 2003b; Pusser, 2003).

These insights equip researchers with important language to speak to how varieties of dynamics are working to shape students. Accordingly, the overarching takeaway is that the development of a student's political identity is intimately coupled with the contexts and environments surrounding them. Therefore, a thorough investigation into political identity development must speak to the varying dimensions, contexts, and environments to capture accurately the process of development. However, much of the previous literature on political engagement and political identity development in particular is devoid of illuminating all these processes at the same time. Some focus on just the individual and the meso-level (e.g., Colby et al., 2010) or the broader macro-level context (e.g., Binder & Wood, 2013), but none empirically speak to the totality of these factors and their influence on students political identity development.

While unfortunate and a major reason why more research is needed, much can be gleaned from the ways in which scholars have thought about how dimensions of the

MMDLE have contributed to racial identity (Renn, 2004), gender (Drew & Work, 1998), and lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity (Rankin, 2005). Perhaps most importantly, the relationship between the MMDLE and these identities asserts that these factors do not influence student's identities equally because the organizational structure of postsecondary organizations is so highly differentiated. Hence, it is important to probe the organizational theory literature further for what it might indicate about student identity development and political identity development more precisely.

Organizational Culture

In the conclusion of *To Server a Larger Purpose*, Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) make the subtle yet provocative proposition that a “democratically engaged university entails creating a different kind of educational experience with its students” (p. 293). Broken down, what this suggestion really brings into focus is that postsecondary institutions are not *static* and *unchangeable* organizations. While enormously difficult to achieve at times and notoriously slow, campuses are in fact being continually shaped and changed by the macro and micro forces noted in the previous section. Thus, if we take the point that postsecondary institutions are malleable, we must more clearly ascertain how the organizational culture of postsecondary institutions shapes students and in turn how students shape the culture and climate.

As the opening chapter noted, organizational culture is a vast intellectual field spanning multiple disciplines and has a particularly rich tradition in higher education. An advantageous mechanism for winnowing down the broad field of organizational culture is to focus in on organizational socialization, given this investigation's concern with how

students' develop a political identity in a particular organizational context. To this end, Brim (1968) provides an intuitive definition of organizational socialization as “the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society” (p. 3).

In the realm of higher education, Bill Tierney (1997) added an important nuance to the study of organizational socialization when he positioned his ethnographic findings of newly hired faculty into two opposing frameworks of organizational socialization. The first, he terms a modernist perspective, which encapsulates Brim's definition of socialization and plainly stated, means that the organization is concerned with imparting and imprinting its culture onto students and other stakeholders (Tierney, 1997). On other hand, Tierney (1997) asserts that a post-modern view of organizational culture “involves a give-and-take where new individuals make sense of an organization through their own unique backgrounds and the current contexts in which the organization resides” (p. 7). In this view, culture is being mutually and continuously constructed rather than transmitted. With a mixture of a modernist and post-modernist interpretation of his findings, Tierney (1997) identifies that there are “conflicts and discontinuities” in the organizational environment due to the normative tendencies of culture. As a result, new faculty are unable to fully assimilate into the campus norms and end up “falling back on their own interpretations of how to fit into the organizational culture” (Tierney, 1997, p. 14).

Adjusted into the scope of this study, Tierney's (1997) framework has three helpful applications that lend clarity to the study of college student political identity development. First, it is not a stretch to conclude that students also face numerous

“conflicts and discontinuities” about what they are supposed to get out of their college experience, least of which may be the continued development of a political identity. Thus, noting that students may fall back on their own interpretations of what it means to be politically engaged compliments previously reviewed literature that highlights that students bring with them to the postsecondary environment important inputs that shape their political identity development. Second, a post-modern view of organizational socialization alerts us to the fact that students can shape the institution. This means that not only should an investigation ask how students develop politically, but also how institutional culture is developed in response to trying to facilitate the political identity development of students. Finally, implicit in Tierney’s (1997) framework and the MMDLE model is the notion that some “external force” is shaping the actions of the stakeholders of the institution. This is important to keep in mind given this study’s concern with the socio-political environment of the state that the institutions are located in, which is an external force that influences the campuses and the student.

Despite the aid of these propositions, they are simply that. The framework is limited because it has been applied mostly to faculty concerns¹⁴ (antonio, Astin, & Cress, 2000; Tierney, 1997; Trowler & Knight, 2000) and lacks an explicit focus on the interplay between the intrapersonal identity development of students and the organizational culture of an institution.

¹⁴ The exception to this is some recent work on doctoral student socialization (Gardner, 2008a, 2008b).

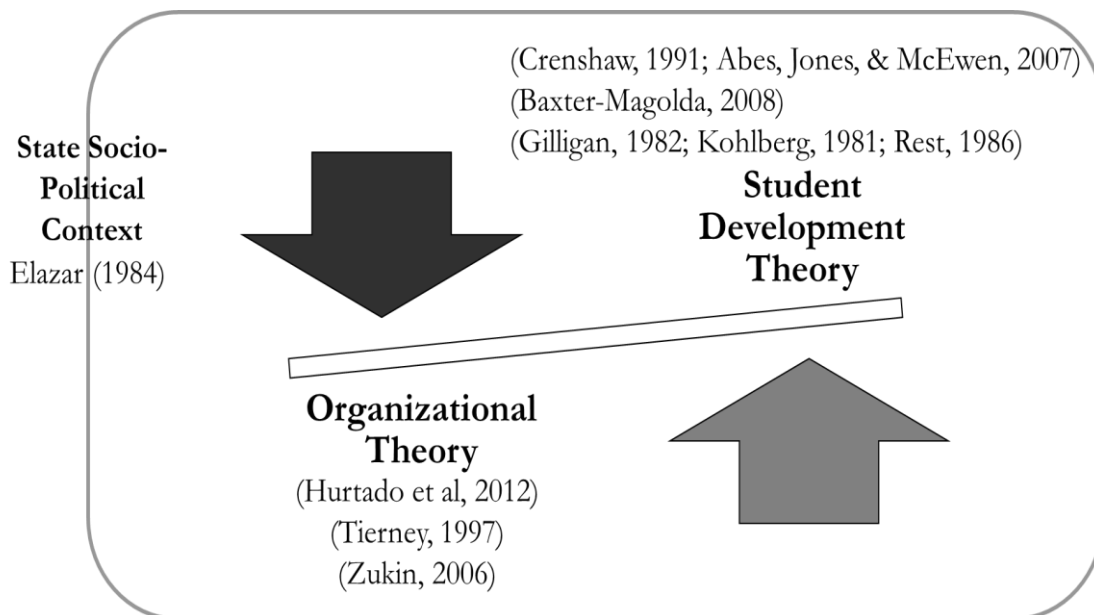
Integration

The extensive review of literature in the preceding subsections makes four major contributions to our understanding about student political identity development within postsecondary organizational contexts. *First*, the intersection between higher education and democracy has been shaped by a history of trying to determine how and to what extent institutions should contribute to the public good. *Second*, the literature is clear that political socialization towards a political identity begins well before a student enters into the postsecondary environment. What this means is that students should not be treated as a monolithic demographic variable when it comes to analyzing how their college experiences relate to their political identity development. *Third*, the literature on student development theory is useful in helping explain how students develop prominent social identities in college. However, it is limited because it is incapable of handling the organizational culture that also influences a student's identity development. *Finally*, the organizational theory literature underscores how aspects of campus climate and organizational socialization merge to frame how dimensions external to students shape them while these dimensions also are shaped by students towards fostering student development and a different organizational culture. Yet, similar to the student development theory literature, the organizational theory literature is inadequate because it does not fully account for the cognitive and intrapersonal processes that are at play relative to the development of a political identity.

Conclusion

Braiding these major contributions together, it becomes evident that a student's identity is formed in college via the socialization process attributed to a range of internal and external forces. Likewise, any of a number of institutional characteristics have been suggested to contribute to this process. While these literatures build the skeleton of this research area, much remains to be investigated. Of utmost concern currently is the omission of student narratives in their own process of political socialization. Only two higher education studies (Binder & Wood, 2013; Colby et al., 2010) have made efforts to rigorously capture student narratives relative to political engagement situated in higher education and both were concerned with the students' *performance* of their political identities, not their development. Consequently, this dissertation responds to the need for empirical research that seeks to explore how students reflect on their political identity development and how they understand the organizational culture to influence that process. As Figure 2.1 shows, the contribution of this dissertation sits at the intersection of student development theory and organizational theory and seeks to build on this juncture of scholarship in order to bring clarity and important nuance to the previously laid out debates and open up new lines of inquiry in an interdisciplinary fashion.

Figure 2.1: Sensitizing Concepts



Chapter III: Research Design

Overview

This project was specifically focused on leveraging students' reflections about their experiences at an institution to describe the *process* of developing a political identity while in college. In order to actualize the intended goals of this project, this study was broadly situated in the qualitative approach to research because of qualitative research's predisposition to more fully account for the complexities of human's lived experiences relative to quantitative research (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015); in large part due to a focus on "thick description" of a phenomenon (Geertz, 1973).

After revisiting the research questions that guided the project, this section details the qualitative paradigm that best fits my epistemology and ontology and then highlights the specific research approach that formed the foundation of this study. Following that, I overview my site selection and participant sampling strategies as well as detail the sources of data that helped answer the research questions. Relatedly, I provide a synopsis of the demographics of the participants in the study. Furthermore, I describe how I analyzed the data sources, and handled issues of trustworthiness in the execution of the study. To conclude the chapter, I engage in a self-reflexive exercise to transparently show the subjectivity, inclinations, and biases that undoubtedly and intentionally influenced the selection, implementation, and execution of the methods in the study (H. R. Milner, 2007; Tracy, 2010).

Research Questions

Noted qualitative methodologist Michael Patton (2015) asserts that “designs are built around the questions we ask” thus, research questions are the guiding lights of any qualitative study and it is important that they influence all research design decisions (p. 254). The two main questions that guided this study about the process of developing a political identity for college students were: (a) What is the process of political identity development for actively involved sophomores and above 4-year, not-for-profit, public institutions in geographically diverse regions of the United States of America? and (b) In what ways does an institution’s structure and culture shape the political identity development of students?

These questions foreground both the process of political identity development and the important dimensions of an institution’s culture and campus climate. The first question was concerned with how this study sought to capture concepts that describe the similarities and differences in the process of developing a political identity across different students at institutions in different parts of the U.S. The objective was to describe the process in order to better explain how going to college influences the development of a political identity. The second question sought to tie the emerging concepts to aspects of an institution’s culture and campus climate in order to fully construct an emerging theory that was properly contextualized by the unique dimensions of each institution’s climate and culture. This second question was necessary to connect the emerging model on political identity development in college to an established body of research in higher education concerned with diversity and organizational change efforts

that seek to foster equitable and inclusive educational spaces for students. Since one of the major rationales for this project was grappling with issues of inequity in education, as the previous chapter alluded to, connecting an emerging model of student development to dimensions of organizational culture may illustrate important mechanisms for addressing current and future challenges that plague democracy and higher education in the U.S. (Colby et al., 2010; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). These questions served as reference points for the following components of the research design to insure that the warrant and rationale that underpinned this study were carried through in a clear, coherent, and compelling fashion.

Inquiry Paradigm

With these research questions in mind, it is important to acknowledge the qualitative inquiry paradigm that most informed the research questions and my approach to designing this research study (Charmaz, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008; S. R. Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Not only does an inquiry paradigm guide design decisions it should also be made clear to account for its influence on data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; S. R. Jones et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). Given my understanding of my epistemological orientation, I believe that the social world is continuously constructed by people's internal sense making as well as the communal sense-making in groups, associations, institutions, and societies writ large. Consequently, the ontology and assumptions of social

constructivism¹⁵ are the ones that most informed my approach to research because as Holstein and Gubrium (2008) assert, social constructionist research best deals with *what* people construct (in my study a political identity), and *how* this social construction unfolds (in my study the process of developing a political identity). Furthermore, Patton (2015) contends, “social constructionism asserts that things do not and cannot have an essence because they are defined interpersonally and intersubjectively by people interacting in a network of relationships” (p. 121). Accordingly, the process of developing a political identity cannot be reduced down to an essence that cuts across different people. There were multiple realities to attend to and seeking to find the essence of the process would undoubtedly marginalize the sense making of some of my participants.

My goal for this project was not to create a definitive typological treatise on political identity or engagement in higher education. Rather, as Wortham and Jackson (2008) note, constructionist approaches to education are important because they can help educators *understand* and *change* the highly enabling and constraining outcomes that educational processes have” (p. 107). Therefore, this project’s use of constructionism was intended to expand the intellectual nuance and understanding that was currently deficient for scholars and practitioners in regards to student political identity and

¹⁵ Crotty (1998) tries to draw a distinction between *constructivism*, which he sees as the “meaning-making activity of the individual mind” and *constructionism* as the “collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p. 58). I used the terms interchangeably throughout but acknowledge the important difference. While the epistemological and ontological foundations are the same for both terms, the difference in focus (constructivism on the individual, constructionism on the group) complements the way I think about a student’s individual meaning making of their identity and the way that that meaning is then shaped and modified by the campus climate and culture that the students operate in.

organizational theory and could reveal new lines of inquiry and practice that are better able to facilitate the development process for all students with more intentional attention paid to the institutional climate and culture.

Research Approach

To effectively build on the foundation of social constructivism and my specific research questions, I selected *constructivist grounded theory* (CGT) as my qualitative approach to research (Charmaz, 2008, 2014). This subsection will provide a brief background of this unique approach to research and make clear why its selection is congruent with the inquiry paradigm and research questions for this study. Charmaz (2008) describes grounded theory as both a “research product and the analytic method of producing it” (p. 397). She asserts though that the history of grounded theory has led to its “application” rather than “innovation” and a social constructionist approach to grounded theory should promote the development of “new understandings and novel theoretical interpretations of studied life” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 398).

Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss (1967) originated grounded theory and outlined the initial methods and guidelines that CGT is built upon (Charmaz, 2008, 2014). In 1990 Strauss and Corbin (1990) released a book that differed from Glaser and Strauss’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) original conceptualization of grounded theory particularly around emergent codes and categories and cast grounded theory in a particularly objectivist fashion (Charmaz, 2008, 2014). The next major upheaval in the grounded theory tradition stemmed from scholars viewing grounded theory from a post-modernist lens and critiquing it for its unchecked positivist assumptions (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007;

Charmaz, 2008, 2014; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2008). Furthermore, scholars questioned whether grounded theory should even be relevant as a methodology in spaces where positivism was shunned because of the way grounded theory was being conceived at the time as “epistemologically naive, voyeuristic, and intrusive into the lives of research participants”(Charmaz, 2008, p. 401).

This brief excursion though grounded theory’s history all matters to my study because in response to these initial epistemological wars, scholars have made intellectual strides towards “reclaiming” grounded theory and defending it from concerns about its positivist foundations and its objectivist turn (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2008, 2014; Clarke, 2005). The major distinction between objectivist grounded theory and CGT is that the objectivist approach assumes a “single reality that a passive, neutral observer discovers through value-free inquiry” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 401). Furthermore, scholars have noted that objectivist approaches tend to “generalize though abstractions that separate the completed grounded theory from the conditions and contingencies of its data collection and analysis” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 401; Clarke, 2005). The positivist and objectivist version of grounded theory was not suitable for my project because I did not think I could, nor did I want to be a “passive and neutral” observer. Additionally, as my study rationale noted, I was interested in theorizing about the complexities of the political identity development process properly contextualized within higher education institutions and state’s socio-political environments.

In light of these dynamics, scholars have established a constructivist approach to grounded theory that loosely meshes a constructivist epistemology with the grounded

theory approach to research. Charmaz's (2008) four key assumptions of CGT differentiate it from other forms of grounded theory because of the reasoning that (a) reality is the result of multiple processes that are constructed in certain contexts, (b) the research process is guided by interaction, (c) the researcher's positionality is explicitly dealt with throughout the study, and (d) data are co-constructed by the researcher and participants in the study.

These assumptions were aligned with my inquiry paradigm and served to build in more congruence in my research design because of the overlap. It is also important to note that while constructivist grounded theory is a very flexible and emergent approach to conducting research, there are still some fundamental methods of constructivist grounded theory that distinguish it from other approaches and that assist researchers in presenting "interpretive portrayals of the studied world" rather than "exact pictures" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 17). For example, data can be collected from multiple sources, but it is imperative that data are "detailed and full" and "placed in their relevant situational and social contexts" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 18). Thus, Charmaz (2014) calls for interviews that are intensive, observations that consider the entirety of a setting, and the use of texts as products of a socially constructed world in order to achieve data saturation.

Dealing with (de)Contextualization

While constructivist grounded theory is a robust approach to researching the process of political identity development for a set of participants, Charmaz (2014) cautions that it may be limited in its ability to contextualize fully the dimensions of a socially constructed world, or in my specific study, an institution's climate and culture,

while simultaneously attending to the process of political identity development, which are both foregrounded in the research questions. To respond in an intentional and systematic way to this concern, I crafted *comprehensive site overviews with campus vignettes* (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) of each institution with a focus on creating a descriptive narrative of the institution's unique climate and culture situated in its state socio-political environment and grounded in data I collected. These site overviews allowed me to analyze the role of the institutional context in the political identity developmental process in a more meticulous fashion because separate but simultaneous attention was given to developing both concepts before bringing them together.

The first issue I had to deal with in regards to the construction of the site overviews was to clearly define “comprehensive” by bounding the site overviews and vignettes to specific areas of focus (Miles et al., 2013). As my research questions indicate, the research sites in my study are large, four-year, not-for-profit, state flagship-like¹⁶ public institutions in different geographic locations in the United States. The primary goal of the site overviews was to marshal and organize data that describes the campus climate, the campus culture, and the socio-political environment of the state that each institution resides in. To best illustrate these concepts in each overview, I drew from various data sources such as formal and informal interviews with students and staff as well as direct observations of each site. Additionally, I situate the site overviews in the

¹⁶ There is no consensus definition of what a state-flagship is. Some states have formal recognition tied to appropriations and in other states, flagship status is accorded to a system's oldest or most prestigious institution. I use “flagship-like” to account for all the various ways one might conceive of a flagship university in a state.

state's socio-political environment through the use of geographic information system (GIS) mapping of state voting trends and ideological partisanship, a review and classification of current higher education legislation (e.g., guns on campus, performance funding, etc.), and political media coverage of the state/region. Finally, in alignment with the constructivist paradigm, I constructed opening vignettes of experiences that stemmed from field notes that took place at each institution. Miles, Huberman, and Saladaña (2013) describe vignettes as “a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic in the case you are studying” (p.182). Accordingly, the selected vignettes were intended to render data in an evocative way to help place the reader into the unique political dimension of each campus.

Summary

Taken together the site overviews and the CGT approach to research provided me the epistemological authorization and research tool-kit necessary to effectively illuminate the *process*¹⁷ of developing a political identity, appropriately matching up with and addressing the first research question. Whereas the site overviews provide the description necessary to contextually analyze the development of a political identity relative to the organizational climate and culture of an institution. This approach responds to the second research question by constructing a narrative that, as

¹⁷ Charmaz (2014) argues that a process “consist of unfolding temporal sequences that may have identifiable markers with clear beginnings and endings and benchmarks in between. The temporal sequences are linked in a process and lead to change. Thus, single events become linked as part of a larger whole. Even the most regimented process may contain surprises because the present arises from the past but is never quite the same. The present emerges with new characteristics. Thus the experience and outcome of a specific process have some degree of indeterminacy, however small it might be” (p. 17).

comprehensively as possible, reflects the organizational climate and culture of an institution relative to the state socio-political climate that it is situated in. The site overview with vignettes approach is also amenable to the constructivist paradigm because each vignette will reflect unique campus climates and cultures that are the result of the co-construction of reality due to the interpretation and actions of different stakeholders in the study (see Charmaz, 2014 for an overview of symbolic interactionism that speaks to this process of co-construction of a research study).

Methods

To this point, I have laid out my research questions, my underlying ontological and epistemological orientations and described my overall approaches to this research project. I have tried to connect each of these areas in order to highlight their congruence and utility in helping to execute the study and answer the research questions. The next subsections will focus more on the actual methods and procedures that I employed to operationalize the espoused research design.

Institution Sampling Strategy

States. The selection of institutions with varied campus climates and cultures, in states that have very different histories and socio-political environments is necessary to construct “information rich” vignettes and site overviews (Miles et al., 2013; Patton, 2015). Thus, I targeted four large, public, not-for-profit, four-year, state flagship-like institutions in California, Florida, Indiana, and New Jersey. The corresponding institutions are the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the University of

Florida (UF), Indiana University-Bloomington (IU), and Rutgers University-New Brunswick (RU).

These states were selected for three reasons. First, previous research in political science has established that each state has a particular socio-political environment that shape peoples' and institutions' (broadly speaking) normative political attitudes and practices (Elazar, 1984; Lieske, 2010, 2012; Patterson, 1968)¹⁸. Much of the work in higher education that has examined the relationship between the socio-political environment of a state and higher education institutions has solely focused on finance and budget issues (Heck, Lam, & Thomas, 2012; Koven & Mausolff, 2002; Miller, 1991). What has not been explored is whether and to what extent a campus' climate and culture are influenced by the socio-political environment of a state and how that dynamic works its way down to influencing a student's identity development.

In response, I sought to sample states that have been identified to have unique but representative socio-political environments. Although much maligned (for an overview of critiques see (Lieske, 2010, 2012), I followed Heck, Lam, and Thomas' (2012) use of Elazar's (1984) typology to inform my state sampling strategy because of its simplicity and because ultimately, I drew from my data sources to reconstruct a description of the state socio-political environment that was used for the comprehensive site overviews. In Elazar's (1984) typology he describes three different socio-political environments that states are classified into. California is categorized as having a "moralist" socio-political

¹⁸ Political scientists generally use the term "political culture" to refer to what I am calling the "socio-political environment." I use socio-political environment intentionally as to not confuse the reader when I refer to a campus' culture.

environment, or an overall support for government to do what is in the best interest of the “public good” (Elazar, 1984). Whereas Florida is classified as having a “traditionalist” socio-political environment, or one that is characterized as seeking to maintain established values and limit participation in political life (Elazar, 1984). Indiana and New Jersey are defined as states with more “individualist” socio-political environments, or orientations towards limited government involvement in private affairs and restrained government intervention in public life (Elazar, 1984). It is important to note that the fluctuating circumstances such as immigration trends, federal and state policies, and economic conditions continually mediate these environments. Thus, this typology is simply a useful snapshot in time and despite its limitations, it effectively serves as a starting point for the sampling of states.

The second reason each state was sampled was the different demographic make-up of each state, which presents each institution with challenges and opportunities that are reflective of larger national demographics (Hurtado et al., 2012) and varied stances on important higher education issues (e.g., guns on campus, state performance funding, and merit-based aid) (Bennett, Kraft, & Grubb, 2012; Heck et al., 2012; McLendon, 2003b). Finally, access to “information rich” data is an important consideration for qualitative researchers (Patton, 2015). As a result of prior affiliations as a student (UF, IU), geographic proximity (RU), and relationships with insiders (UCLA), I was confident that I would be able to secure permission and access to a wide array of students at each institution. In addition, my relative familiarity with three out of four of the institutions gave me a unique “insider-outsider” stance that availed me to research issues “seen,

unseen, and unforeseen” (H. R. Milner, 2007). These three reasons compliment the research questions because they guided me to select states where the socio-political environment is distinct, rich, diverse, and of contemporary significance to the political landscape in the U.S. It is critical to reiterate that my goal here was to simply highlight the plausibility of these state characteristics, but, in agreement with CGT, I grounded the socio-political description of the states in the sources of data I collected from my participants and my observations.

Institutions. With the state contexts in mind, based on the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, I defined “large” as student enrollment greater than 30,000 students with most of those students being primarily residential. I was interested in large institutions because of the likelihood that a vibrant student culture would be present with numerous opportunities for students to get involved and be influenced by the peer culture (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Additionally, while this study is not interested in generalizability, sampling large state flagship institutions allowed for increased latitude when thinking of ideas for transferability given that institutions of this size and prestige usually account for the education of a relatively large number of the college going population in each state and have been noted to have a differential impact on students relative to other types of large institutions (Duderstadt & Womack, 2004; Hoekstra, 2009; Turner & Pusser, 2004).

By “public,” I mean that a certain percentage of the institutional budget stems from state allocations determined by a state legislature and confirmed by the governor of a state. Furthermore, public also alludes to the fact that these four institutions are

accountable to either or both a state legislature or an external state university governing board (Heck et al., 2012; Kezar, 2006; Lowry, 2001; McLendon, 2003a), meaning that the institutions are not autonomous and there is a relatively larger (when compared to a private institution) likelihood that the socio-political dynamics of the state will manifest in some way on campus. Hence, these criteria were established in order to avoid introducing complexities that sampling private institutions or public institutions with different missions might present.

Not-for-profit means that the institution does not exist to make money for shareholders. While for-profit institutions have grown, their institutional missions are more focused on career preparation rather than the holistic development of students and thus would not provide data conducive to the study's interests. I focused on four-year institutions because of research that suggests that these types of institutions have a different influence on student's development relative to two-year colleges, in part because students are engaged with four-year institutions for a longer period of time (Evans et al., 2009; Hurtado et al., 2012; Kuh et al., 2010).

Institution Recruitment Procedure. After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in May of 2015, I begin recruiting the institutions listed above. I contacted the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) at each institution via email, informed them about the aims of my study and asked for permission to engage the institution as a research site. I received permission from all of the institutions by August 2015 and all of them expressed enthusiasm for my study. Upon confirmation of institution participation, between May and August 2015, I began collecting and analyzing data sources (detailed

below) not related to site visits or interviews in order to begin to construct the site overviews.

Student Participant Sampling

Since this study is centrally concerned with *student* political identity development, sampling students at the aforementioned institutions was key to actualizing the aims of this study and carrying out a rigorous CGT. Accordingly, this study employed a sampling strategy known as “sensitizing concept exemplars” sampling coupled with “maximum variation” sampling, both of which are forms purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015). With sensitizing concept exemplars sampling, researchers “select information-rich cases that illuminate *sensitizing concepts*: terms, labels, and phrases that are given meaning by the people who use them in a particular context” (Patton, 2015, p. 269). The sensitizing concept of interest in this study was the process of developing a political identity in college. Since this study was concerned with how students make meaning of the process within the context of their institution, this sampling strategy makes explicit that each student participant had to be able to speak to their own process of developing a political identity. This strategy built in congruency by insuring that data collected via interviews help respond to the research questions.

It is important to clarify and defend what “type of student” could best serve as an “information rich case” since this evaluation flows from my positionality and understanding of students. A quick example of the evolution of my thinking in this area underscores the dynamic and iterative process of CGT (Charmaz, 2014). An initial draft of the first research question during the proposal phase of this project asserted that the

study was concerned with “actively-involved seniors.” The reason for focusing on this specific population at the time is that there is a long-standing body of literature that speaks to how students who are actively-involved in their institutional environment are more influenced by the institutional setting relative to those who are not as involved (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Further, the longer a student is at an institution the likelihood that they will be influenced by the institution increases (Kuh et al., 2010). Since this study is concerned with a developmental process, it is important that students (a) have had different experiences to speak to and (b) are able to reflect on how those experiences have informed their political identity. Based on the engagement and college effects literatures, it is widely established that students that are actively involved and older are more likely to have had a varying amount of experiences and to have had the time to make meaning of those experiences relative to younger students who are not as involved (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)¹⁹. Additionally, I argued that the more contact points a student has had with the institutional climate and culture, the better positioned they will be to speak more fully to how those aspects inform their political identity development process, which would address both research questions.

With all that being articulated, during the early phase of participant recruitment in August 2015, as I was having trouble securing interviews with students at RU, I was pushed by a member of my critical inquiry group to reconsider my assumptions about the relationship of time on campus and the influence it has on students. They reasoned that

¹⁹ This is not to suggest that this happens uniformly for all students.

all students are in some ways influenced by the structure and climate of their campus and understanding how students who have been on campus for varying amounts of time describes their experiences similarly or differently may add important nuance to the data I collected. After reflecting on this, I agreed and decided to enlarge my sampling criteria to students who identified as sophomores or older. Specifically, during data analysis I only included students who indicated that they had been in college for at least two semesters. However, since I was intrigued by the differing perspectives, time permitting, I also interviewed graduate students and first year students.

Student recruitment procedures. In late July 2015, I began to send emails to student affairs staff²⁰ at each campus that explained my study and asked them for nominations of students that they considered to be actively-involved²¹ (see Appendix A for the sample letter). I compiled the names and emails that I received into a database. I also conducted a search for the names and emails of the student leaders of typical student organizations and clubs that each campus has and added them to the database (see Appendix B for a sample of groups contacted list).

Once the database reached a sufficient amount of names and emails, I began sending recruitment emails, to each student inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix C for the letter) by filling out a very brief demographic questionnaire that was built and administered online using Qualtrics (see Appendix D). The questionnaire was

²⁰ I initially intended to also recruit via faculty, but given my timeline and the 9 or 10 month contracts standing faculty are on, I was more confident that I would get responses from student affairs professionals.

²¹ I did not define “actively involved” in the email. I am hoping to get students that are involved in a range of things from undergraduate research to student organizations, to volunteering, etc.

necessary to help employ a maximum variation sampling strategy. Maximum variation seeks to identify “patterns that are common across the diversity of dimensions of interest” (Patton, 2015, p. 267). The dimensions of interest for the students in this study, based on the sensitizing concepts, include type and level of campus involvement, salient social identities (gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, etc.), hometown/background, and level of political engagement. The demographic questionnaire contained questions that helped me ascertain how students were arranged on the dimensions of interest relative to each other, in order to insure that I was sampling a diverse group of students for interviews. As I began to receive responses to the questionnaire, I personally emailed students and invited them to participate in an in-person interview that was scheduled for the period of time that I was going to be visiting each campus. I was also open to conducting interviews using video conferencing software (Google Hangout) or the phone and this proved useful in a few cases, as I was able to interview one student who was studying abroad and another student that was not able to meet in person while I was at their campus. I hoped to enroll no fewer than eight and no more than 12 students at each site, totaling 32-48 student participants. I ended up interviewing 42 students, 39 of which fit my sampling criteria.

Overview of Student Sample. The final sample included six students from Rutgers, nine students from UCLA, and 12 students each from IU and UF. The average age of the participants in the study was 20.8, with a high of 25 and a low of 19 and the average number of semesters on campus was 3.7. Thirty-one out of 39 participants were in-state students, which is similar to in-state/out-of-state populations at all of the

institutions except Indiana, which has a larger out-of-state population. A quarter of the students were first-generation college students, three were transfer students, one was an international student, and a majority lived off-campus with roommates²². The top three majors that participants specified were social science (38%), STEM/health (18%), and business (15%). Sixty one percent of students in the sample identified themselves as female/woman, 57% identified as a person of color, 18% identified as gay/bisexual/queer, and 41% indicated that they were atheist or “none” in terms of their religious/faith identity. Although the percentage breakdowns are useful in helping to gain a quick sense of the student demographics, in line with the constructivist paradigm this study is situated in, the demographic questions on the questionnaire were open-ended to allow students to identify in the ways they saw fit, in order to not marginalize certain identities. Table 3.1 below presents some of relevant characteristics of each of the students that the demographic questionnaire captured.

Table 3.1: Participant Demographics

²² This is a bit misleading because although the students technically did not reside in on-campus housing, most lived within a few miles of campus and would not be considered commuter students.

Pseudonym	Age	Home State	Intended Career Field	Gender Identity	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Faith/Religious Identification	(dis)Ability Identification	First-Generation College Student
UCLA									
Ashlyn	21	CA	Teaching	Female	Mexican-American	Straight	Catholic	No	X
Lus	25	CA	Research/Professorship	woman	Latina/Salvadoran descent	heterosexual	No	No	X
Clarissa	20	PA	Legal Field	Female	Chinese American	Heterosexual	Buddhism	No	X
Gary	21	Kerala, India	Not sure	Male	Indian	Heterosexual	Catholic Christian (nonreligious)	N/A	
Sophia	21	CA	Education: Teaching or administration (K-12 or higher education)	Female	Mexican	Heterosexual	N/A	N/A	X
Chicano Man	20	CA	Lawyer	Male	Mexican-American	Straight	Yes, Catholic	Unsure	
James	22	CA	Student Affairs/Writing	Male/Queer	Filipino-American	Gay	Non-religious	Depression	X
Joyce	20	VA	Public Relations	Female	Caucasian	Heterosexual	N/A	N/A	
Allison	21	CA	Higher Education	Female	Latina/Mexican	Heterosexual	Christianity	No	X
RU									
Abby	19	NJ	Healthcare	Female (cis)	South Asian	Heterosexual	Islam	No	
Nia	21	NJ	Speech Therapy	Female	Black	Straight	Christian	Asthma	
Emily	20	NJ	Law	Female	South Asian	Straight	Muslim	No	
Jennifer	21	NJ	Environment	Female	Biracial: Asian and Caucasian	Bisexual	Sikhism	No	
Zack	21	PA	Policy, campaigns	Male	White	Straight	Catholic	N/A	
Tom	19	NJ	Journalism/Communication	Male	White	Gay	No	No	
IU									

Pseudonym	Age	Home State	Intended Career Field	Gender Identity	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Faith/Religious Identification	(dis)Ability Identification	First-Generation College Student
Kyle	20	IL	Sports Business or Coaching	Male	White	Gay	Catholic. However, I do not really believe in God anymore.	No	
Chris	20	IN	Law and/or Media	Male	White	Queer/Gay	n/a	n/a	
Barry	22	IN	Government or Non-profit management	Male	White	Heterosexual	None	No	X
Elaina	20	IA	Public Accounting	Female	White	Strait	Christianity	no	
Destiny	21	IN	Higher Education & Student Affairs	Female	Black/African American	Heterosexual	Christianity	No	
Katie	21	IN	Politics/Policy	Female	White		No	No	
Mya	20	IN	Pediatric oncology	Female	White	Straight	Muslim	No	
Parker	22	IN	Public Affairs	Female	white	heterosexual	n/a	no	
Kenneth	24	DC	Government Intelligence Services	Male	White	Females, heterosexual	Islam	30 Percent VA disability	
Al	21	IN	Politics	Male	White	Straight	None	None	
Nicole	21	IN	Government Relations	Female	African American	heterosexual	Christian	no	
Joe	22	IN	Business	male	white	straight	none	none	
UF									
John	19	FL	Education/Public Administration	Male	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Catholicism	No	
Jason	21	FL	Public Relations	Male	White	Straight	Catholic	No	
Sharon	20	FL	Medicine	Female	Bengali	Straight	No	No	
Maya	21	FL	Medicine/Health Policy	Woman	Asian/Indian	Straight	Hindu	No	

Pseudonym	Age	Home State	Intended Career Field	Gender Identity	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Faith/Religious Identification	(dis)Ability Identification	First-Generation College Student
Genevieve	21	FL	Civil Rights Law	Cis-woman	White	Queer (pansexual)	No	No	
Asmara	19	FL	International linguistics/business/travel blend of a career	Female	Black/American	Straight	Christian	No.	X
Caitlyn	21	FL	Veterinary Medicine	Female	Black	Heterosexual	Christian	None	
Black Panther	21	FL	Law	Female	Black	Straight	Yes, Christianity (Non-denominational)	No	X
Michelle	21	FL	Non-profit	Female	Filipino-America	Bisexual	No	No	
Xalis	20	FL	I want to get a PHD in Economics and become a professor or/and work at a think tank	Male	White/Jewish	Heterosexual	I'm Jewish by birth, Atheist by choice	No	
Joseph	21	FL	Operations	Male	Black	Straight	Catholic	No	
Marie	20	FL	Public accounting or tax law	Female	Multiple	Straight	No	No	X

Data Sources

Delineating sources of data that are harmonious with my research questions, epistemological orientation, and sampling strategy is central to building in a desirable level of methodological rigor (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; S. R. Jones et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). Below I describe each data source and explain how it was congruent with other areas of my research design.

Interviews

The primary source of data for this project were interview sessions with student participants (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Charmaz, 2014). The average interview was around an hour long and took place in various campus settings like coffee shops to help the participants feel at ease. Follow up interviews with certain participants lasted between 10 and 20 minutes and took place on the phone. CGT cites interviews as a necessary and appropriate tool to elicit data relevant to the research phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). The interviews were semi-structured (Arksey & Knight, 1999) and covered four topic areas that were all concerned with illuminating the process of developing a political identity in college. The topics included: (a) reflections on their current understanding of their political identity and the process involved in developing that identity; (b) sense-making of experiences in college that contribute to their understanding of political identity; (c) reflections on campus climate and culture (d) reflections on the socio-political environment of their state and its contribution to their political identity (see Appendix E for a representative interview protocol). I also asked each participant to choose a pseudonym, which are used throughout this study to protect the identity of students.

Initially, I intended to also ask each participant to bring a curated artifact (photographs, Facebook post, clothing, etc.) that was symbolic or indicative of their political identity. However, after the first few interviews, I realized that this was not logistically sound and it was easier to simply have students describe the artifact. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed by a transcription company (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Although many qualitative methodologists suggest that the researcher transcribe their own data, due to time constraints, this was not a feasible step for me. However, since a lot of jargon was used and the quality of the recording varied, I went through and had to correct and prep many of the transcripts before data analysis. Each transcript was stored in a database and uploaded to Atlas.ti to aid in data analysis. At the end of each day of interviews, I also memoed about ideas, concepts, and questions that I had from the interviews to capture my initial impressions and aid in data analysis.

Demographic Questionnaire

The questionnaire mentioned in the previous section was not only used to help with participant selection but they also served as a valuable source of data (See Appendix D). The data collected on the questionnaires afforded me the opportunity to triangulate other sources of data and make assessments of different students in an effort to capture complexities that exists within and between students, particularly around their social identities and political party affiliation. As the data analysis section will make clear, a hallmark of any version of grounded theory is the constant comparative method of data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Comparison can happen at multiple levels and the

questionnaire data provided another layer of data on which I employed this analytic strategy.

Direct Observations

I spent four to five days on each campus conducting direct observations of three specific aspects of the institution that were critical in building the site overviews and vignettes (Charmaz, 2014; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2008; Patton, 2015). First, I attended student group meetings and events to hone in on the language, interactions, and symbols students use relative to political engagement that are present and absent in these spaces. Second, I took walking tours to make observations about the physical environment of each institution towards understanding what messaging exists around being politically engaged. Special attention was given to whether the messaging was generated by students, the community, or the campus' administration and faculty. Finally, I made observations about the campus climate, the campus culture, and the socio-political environment of the state to help triangulate information received from students. These latter observations were based on informal "field interviews" with staff at each institution that provided another perspective on these concepts (Lofland et al., 2008).

The direct observations of each campus occurred in the fall of 2015 between September and November. Notes, jottings, and memos were kept in a field-note journal (Charmaz, 2014; Lofland et al., 2008; Patton, 2015) to help make the observations systematic. I created one field-note journal for each institution and took pictures of relevant aspects of the physical environment with captions noting what the photo was of, where the photo was taken, and at what time.

Institutional Documents and Archival Materials

In addition to the direct observation of the campuses, I systematically reviewed prominent institutional documents and archival material that was relevant to the socio-political environment of the state and/or the campus culture and climate or what Charmaz (2014) terms “elicited and extant documents.” I conducted reviews of the campus websites, strategic plans, and the student newspapers, looking for specific references to political engagement, political activism, voting, political lobbying, campaign donations, political campaigning, etc. I used this review to tailor the interview protocol for each institution to gauge the perceived relevance of each topic to the student’s experiences. To (re)orient myself to campus, I also gathered documents from online official archives to gain a better understanding of recent issues that the Boards of Trustees and other campus leaders have dealt with as well as important events in the campus’ history.

Documents that I was able to collect were stored in the database for each campus and uploaded to Atlas.ti. Lastly, to explicitly collect data that relates to the socio-political climate of the state relative to higher education, I collected the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) analysis of state governors’ State of the State speeches with respect to the portions of the speeches that have implications for public colleges and universities. I compiled the last five-year’s analyses for each state in my study to better understand important trends that helped frame the socio-political environment of the states.

Researcher Journal

Finally, given that in CGT I am considered an instrument of the research (Charmaz, 2008, 2014), I needed to systematically keep track of my thoughts during the research project. Once permission was granted from IRB to begin the study I wrote frequent entries about the progress of the study and all relevant thoughts I was having about the project in a researcher journal. It is important to bear in mind that the researcher journal is different and remained separate from the field-note journals mentioned previously. This helped me understand how my biases and insights were influencing the research process so that in the analysis of the data, I could better attend to how these dynamics informed what was ultimately produced as findings. Furthermore, a researcher journal added to the “audit trail” (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015) of my qualitative study and built in a layer of rigor so that an outside researcher could see the process of my engagement with the study and track the decisions made about each aspect of the study.

Data Analysis Strategy

To analyze and interpret of all the data I collected, I engaged in three intersecting but distinct *segments* of data analysis. As a result of the three segments of data analysis, there were three units of analysis, one for each segment, which all synergistically coalesced to respond to the research questions. The units of analysis for the first segment were the individual students and in particular, their reflections and narratives about developing a political identity while in college gleaned from interviews. The units of analysis for the second segment were the four campuses. Of particular interest was the campus climate and culture of each institution as well as the socio-political environments

that the campuses are situated in. Finally, the unit of analysis for the third segment was the interaction between the previous two units of analyses. Put another way, the third segment was bounded by the emerging relationship between the ways in which students develop political identities and the structure and norms of the campuses and states they inhabit.

Segment 1: Grounded Theory Analysis and Construction

Initial Coding. In the first segment, I used Charmaz's (2008, 2014) suggestions as a framework for CGT analysis to unearth the process of developing a political identity in college towards a descriptive model that captures the complexity of the process. Charmaz (2014) outlines four steps for data analysis. The foundation of analysis in grounded theory is the idea of constant comparison of ideas, concepts, people, codes, and other material in the data that propels the data analysis process forward until a theory is fully constructed that describes the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2008, 2014). Initial coding was focused on fragmenting the data into words, lines, segments, or events in order to ascertain "what is happening in the data" and "grappling with what it means" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113).

I began data analysis right away. Once transcripts were returned to me, I read them over, uploaded them to Atlas.ti, and paired them with the raw audio from the interviews, in case I wanted to hear the speaking tone of the participant. Based on notes taken during the initial read through of the transcripts and memos of interviews that I noted were particularly insightful or illuminating at the time, I selected and initially coded three transcripts from each institution, generating 990 initial codes (for a sample

list of initial codes see Appendix F). I began inductively coding, moving quickly through the transcripts, but as I coded more and more transcripts, I would use previously generated codes to describe occurrences that were similar. I was intentional about selecting contrasting narratives within and between institutions (e.g., a student who claimed to be disengaged from politics, a conservative student, and a liberal student) to take advantage of the maximum variation sampling I undertook. It is important to point out, as Charmaz (2014) contends, that initial coding often points out gaps in data. Hence, the initial analysis of transcripts after visiting the first two institutions, led me to refine my interview protocol by taking questions out and rewording others to better hone into aspects of a student's identity development. For example, I initially asked what political labels students subscribed to but later came to understand that students subscribed for different reasons. Thus, I began asking a follow-up question about how salient the political label was to a student's daily-lived experience.

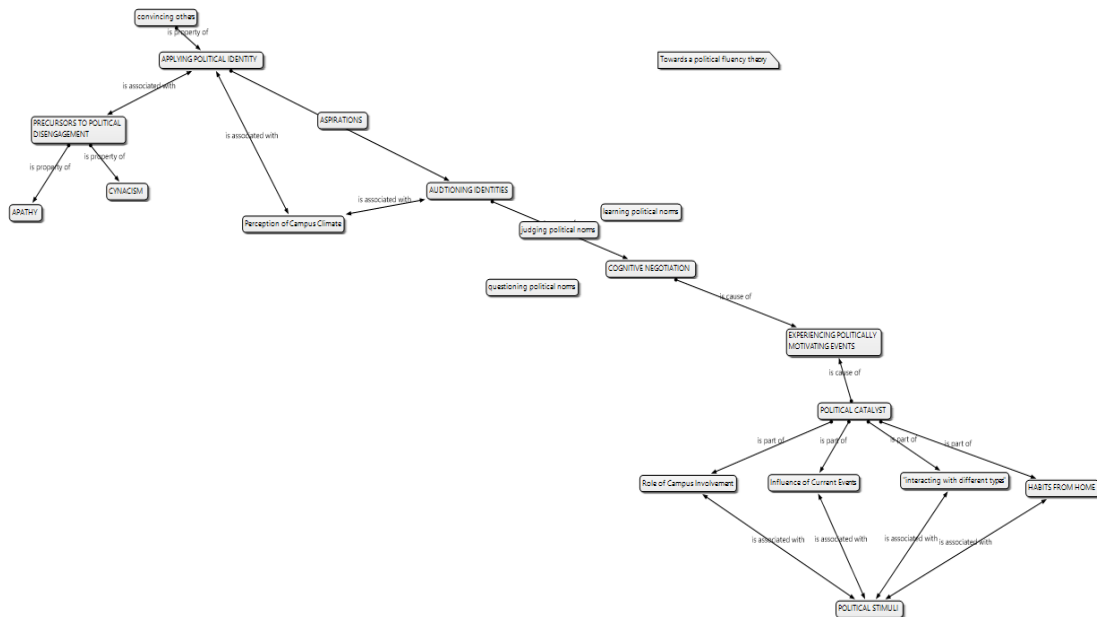
During this stage in the analysis, I endeavored to remain open to the various directions that the data were leading me. Thus, many of the codes were "in vivo" codes, or codes that come directly from a participant's narrative. Some examples of in vivo codes are: "becoming exposed," "hearing the bad side," "questioning the system," and "taking my education with me." Furthermore, during initial coding I paid special attention to "code words that reflect action" or using gerunds while coding (Glaser, 1978) in order to resist making conceptual leaps too early in the analytic strategy (Charmaz, 2014).

Focused Coding. The next phase of coding in grounded theory was focused coding. Focused coding was used to “synthesize, analyze, and conceptualize larger segments of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). In this phase, I coded the initial codes and began to group them into broader categories or what Atlas.ti calls “code families.” During this process, Charmaz suggests that the researcher continually make clear and defend whether the focused codes capture the data accurately and completely. This phase generated 356 codes. As these focused codes emerged, I compared them back to a different set of transcripts. I would add initial codes when they did not fit the emerging focused codes and memo about the tensions. Some examples of focused codes are: “lacking understanding,” “evaluating self,” and “interacting with others.”

Axial Coding. The third phase of coding builds on Strauss and Corbin’s (2008; 1990) notion of axial coding. Axial coding takes focused codes and looks to define categories of relationships and areas of overlap that might connect certain focused codes together. The purpose of axial codes is to reconstruct data in fresh ways. Strauss and Corbin (2008) propose an organizing scheme for axial coding that breaks the focused codes into concepts that are considered either “conditions of the phenomenon, actions/interactions of the participants, or consequences of the phenomenon.” The basis for the organizing scheme in this phase of coding is asking the focused codes “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences” in order to more fully describe the unit of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

To advance to axial coding, I took the focused codes that were more prominent as determined by their “groundedness” or the number of initial codes within a focused code and graphically arranged them in a way that resembled the emerging process. This generated 20 axial codes. Atlas.ti assisted me in this phase as the “network manager” allowed me to build a graphic display that pulled directly from both initial and focused codes (see Figure 3.1). This exercise was also an example of “sorting” emerging concepts, which is an important task in GGT (Charmaz, 2014). I defined each of the axial categories and wrote a longer memo explaining how I was seeing the relationships between the concepts in the data.

Figure 3.1: Early Rendering of Political Identity Process During Axial Coding



In my proposal, I mentioned that the following sensitizing concepts might be useful axial codes²³ (a) precursors to political development in college; (b) role of social capital and access to information; (c) campus climate and culture influences; and d) outcomes of political identity. These concepts came up, but the way that they relate to the process is markedly different than how I perceived them to be a year ago. I will attend to these dynamics in greater detail in the social location section.

Theoretical Coding. The final phase in my grounded theory analysis was theoretical coding. In this phase, the researcher works to further integrate the axial codes into a compelling storyline that serves as a comprehensive response to the research questions (Charmaz, 2014). To carry out theoretical coding I looked for linkages and areas of divergence among the axial codes that clarified relationships between the categories and sharpened the theoretical narrative. This led to the emergence of a core category that cuts across the entire process, four key categories, which I call phases that add depth to the core category and form the contours of the recurrent process. Two modifiers of the process also emerged that alter student's political identity development in important ways. These concepts combine to form the emergent model of the *College Student Political Identity Development* process.

Other Important Tasks in CGT. There are three other important aspects of grounded theory analysis that Charmaz (2008, 2014) recommends and were integral to data analysis in this segment. These include engaging in theoretical sampling, saturation,

²³ I list these in an effort to make them explicit and index my "wrestle with my preconceived notions" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 155).

and memo-writing or “memoing.” In theoretical sampling, once a theory begins emerging from the initial data analysis, it is imperative that the researcher seek out more data that can corroborate and add variation within the emergent theory. As noted earlier, initial coding led to changes in my interview protocol to glean data that are more sophisticated. I also intentionally theoretically sampled to insure that I had a greater amount of STEM/Health majors because their narratives were a bit different from the other students in my study. Likewise, I had to intentionally sample a greater number of students that identified as Conservative and first-generation students to add a sufficient amount of variation to the emerging concepts.

Data collection, analysis and theoretical sampling concluded once the theoretical storyline had been saturated, or in other words, new data was not extending or complicating categories in any new ways. This is the main reason why I did not recruit more Rutgers students. The six accounts were more than enough to get a varied sense of the campus and state context and the identity development narratives were similar to the stories I was hearing from students at other institutions. However, Charmaz (2014) cautions that theoretical saturation should not foreclose other analytic possibilities, which was important to acknowledge given my concern with a decontextualized theory (p. 216).

Memo-writing was another critical piece of my grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Memos served as steps between data collection and writing up the grounded theory. Memos captured my thoughts, reactions, questions, comparisons, and feedback all related to the research process. I generated 53 formal memos of varying lengths that were captured using Atlas.ti. I also used numerous informal memos or

jottings throughout the study that I consolidated into my research journal or took from email threads or conversations with a peer-debriefer or my critical inquiry group.

Segment 2: Comprehensive Site Overview Analysis and Construction

In this segment of analysis, the purpose was to tell each institution's "story" by asking the data "is this typical" of the institution's structure, culture, and state socio-political climate before moving to a comparison between each institution (Miles et al., 2013; Patton, 2015, p. 185). In order to analyze and synthesize the relevant data (e.g., field journals, transcripts, institutional documents, etc.), I engaged in two phases of analysis towards building a narrative that illuminates aspects of an institution's campus culture, climate, and state's socio-political environment. Operationally, I engaged in a first phase of "descriptive coding" (Miles et al., 2013, p. 74) to better understand what story the data were telling. This entailed reading the transcripts and looking for segments of data that spoke about the campus or state and tagging the excerpt "perception of campus climate."

In a second phase of analysis, I collapsed the data into themes that were able to contribute to an emergent but systematic narrative about the institution's climate and culture as well as the larger socio-political environment of the state (Miles et al., 2013). Data from various other sources were then added (e.g., photographs, maps with GIS data to show election outcomes or campus space) to the narrative to complement and supplement the themes so that a comprehensive description of the culture and climate of the institution and the socio-political environment in which the institutions are situated

was triangulated, saturated, and clearly conveyed (Miles et al., 2013; Patton, 2015). Additionally, the vignettes were developed from refined field notes and memos.

Segment 3: Theoretical Analysis of Links between the Emergent Process and Comprehensive Site Overviews

Focusing on the cognitive and intrapersonal process of developing a political identity could lead to a decontextualized understanding of the process (Charmaz, 2014). Similarly, building distinct descriptive site overviews for each institution does not automatically bring to bear how the climate and culture of an institution both shape people that operate within the institution while being reconstituted by those very people and the larger socio-political environment that encapsulates the institution (Miles et al., 2013). A major rationale of this study was to explore the space between the micro and macro levels of postsecondary education in order to discern how opportunities and resources are allocated in higher education that differentially affect the process of developing a political identity. This concern opens up opportunities to move beyond description of either of the aforementioned topics towards a comprehensive and appropriately contextualized theory that helps to make sense of how the developmental process relates to larger issues of equity in a democracy.

The final segment of analysis brought the emergent process of developing a political identity in college into conversation with the site overviews of each institution's structure and culture in order to build a robust theory that transcends the data while being rooted in it (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2013). To carry this out I reconstructed the model of developing a political identity in relation to the major themes that arose from

the site overviews by asking the data “how are these categories connected and what story do they tell?” This reengagement with the data produced distinct but interwoven strands that link together to form an explanatory theory of higher education’s role in a democracy. My analytic approach was to interrogate the emergent concepts in the previous two segments for connections and relationships between aspects of an institution’s culture, climate, and the socio-political environment of the state.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Taking steps to establish trustworthiness²⁴ in a qualitative study is a critical step because the quality of a study depends on how well a researcher can convey that the execution of their study was rigorous and thorough. There are numerous steps I took throughout the study to layer in trustworthiness in my research design, sampling, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2013; S. R. Jones et al., 2014; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2010). Some have been mentioned already, but I include bullet points and the fundamental question I responded to in the dissertation as a general overview of the steps I took to establish trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013; Golafshani, 2003; S. R. Jones et al., 2014; Miles et al., 2013; Patton, 2015):

Methodological coherence (credibility) – Is there a logical and clear connection made between the study’s rationale, research questions, inquiry paradigm, approach to

²⁴ There are numerous and various ways the literature has come to address the overarching question of “quality and rigor” in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). I use “trustworthiness” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as a catchall but understand there are limitations (for a review see (Calderón, 2013)) and seek to employ forms of quality checks that go beyond the original conceptualization of trustworthiness.

research, sampling strategy, sources of data, and data analysis? Do I adequately defend the connections?

In this chapter, I established that I approached this study from the constructivist paradigm of qualitative research. Accordingly, I aligned my research questions, methods (interviews, direct observations, etc.) and my analysis (constructivist grounded theory) in a way that accentuated that reality is continuously co-constructed. Furthermore, to attend to this co-construction reality I sampled various data sources to capture multiple realities and subjected my findings and interpretations to numerous others to incorporate their understandings. Another sign of coherence is that I espoused these concepts during the proposal and made explicit where I deviated from what I intended to do and why.

Searching for disconfirming cases (dependability) – How am I remaining aware of data that does not fit into emerging categories, site overviews, and the theory? What am I doing with those data?

There were many moments during data analysis when disconfirming cases presented themselves. For example, STEM students noted that they did not readily discuss politics in their courses, relative to how much the social science students brought it up. This pushed me to seek out more STEM students and ask more detailed questions to better understand how they encounter politics on their campus. Likewise, when I encountered other data that did not fit into concepts or categories, I pushed myself to ask why it was not fitting, memoed about it, and often determined that I needed to broaden how I was conceptualizing a code or category to better integrate the disconfirming cases.

Triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, documents)

(dependability) – Do I have data sources that are rich and useful in constructing a dynamic portrayal of my research phenomenon? Do I narrate when data sources converge/diverge and when data saturation has been reached?

As articulated, I used numerous sources of data to triangulate emerging concepts, categories, and the overall narrative. I piloted both the demographic questionnaire with students at a private institution in the northeast during the summer of 2015 to insure that the questionnaire was capturing the data I intended it to. The data sources were for the most part comprehensive, and in instances where data were insufficient, I noted it and attempted to fill in gaps by collecting more data. Data saturation for the campus overviews was reached when no new insights were gleaned about the campus culture or climate. Additionally, saturation was reached with the student narratives when it became clear that the process students were experiencing was more similar than different. Although additional interviews were only conducted with 10 students, their feedback was consistent and suggested that the emergent concepts accurately and sufficiently captured a range of experiences.

Triangulation of perspectives (participants, me, faculty/staff) (confirmability) –

Do I have data from have multiple perspectives that provide different vantage points on the unit of analysis? Do I articulate how these vantage points strengthen the findings and analysis?

Having a sizable number of students at each institution that had different majors, involvement experiences, and backgrounds provided many different perspectives on both

the campus/state contexts and the political identity development process. My observations and insights also served as another vantage point as made explicit in the site vignettes and in the way I analyzed the data.

Peer-debriefer/Critical Inquiry Groups (credibility) – Do the analysis, findings, discussion, and conclusion complicate, extend, or contrast experts' and informed others' knowledge of the field? How do I integrate my engagement with people outside of the study?

Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016) note that “dialogic engagement” or the process of “deliberately engaging thought partners to challenge biases and interpretations” (p. 16), as a key horizontal that cuts across rigorous qualitative research. I engaged both a peer-debriefer and critical inquiry groups in dialogic engagement to best respond to this issue. The peer-debriefer, who is also my dissertation chair, is an expert in the field of civic-engagement and organizational theory in higher education. He also possesses differing social identities and more experience doing qualitative research. He provided feedback on many aspects of the research design (e.g., wording for the interview protocol and demographic questionnaire), and served as a sounding board and coach during critical moments in the dissertation. For example, I sent him an early memo about what I was seeing in the first few transcripts I coded and he implored me to remain open to other aspects that could emerge. This proved especially helpful as that early memo was more of a typology that I was applying to the data rather than letting codes and concepts emerge, which is a major concern that Charmaz (2014) points out often derails what would otherwise be a strong grounded theory (p. 150). The strength of

having a peer-debriefer so intimately familiar with the details of the study helps to provide a consistent but detached perspective. Often after meetings with the peer-debriefer I would walk away with clearer insights that would lead to new memos or renewed enthusiasm for analysis.

I also used different critical inquiry groups to assist in various aspects of the research design and analysis process. The core critical inquiry group was a team of four Ph.D. students. Three are studying higher education and one is studying education, culture, and society; but none are budding experts in student development or civic engagement. I selected these peers to be a part of my core critical inquiry group because they possessed dissimilar social identities, and I considered them as informed peers who I was hoping my work would also resonate with. If I could get them to corroborate and identify the purpose and interpretations of the study from my point of view while integrating their perspectives, then there would be an increased likelihood that the work I was engaging in was rigorous and sound. I periodically sent them excerpts of data, memos, drafts of findings, and analysis to garner their feedback. This proved useful in helping me to consider how others were interpreting the data and whether I was missing important insights that needed to be acknowledged or addressed. There were also instances that presented themselves as a result of being on the faculty market that I leveraged to assist me in data analysis. For instance, putting together a job talk on my dissertation while in the midst of data analysis gave me the opportunity to present emerging categories of the identity development process to people who were unfamiliar with my topic and gain their feedback. This pushed me take stock of where I was in the

analysis process, define codes, and articulate them. Similarly, I presented an early rendering of the site overviews to a doctoral fellows group and got their feedback about aspects that were unclear or areas where more data could be useful.

Participant reflections (credibility) – Do the findings resonate with the participants? Do the conclusions make sense to the participants? How often did I invite participants to assess the status of my project?

In my proposal, this subsection was originally titled “member-checks.” However, Tracey (2010) makes the astute observation that “member-checks” assumes a single reality that needs to be checked on or verified and thus, would be incongruent with the constructivist paradigm. Tracey (2010) goes on to call for “member reflections,” which “are less a test of research findings as they are an opportunity for collaboration and reflexive elaboration” (p. 844). Consequently, once drafts of the findings were complete, I created condensed versions (3-4 pages) of each that captured the key concepts of what had emerged. I then sent emails to each participant with a copy of their state/campus overview, the findings on campus space, the political identity development process, and their raw transcript. In the emails, I invited them to respond to a few question prompts that I included and also offered to do follow-up phone interviews to those that were inclined. I received an overwhelming response from students that were interested in reading over the documents I sent them. In all I heard back from 10 students. For the most part students indicated that the findings resonated with them. As an example of what I gleaned, Destiny, a student IU responded in an email writing:

- Summary - The categories do make sense to me, and I found the descriptions to be helpful. Although I stated in my interview that I

wouldn't describe myself as politically conscious, I do believe the way you have mapped out your "Acquiring Political Fluency" diagram makes me believe that I might be a little more fluent than I admit to being (especially as presidential candidates are beginning to drop out and party front-runners emerge). Therefore, I do believe the process is descriptive to my experiences in college in becoming more aware of the importance of political activism.

- Outline - The typology of spaces described completely resonates with my experiences. It was interesting that social media was considered a semi-public/private space, because I have usually considered this platform to be a public space instead.
- State & Campus Overview - I agreed with this overview 100% and was actually surprised to find out that 85% of Indiana's population is White and 10% is Black. Being from Indianapolis, I am fortunate enough to come from a diverse neighborhood (and my high school alone had nearly every nation represented). I also think it was great to note that IU was the least diverse in all the schools you have visited.
- Transcript - There were a few typos here and there, but nothing worth mentioning that needs to be changed.

On the other hand, some students noted some areas of divergence such as Xalis, a student from UF. He responded saying,

I don't like the illustrative quote for Semi-Public/Private Subheading. The quote seems like it could pertain to engaging with people anywhere on campus and does not address the uniqueness of the semi-public space responding back....

I folded these and other insights into the interpretation and representation of the findings and analysis to fully encapsulate the meaning-making of students.

Theoretical validity (transferability) – In what ways might concepts from the emerging grounded theory transfer to other sites? Does the theory extend, complicate, contradict, or reify existing knowledge? In what ways and to what degree?

The issue of transferability will be handled in the final chapter. Suffice to say though, that there are areas of the emerging study that have resonance beyond the sampled sites and students.

Creating an audit trail via researcher journal and memos (confirmability) – How well are findings and conclusions grounded in the data? Am I able to track decision points? Can an outside researcher or participant follow the logic of my decision-making?

The totality of my researcher journal, memos, and email threads serve as a strong trail that link decision points together and could viably be audited to reveal how and why I arrived at the analysis and interpretation that I did. Throughout the findings, I make explicit mentions to how the codes stemmed from particular excerpts in the data and I have made clear throughout the methods section how my research design unfolded relative to what was stated in the dissertation proposal.

Researcher Reflexivity: Rejoinder to the Preface

I have dreaded writing this section because of the status of the current presidential election in the U.S. Trying to grapple with everything that is transpiring in the current political landscape while analyzing data and writing drafts is quite the mental exercise. As of this writing, Donald J. Trump is the presumptive nominee on the Republican Party and Hilary Clinton is the presumptive nominee for the Democrats. However, both are in somewhat tight races with Ted Cruz and Bernie Sanders respectively. To say that this election has dominated news cycles and popular discourse in the U.S. would be an understatement. In the preface, I wrote that the 2008 election felt like a sea change in the political system of the U.S. What is happening in the 2016 election makes 2008 feel

quaint. Additionally, the Black Lives Matter Movement coupled with the Flint Water Crisis and the immigration debate has centered race relations as a dominant theme of the election as well. Likewise, foreign policy continues to have a large presence in the national psyche due to things like terrorist attacks in Europe, the debate over closing the military installation at Guantanamo, and the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

Due in part to Bernie Sanders pronouncement of “free college” in his presidential platform, efforts to restructure the college loan program, and the Obama administration’s efforts to build on Tennessee’s pledge of “free community college,” higher education has also been a surprisingly large part of the political conversation in the last year.

Universities have grappled with how to respond to increased campus activism (Eagan et al., 2015), while dealing with how to control rising costs, attacks on tenure, and a general weariness about the value of a college degree (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Zumeta, Breneman, Callan, & Finney, 2012). What is happening on the national political scene and what is happening in higher education concerns me both as a citizen and as a scholar. As the Preface highlighted, I arrived to this topic because of personal experiences that compelled me to better understand what was happening around me and happening within me. Yet here I am again, still trying to ascertain what is happening around me and what is happening within me.

Researcher reflexivity is “the systematic assessment of your identity, positionality, and subjectivities” (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016, p. 15). At the beginning of this research process, I memoed about my salient identities, or being a Black, heterosexual, cis-male, who is able-bodied, “well-educated,” non-denominational

Christian, and politically Conservative. As I have wrestled with what has been happening external to me, these identities have played a large impact. For example, last year shortly after my dissertation defense, the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that gay marriage was legal in all 50 states. “Christian” groups lashed out at this ruling and battles over “religious freedom” quickly replaced the marriage equality fight. As a Christian, how was I to make sense of this? Would I encounter gay students in my study? How would I parse out my thoughts and feelings from those of my participants? Likewise, as a Black man, how would I account for the prevalence of not only the Black Lives Matter movement but the ways in which college students took up specific actions in the name of the Black Lives Matter movement, such as events that transpired at the University of Missouri and Yale University. Simultaneously, I routinely shriek in horror at news of Conservative speakers being disinvited from college campuses and the related sentiment that free speech is under attack on college campuses because Liberalism has run amok.

I know intellectually that in qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument, but at many points in time, dealing with all these competing tensions internally as both a scholar and a citizen was very overwhelming. One day, I would find something fascinating and it would provide insight into a piece of data analysis, another day I found myself openly questioning if this work even matters in a world where, with impunity, Donald Trump can be so racist, sexist, and crass. Yet, I call myself a “conservative,” just like he does.

Where this all leads me to is an explicit declaration of my biases and understandings that influenced the research process. Milner (2007) provides a useful framework that I have adapted to help disentangle and make clear the “seen, unseen, and unforeseen” dangers tied to qualitative research. To add in a measure of accountability to my study, it is critical to make plain some of the specific seen, unseen, and unforeseen challenges that have been prevalent in the process. For instance, some seen challenges are my concern with: the future viability of higher education given all the challenges it faces, race relations in the country with respect to coalitions and identity politics, and the role of limited government and free market ideas in higher education (what some call “neo-liberalism”) in the 21st century. Additionally, I have insider-outsider status at three of the four campuses. This was useful because of the built in level of familiarity. However, I also had to remain intentional about staying open to how the participants were perceiving the campus and the cultural and physical ways the campuses have evolved since I was affiliated with them. Unseen issues include power dynamics in the researcher-participant relationship due to my salient social identities and the hegemony attached to some (e.g., my gender, sexual orientation, and religion.). Unforeseen challenges that I am working through are the ways in which higher education perpetuates political inequities and if and how curricular and cocurricular experiences in college can mitigate these inequities.

The first feature of the framework, *Researching the Self*, helps researchers systematically address and remain aware of the seen, unseen, and unforeseen challenges in their research. Here Milner (2007) asserts researchers “may need to critique current

situations to change and transform the world” by “posing racially and culturally grounded questions about themselves” (p. 395). In both the Preface and in this subsection I have made explicit the questions I constantly ask myself as they relate to my identities and my understanding of the political system and how I try to answer them. The second feature of the framework is *Researching the Self in Relation to Others* “to acknowledge the multiple roles, identities, and positions that researchers and research participants bring to the research process” (p. 395). In this study that meant attending to age, race, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, and many other social identities that I and students brought with them into the study. I intentionally worked before and during interviews to insure that students felt comfortable sharing about themselves. Many students noted at the end of the study that it was not as difficult as they were expecting it to be since we were mostly discussing their thoughts about politics and not some external measure of how politically engaged they were. In addition, many students said I had a good “poker face” and that they could not tell how I felt about responses they were giving. These moments served as key indicators that I was creating a context where students did not feel judged and felt comfortable sharing themselves.

The third feature of the framework is *Engaged Reflection and Representation*, or thinking through what is happening in a research community together with participants. As the trustworthiness section makes apparent, I made efforts to involve participants in the analysis and representation of the findings of the study. The final feature is *Shifting from Self to System* or the suggestion to researchers to “contextualize and ground their personal or individualistic, new and expanded consciousness to take into consideration

historic, political, social, economic, racial, and cultural realities on a broader scale” (p. 397). This feature is important to make plain given my concern with better understanding higher education’s role in a democracy. The effort to combine the political identity development process and the site overviews towards illuminating its role in the systems that students experience, directly address this feature.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this dissertation outlined the importance of political identity and engagement as a topic to the future of higher education and the U.S. democracy. The literature review exposed an oversight in related research at the intersection of student development theory and organizational theory. The research design chapter then effectively articulated how the proposed methodology and methods address this neglected area of research and helped the study meet its aims. In particular, the need for a framework that explains how college students develop their political identity given how they experience their campus’ structure, climate, and their state’s socio-political environment became readily apparent. The next two chapters unveil two distinct but related aspects of the comprehensive site overviews. Chapter IV focuses on the state socio-political climate, while Chapter V presents the vignettes, campus overviews, and the organizational findings that cut across all the institutions in the study. The findings from these two chapters undergird the argument that the structure, culture, and socio-political environment that students encounter while in college influence their political identity development.

Chapter IV: State Socio-Political Environments

Students and institutions exist in a unique socio-political environment that sculpts democratic institutions and, as a result, the political identities of the people that reside within the state context (Elazar, 1984). With this in mind, it is imperative to make plain the prevailing political trends in each of the states in the study to make part of the case that the socio-political environments of the states inform how students develop their political identity. In an effort to simplify the complex way that geographers and political scientists deal with political space, after providing a brief overview of the political context of each state, I focus in on the political issues in the higher education realm of each state. I also draw from the narratives of the participants in the study to make plain how they experience and classify the socio-political environment of the state.

The four states can roughly be placed on the popular socio-political shorthand spectrum that conceptualizes Liberal or left-leaning socio-political stances and Conservative or right-leaning socio-political stances as opposites at the poles of the spectrum. Table 4.1 presents a snapshot of the current make-up of the political parties that control the respective state government bodies and the winner of the 2012 presidential election in each state.

Table 4.1:

Political Climate of States

	Governor	State Senate	State House	2012 Presidential Winner	State Political Climate
Florida	Republican	Republican	Republican	Barack Obama (50.0%)	Center-Right

	Governor	State Senate	State House	2012 Presidential Winner	State Political Climate
Indiana	Republican	Republican	Republican	Mitt Romney (54.3%)	Right
California	Democrat	Democrat	Democrat	Barack Obama (59.3%)	Left
New Jersey	Republican	Democrat	Democrat	Barack Obama (58%)	Center- Left

This rest of this chapter provides the overview of the four states that were involved in the study in order to add a layer of contextual information that is necessary to understand socio-political external influences on the climate and culture of campuses that will be covered in the next chapter. While not exhaustive, the goal of presenting political information about the states is to furnish the reader with relevant details about the state socio-political environment that unfolded before and during the course of this study that either the participants brought up during interviews or I noted from my field notes or analysis of documents. This contextual information begins to make evident how students experience and understand political spaces and how the regional political variation manifests itself differently on each of the campuses.

Political Context of Florida

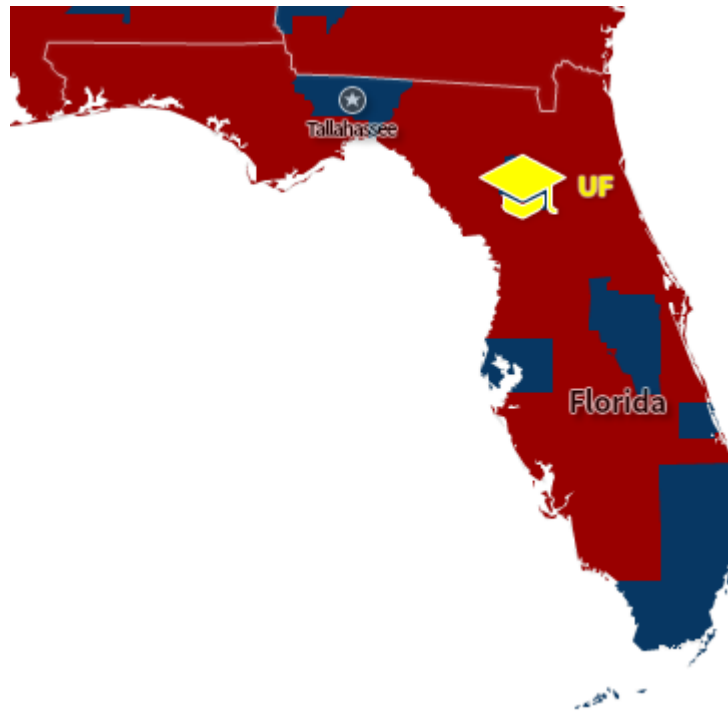
Florida is the third most populous state in the U.S. and given its warm weather and location near the Caribbean, Florida is also one of the most ethnically and socio-economically diverse states in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Politically, as a whole, since 1960, Florida has voted for the Republican candidate for President in all but

five elections (1964, 1976, 1996, 2008, 2012 (see Figure 4.1). Also, since 1960, Florida has had seven Democrat governors and five Republican governors. To make the political landscape a bit more eclectic, Florida has elected both Democrat and Republican senators for numerous years and given its political complexity, Florida is often considered a political canary of the partisan trajectory of the U.S. (Foreman, 2015; Jaffe, 2014).

Joseph, a senior at UF, aptly described the political geography of the state, when he said:

Everyone has always known Florida is a very special child. Florida is a special state, because of the culture in Florida. It's not Florida. It's like little Haiti, little Cuba, and then Boca Raton is the biggest migration in the United States from New York to Boca and it's the biggest Jewish city, or one of the biggest Jewish cities in the country. And then you drive out further and once you reach north of Orlando, then you reach the country South, and you know, where a lot of people are Conservative. The people are country, they go hunting and do all that stuff. (Joseph, 21, UF)

Figure 4.1: 2012 Presidential Election Winner by Florida County



Politics of Higher Education in Florida

According to a comprehensive report from the Center for American Progress that ranks the states on a host of outcomes correlated with poverty and economic prosperity, Florida ranks 33rd on the higher education attainment rate with 37.8% of its residents attaining at least an associate's degree (West & Odum, 2016). These dismal numbers have made it difficult for Florida to attract industries that require a highly educated workforce and made higher education a political hot button, indicated by the Governor's recent budget proposal, as the state seeks to diversify its economic bedrocks from agricultural and tourism to technology, energy production, and healthcare (Hammett, 2015). Hence, relative to the other states in the study, the political environment around higher education has been active and highly contentious. Over the last five years, the major political issues in higher education in Florida have been around performance funding for outcome metrics (Larrabee, 2015), reigning in the cost of college (e.g., the cost of tuition or text books) (Crisafulli, 2015), and ensuring the workforce readiness of college graduates (Solochek, 2015). More recently, the guns on campus debate has embroiled the state legislator and been a source of angst on campuses across Florida (Clark, 2015). In a recent report card on state support of higher education, Florida received an overall "D" because "while tuition is lower the national average both recent tuition hikes and budget cuts" have negatively impacted students and families in Florida (Young Invincibles, 2016).

The high level of involvement of state politics in higher education intersects with students at numerous junctures in their political identity development. For example,

when asked if tuition hikes that the Florida legislator was considering weighed into her decision to attend UF, Sharon, a junior who plans to go into medicine exclaimed:

Oh, yeah. Definitely. Financially, college is insanely expensive, and I did have to look at other schools that would pay me more, like USF for example. That was a good choice, because they did offer me a lot more money, but I think I wanted to go to UF so much that it was like I'm willing to pay a little bit more to go somewhere where I've wanted to go for a long time. I know that tuition's always ever increasing. I don't think it's fair, but for me the difference wasn't enough. (Sharon, 20, UF)

Conversely, Black Panther a senior interested in going into law, responded:

I didn't really think about ... Honestly I had no clue about college, really. What it took to get there. Obviously, stuff like SAT and ACT, stuff you have to do. In terms of the money, I never really thought "Oh I'm going to have to pay for college." It was always like "We'll find a way for you. We'll figure something out for you." When I got here, I got a couple of scholarships and grants that helped me out. (Black Panther, 21, UF)

We see from these quotes how the broader political issues going on in a state influence some students but not others. As the process of developing a political identity will underscore, these politically-motivating experiences factor into how students come to see themselves in the political system and are early signs of political stratification. Additionally, in the wake of the Trayvon Martin murder on February 26, 2012 that happened just outside of Orlando and ongoing tensions over immigration and the treatment of migrant workers, race relations have been increasingly contentious in Florida. This has led to the rise of student groups such as the DREAM Defenders and Gators for Tuition Equity [for undocumented students], which are activist groups that operate on and outside campuses to advocate on behalf of changing policies that negatively impact their groups' members.

As far as oversight, Florida has one university system made up of 12 public, four-year universities. These institutions are accountable to and governed by the State University System of Florida Board of Governors. The Board of Governors is made up of 17 members, 14 of whom are appointed by the governor, the president of the faculty senate, the commissioner of education, and the chair of the Florida Student Association. There are also 28 locally controlled public colleges (formally community colleges) that make up the Florida College System and are under the purview of the State Board of Education.

Political Context of Indiana

Indiana is the 16th most populous state in the U.S. According to recent population estimates, over 85% of Indiana residents are White and just over 10% are African-American/Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Politically, Indiana is considered a conservative state, although some of the areas where the Black population is congregated, like Gary, Indianapolis, and South Bend, tend to vote consistently Democratic. Since 1960, there have been five Democrat governors and five Republican governors. However, on the presidential level, the Republican nominee has failed to carry Indiana only twice since 1960 (1964, 2008) (see Figure 4.2 for the 2012 presidential election results). Despite Indiana being reliably Republican, Democrats in the state have been successful at winning elections, most notably at the senate level. However, Indiana Senate Democrats tend to be more moderate. A prominent example that came up during many interviews with students at IU and can be seen as emblematic of Indiana's hyper conservative socio-political state environment was the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) battle

that played out in the state capital in the spring of 2015. In short, the state legislator and governor passed a bill that allowed individuals and businesses to assert that their exercise of religion had been impeded as a defense in legal proceedings (Wang, 2015). This issue triggered a combative national dialogue between conservative groups and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activist groups.

One participant from IU, who worked on an anti-RFRA campaign, identifies as “progressive” and intends to work in policy after her time in college, recounted her struggle growing up in such a conservative state. When I asked specifically about how the conservative climate influences her, she noted:

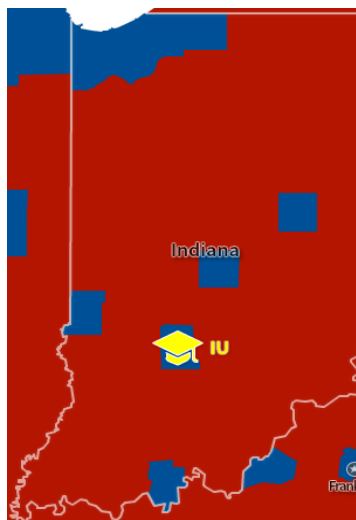
The people I know who care about these [progressive] issues, who are from Indiana, have to make a decision. They can stay and try to make things better. I know a lot of older people involved in the Indiana Democratic Party, or who have done organizing for like 20 years here in the state. They’ve made an active decision to stay and make their home a better place. I applaud them so much for that, and I think it should, like that that’s a logical conclusion of caring about these issues, and making sense of the dichotomy between what you believe and being in a super red state that disenfranchises a lot of people. (Katie, 21, IU)

She goes on to say though that for her, she has already decided that she intends to leave Indiana because of the conservative climate and her career goals. She goes on to detail the inner conflict by saying:

It makes me feel slightly hypocritical. It makes me feel like I’m giving up in some ways, because I’ve spent so much time in college trying to change hearts and minds of people in this state, the kind of people that I grew up with... I just don’t see a future for myself here, and I don’t know if I’m even motivated to try and make sense of that dichotomy between the red state and me. I don’t even think I’m capable of navigating that, and I don’t know if I’ve ever felt capable of navigating that. I think I’ve always known I’ll have to leave. (Katie, 21, IU)

Additionally, the state has dealt with the impact of economic issues due to the loss of manufacturing industries, and there have been pushes to further restrict abortions (Davies, 2015) while lobbyist have called for the ability to sell alcohol on Sundays and to open casinos (Cook, 2015a). The fact that these remain as contentious issues in the state legislature also add to Indiana’s ethos of a right leaning socio-political state.

Figure 4.2: 2012 Presidential Election Winner by Indiana County



Politics of Higher Education in Indiana

The Center for American Progress ranks Indiana 34th with 37.4% of its residents holding an associate’s degree or higher (West & Odum, 2016). Similar to Florida, the low share of residents holding postsecondary credentials has made higher education a relevant political issue in the last few years. Political issues that have transpired in higher education in Indiana over the last five years have centered around college and career readiness and affordability (Cook, 2015b). The Young Invincibles gave Indiana a “C”

overall for efforts to control the cost of higher education. However, the report notes that only 7% of the state budget is allocated to higher education, which is below the national average of 12% (Young Invincibles, 2016). One reason for this may be that different from the other states, one of the main initiatives of the Daniels and Pence gubernatorial administrations has been a focus and push to raise enrollments in vocational and technical training rather than four-year universities. In his 2014 state of the state address, Governor Pence (2014) maintained:

While anyone who wants to go to college should be encouraged to go, there are a lot of good jobs in Indiana that don't require a college degree. These new partnerships [between vocational/technical schools and businesses] will make sure our schools work for all our kids.

I asked IU students whether this effort had influenced their college-going process, and all of the students that had at least heard of this political messaging (many had not) said it did not influence their college going decision-making. Kenneth, who is a military veteran and intends to go into a career in government intelligence summed up the majority of the responses when he told me that, “this is the first time I’ve heard of it. [Vocational or technical school] wasn’t an option for me” (Kenneth, 24, IU).

Another pertinent higher education issue in Indiana that came up during data collection was efforts to pass a policy that permitted the concealed carry of guns on campus (Metz, 2015). Some state legislators and student groups have called for campuses in Indiana to allow concealed carry which would align the campuses with state laws that permit registered gun owners to do so. Those who favor the legislation argue that guns make campuses safer places and that law abiding citizens should be able to

defend themselves. To this point, in an interview with the Indiana Daily Student newspaper, representative Jim Lucas, R-Seymour, declared:

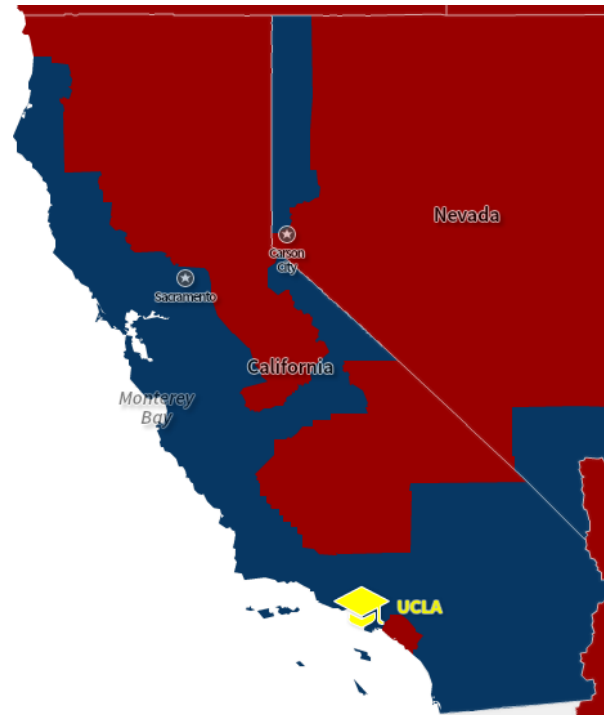
I want lawful people to be able to defend themselves and carry a gun. I know we're seeing an encroachment upon our Second Amendment rights this year and I think that needs to come to an end. Campus isn't any different than the real world. In fact, isn't college supposed to be preparing you for the real world? (Garau, 2016)

Critics of the efforts believe that guns on campus would increase the likelihood of fatal gun related accidents. Furthermore, critics believe that the campus police departments have the responsibility of ensuring the safety of each campus and students, staff, or faculty wielding guns only exacerbates security issues (Garau, 2016).

Finally, it is important to note that there are three major systems of higher education in Indiana, the Indiana University system with 8 campuses, the Purdue University system with five campuses, and the Ivy Tech Community College system with 32 campuses across the state. These systems are coordinated, not overseen, by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. The commission is made up of 15 members, twelve appointed by the governor and three at-large members.

Political Context of California

Figure 4.3: 2012 Presidential Election Winner by California County



California is the most populous state in the U.S. with over 39 million residents.

California is also the most diverse state in the U.S. with an estimated 60% of the population made up of Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Black, Native Americans and other non-White races/ethnicities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Los Angeles, where UCLA is located is the second largest city in the country and is representative of the demographic breakdown of the state. Politically, California is considered to be a very liberal or progressive state, although that is a relatively recent trend, one that has grown more pronounced since the 1990s (Baldassare, 2000). Since the 1992 election, California has been carried by the Democrat nominee for president every time and both of California's U.S. senators have been members of the Democrat party (see Figure 4.3 for the 2012 presidential election results arranged by California country). Since 1960, California has

had 4 Republican governors and 4 Democrat governors. Additionally, 43% of California residents are registered Democrats to only 26% of Republican registered voters.

Californian's have adopted relatively progressive policies on environmental issues, taxes, healthcare, and social issues (Tatum, Carter, Ravi, & Kaldani, 2014). An interesting outlier to California's reputation of a very liberal state was the contentious battle in 2008 over "Proposition 8" or the referendum on *not* legalizing same-sex marriage that narrowly failed. Many proponents of same-sex marriage attributed the defeat to Black and Latino communities of that were less likely to be in favor of gay rights. Chicano Man, a Chicano student at UCLA, that plans to become a lawyer, described the proposition 8 battle as follows:

Coming from a Catholic background, everyone around me is like, "Yes, yes on 8. Yes on 8. Yes on 8." I'm like, "Yes on 8. This is what it's supposed to be." Then I was really weirded out when there was people who said, "No on 8." I'm like, "Whoa, that's not what I've seen." What is this? It was a small group. My community is mostly conservative, in that mostly social conservative, I should say that, not economically because we're Catholic-Hispanic. (Chicano Man, 20, UCLA)

Despite this, a prominent example of California's progressivism that came up in many of my interviews is the state's approach to immigration. With a border to Mexico and such a large Latino population, California has over twenty "sanctuary cities." Sanctuary cities are places that have decided not to prosecute or pursue undocumented immigrants (Littlefield, 2015). The idea of sanctuary cities and unchecked immigration continues to be a political hot-button issue in the country. Many Conservative politicians and pundits assail California for its progressive approach to immigration and further codifies California's liberal reputation (Ridgley, 2013). When comparing her experience

growing up in Virginia versus her experiences at UCLA and in California around the political climate of the state, Joyce, a UCLA student hoping to have a career in public relations, stated:

I think it's a different mentality... I feel like the people here at UCLA for the most part, although I'm sure there are definitely different sets, are very open minded. It's definitely a more liberal feel as compared to my high school in Virginia... (Joyce, 20, UCLA)

Politics of Higher Education in California

The California plan for higher education has been widely hailed as one of the best state systems of higher education in the history of the U.S. The plan was designed to consist of comprehensive research universities (the University of California system with 9 campuses), regional broad access institutions (the California State University system with 23 campuses), and a system of open-access community colleges (113 campuses) that are designed to serve the local and regional needs of students and surrounding industries. California ranks 29th with 39.3% of its residents holding at least an associate's degree (West & Odum, 2016). While relatively low overall, certain parts of California such as the Silicon Valley attract and retain a highly educated workforce. This means that certain Californians are attaining high rates of postsecondary education while others are not. For instance, there is a 34% gap in higher education attainment between Whites and Latinos in California (Young Invincibles, 2016). Accordingly, an underlying higher education issue in California is expanding postsecondary access and success in equitable ways. As a result of these gaps, the Young Invincibles gave California a "C" grade, despite the cost

of college being below the national average and the amount of state aid awarded to students being well above the national average (Young Invincibles, 2016).

Consequently, over the last five years, the political issues that have intersected with higher education have centered on access to the University of California system, tuition hikes and state appropriations to higher education as well as the status of undocumented college students. Concerning the latter issue, in 2011, the state legislator passed and the governor signed into law the California Development, Relief, and Education, for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which provided enabled students who attended California high schools to apply for state financial aid, regardless of immigrant status.

In his 2013 state of the state address, Governor Jerry Brown noted that cost pressures in higher education were “relentless” but resolved to say, “I will not let the students become the default financiers of our colleges and universities.” This tension over the public funding of the higher education system has been on-going since the 1999, which was the last time the state provided increases for the UC system. A National Journal exposé on the issue quoted UC President Janet Napolitano as saying “we’re doing everything we can to manage costs, but all costs are not waste” (Quinton, 2015). Students could also feel this tension. Ashlyn, a UCLA student who hopes to become a teacher, described how students were rallying against a proposed 5% tuition increases and how she received an email from Napolitano, that she summarized by saying:

“Hey, like, we can’t prevent this rise from going, the tuition rise, so don’t take action,” like discouraging that political action because there was a lot of students who were just like, “We can’t let this happen.” (Ashlyn, 21, UCLA)

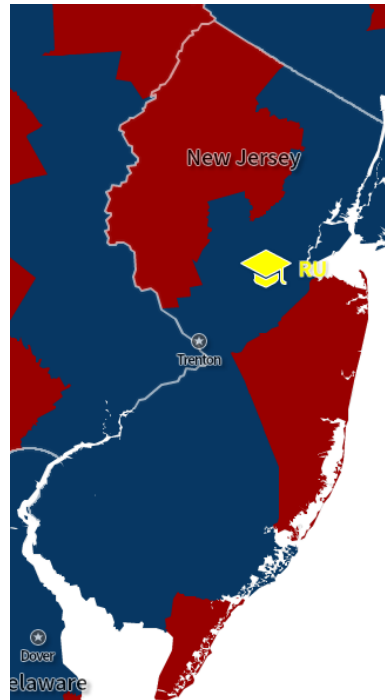
Although Ashlyn was not spurred to participate directly in the subsequent protest that took place, she was a spectator at the rally. Student protesters overtook a popular campus tradition, the “Beat USC” bonfire to help raise awareness about the tuition hikes. Ashlyn recounted that the political action students were taking in response to the tuition hikes was “a great way of bringing political consciousness to all of our students” (Ashlyn, 21, UCLA). Accordingly, most of the students I spoke with were aware of the college cost battle that was going on in the state, but only one was compelled to actively participate in the protest and only a couple said that the rising cost weighed into their college decision-making process.

Political Context of New Jersey

Of the four states in this study, New Jersey was the smallest by land mass but more populous than Indiana. The political context of New Jersey is complex, but many consider it to be a moderate or center-left leaning state (M. Cohen, 2012). New Jersey is the second wealthiest state per capita, has large urban areas, and a highly educated workforce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Coupled with its location in-between New York City and Philadelphia, the state is an attractive option for people who work in those cities but not looking to reside where they work. Since 1960, New Jersey has had seven Democrat governors and seven Republican governors. In the same time span, the Democrat nominee for president has carried New Jersey eight times and the Republican nominee has done so six times (see Figure 4.4). Currently, New Jersey has a Republican governor but the New Jersey state senate is made up of 60% Democrats and 40%

Republicans while the General Assembly is comprised of 65% Democrats and 35% Republicans.

Figure 4.4: 2012 Presidential Election Winner by New Jersey County



New Jersey is seen as socially liberal, supporting gun control, same-sex marriage, and medicinal marijuana use. However, Governor Chris Christie, a Republican, has also pushed through some decidedly conservative policies such as public employee pension reform, not raising taxes during his tenure, and defunding Planned Parenthood. Unlike the other states, there was no major political battle that had transpired in the state that came up in all of the interviews. The response to Hurricane Sandy was mentioned a few times but it was not framed in a contentious way. In the absence of a major state issue that shared attention with national issues, many of the students I spoke with responded

similar to Nia, an RU student who wants to be a speech therapist. She replied to my question about the political landscape of New Jersey by saying:

All I can think of is police brutality, but I can't even think of any instances in New Jersey. There have been so many marches and what not here at Rutgers last year. Like they shut down Route 18 last year; they shut it down because it was a big, big problem. Ambulances and stuff like that couldn't get through. There were serious accidents that happened that day too. That was a really big issue. Other than that, I don't know. (Nia, 21, RU)

Tom echoed Nia's sentiment and explained how the national issues are localized to the state and the surrounding New Brunswick community. He also brought up the issue of policing and said that he heard that police at Rutgers and in New Brunswick got funding for body cameras to enhance their accountability. He went on to say that the issue was "sort of like a national thing" but that it was "really cool to see it on a local level" (Tom, 19, RU).

Politics of Higher Education in New Jersey

Much of the education issues in New Jersey have been in the K-12 sector and Governor Christie's push to reform teacher pensions and expand access to charter schools (Renshaw, 2012). Part of the lack of attention to higher education stems from the fact that New Jersey ranks 6th in higher education attainment in the country with 48.6% of its residents holding at least an associate's degree (West & Odum, 2016). New Jersey received a "C" grade from the Young Invincibles (2016) who noted that the states "saving grace is the significant amount of aid that [the state] gives to students" (p. 41). Despite this reality, funding for public higher education in the state has decreased during Governor Christie's six-year tenure. In May 2015, NJ.com, the state's largest website for

news, sports, and opinion ran an editorial titled “Another cold slap in the wallet: Fewer NJ families will find college affordable,” that drove this point home to New Jersey residents (Star-Ledger Editorial Board, 2015). Acknowledging the issue, during Governor Christie’s 2015 state of the state address he declared, “we need to make cuts in programs that have been shown not to work in order to make investments that will build a more productive tomorrow” (Christie, 2015).

Interestingly, all the students I spoke with had heard about the cuts to higher education and the subsequent rise in tuition. When asked if that issue played into her college-going process, Jennifer, an RU student who plans to go into a career where she can protect the environment, said, “[the cuts] played a factor because in state tuition and grants and all that is obviously less money if you’re staying in state rather than out of state” (Jennifer, 21, RU). Zack, another Rutgers student interested in policy careers, captured the prevailing attitude when he explained:

Any kind of issue pertaining to higher education and funding, et cetera, was really not something of necessarily immediate concern regarding my decision. There definitely wasn’t an influence on my decision to come to Rutgers specifically. I had a bunch of other choices. (Zack, 21, RU)

Lastly, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey is the entity that makes up the state’s four-year-public higher education system. There are three campuses located throughout New Jersey (New Brunswick, Camden and Newark) and two other public research universities in the state that are unaffiliated with Rutgers. The state also has 19 public community colleges. In 2011, Governor Christie abolished the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education, which served as coordinating board between the different public postsecondary institutions in the state. Most of the functions of the

Commission were transferred to a governor appointed Secretary of Higher Education (State of New Jersey Executive Department, 2011). A higher education advisory council was also established by the governor to assist the Secretary of Higher Education and advise the governor on higher education issues. One of the major outcomes of this reorganization was “Building our Future Bond Act” which allocated funds for new buildings and renovations at New Jersey’s public institutions and a highly contentious reshuffling of the state’s medical and dental college (Nurin, 2015).

Chapter V: Contextualizing Institutions within State Socio-Political Environments: The Role of the Political Dimension of Campus Climate

Despite the distinctiveness of each institution, there are many similarities that stand out in how students come to develop their political identity. As a result, these campus profiles bring into starker relief both how and where students experience the organizational dynamics of their campus and the ways in which the state socio-political environment informs the organizational components of the institution, that go on to shape the political identity of many students. Through the analysis of the comprehensive site overviews, the *Political Dimension of Campus Climate* emerged as a finding that describes and explains how and where students experience the political milieu of their campus. However, not all students experience the *Political Dimension of Campus Climate* in the same way and this detail sets the stage for the next chapter that uncovers the process of how and why students develop their political identity while in college. Therefore, the point of this chapter is to accentuate how the *Political Dimension of Campus Climate* form one strand of the role higher education plays in a diverse democracy by conveying the function of universities in creating and maintaining spaces for students to develop their political identity. Yet, as this chapter will also show, institutions do not have equal influence in all the spaces students operate in and how students experience this dimension is also moderated by the state socio-political environment.

Table 5.1 provides some initial data about each institution that is useful for comparing their relative prestige, commitment to the public good, student success, and

peer institutions. Using institutional vignettes, I sketch out how I experienced the *Political Dimension of Campus Climate* at each institution. The vignettes are written in a more informal tone and use photographs I took to help orient the reader to what I was witnessing on each campus. I then offer an overview of each campus with dedicated to relevant details that highlight distinct and overlapping features of each institution. The section closes by specifying the levels and stances that make up the concept of the *Political Dimension of Campus Climate*.

Table 5.1: Snapshot of Institutions

	U.S. News Top Public School Ranking (n=130)	Enrollment	In-State Tuition	Community Engagement Classification²⁵	Institutional Support for Service Rank (n=279)²⁶	Degree Programs Offered	4-year Graduation Rate	Sports Conference
University of Florida	14	49,589	\$6,313	No	164	100+	67%	SEC
University of California, Los Angeles	2	43,239	\$12,753	Yes	128	125+	73%	Pac-12
Indiana University-Bloomington	29	36,419	\$10,388	Yes	140	550+	59%	Big 10
Rutgers University-New Brunswick	28	34,544	\$14,131	Yes	97	100+	59%	Big 10

²⁵ “Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (New England Resource Center for Higher Education, n.d.). Institutions must apply for and present evidence in to receive this classification. This is a proxy measure for institutional commitment to the “public good.””

²⁶ This ranking is compiled by Washington Monthly and is a “combined score based on the number of full-time staff supporting community service, relative to the total number of staff, the number of academic courses that incorporate service, relative to school size, and whether the institution provides scholarships for community service” (Washington Monthly Magazine, 2015). This is another proxy measure for institutional commitment to the “public good.””

Section I: Campus Profiles

University of Florida Institutional Vignette

As I prepared for my trip to Gainesville, I was perusing the student government website and noticed that the executive candidates of UF's student government would be hosting a "state of the campus" address during the time that I planned to be on campus. I arrived to a room packed with students in suits and dresses; it was like I had walked into an upscale gala. There was a table towards the far corner with remnants of punch, cheese, crackers, and fruits and the chairs were arranged in rows all facing a podium and two large screens. A quick scan of the crowd revealed mostly White students with a few students of color intermixed and what appeared to be some older faculty and student affairs professionals (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: UF SG President Discussing Efforts to Register Student Voters



The student body president, vice-president, and treasurer all had the opportunity to speak about the work they had been doing over the last nine months and took numerous opportunities to spotlight their successes. Two themes stuck out to me during my time at the state of the campus address. First, all of the executives continually noted how they had and continue to be open and transparent in how they went about their respective roles. The treasurer gave an example of how he instituted weekly mobile office hours where he would talk with students about how their student fee money was being used. The second theme that cut across all the speeches was this idea that students had been and will continue to be involved in the different roles and responsibilities of the student government. For example, the president noted how during “Gator Day at the Capitol” in Tallahassee (see Figure 5.2), a charter bus full of students went to lobby state legislators and the governor about the price of textbooks.

Figure 5.2: UF SG President Discussing Lobbying Efforts in Tallahassee



It is well established that campus involvement in organizations like student government are an example of high-impact practices (Kuh et al., 2010) that have the potential to spur the type of engagement that leads to desirable outcomes during a students' college experience. One outcome we do not often consider is the political implications of students' involvement. Seeing the students practice political speeches in front of their peers and broadcasted to the campus is a strong example of building the skills that contribute to how a person views their engagement in the political system. Hence, engagement in this public forum as a result of their involvement experiences was an important site of political practice for these students. However, the fact that there was an implicit undertone that the Student Government at UF needed to be more transparent and that getting a wider array of students involved was a major initiative of the executive ticket also highlights how stratified opportunities for political practice can be at such a big institution.

University of Florida Campus Overview

The University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida is located in the north central part of the state. It is the oldest and second largest university in the State University System. According to the most recent rankings by *U.S. News & World Report*, Florida was tied for the 14th best public university and has a number of nationally ranked programs and specialties. UF is the only public institution in Florida that is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities. The University of Florida website states that:

At the University of Florida, we are a people of purpose. We're committed to challenging convention and ourselves. We see things not as they are, but as they could be. And we strive for a greater impact: one measured in people helped and lives improved.

The website frames this purpose statement though a commitment to academics by helping “great students become greater,” impact within the state to the tune of eight billion dollars in economic stimulus and the creation of 100,000 jobs in Florida, and the production of world class research and innovation from top faculty and research centers. To this end, the university mission statement declares that UF must “create the broadly diverse environment necessary to foster multi-cultural skills and perspectives in its teaching and research for its students to contribute and succeed in the world of the 21st century” (University of Florida, n.d.-a).

Despite the strong reputation and success UF has amassed, over the last five years UF has engaged the Florida legislator in a comprehensive effort to become a top-ten public research university. This has played out through the “UF Preeminence” campaign which seeks to establish 500 endowed faculty position, increase the number of scholarships to low-income-first generation students, raise 800-million dollars, and steer resources and funding to 28 focus areas that address complex social issues (University of Florida, n.d.-b). The state legislator and governor has responded in a tempered fashion by not meeting all of the requests the campaign has established but working with the UF Board of Trustees and President to give UF official flagship status. This status enabled UF to set its own tuition within 15% of the rate set by the University System to help raise funds towards meeting the goals of the campaign.

This overarching effort has played out in two ways that shape the culture of the institution. First, as UF has sought to raise the profile of students it admits, the proportion of Black students has reached a historic low, leading to racial issues on campus. Secondly, the cost of attending UF has priced out students or led to students taking on increased debt loads to finance their education. These two realities inform what type of student is on campus and the types of major and career paths students choose to pursue given their debt load.

Accordingly, the university enrolls just under 50,000 students, 32,000 of which are undergraduates. At the time of this project the demographics of the institution were, White: 55.8%, Hispanic: 15.7%, Black: 6.6%, Asian: 6.9%, Non-Resident Alien: 8.8%, Not Reported: 3.2%, Two or More Races: 2.2%, American Indian or Alaska Native: 0.3%, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: 0.5% (University of Florida, n.d.-a). Per the Carnegie classification system, UF is considered a large four-year, primarily residential campus, and the university receives 11.3% of its budget from the state (Office of Chief Financial Officer, 2012).

When asked to describe the campus culture of UF, Maya, a senior interested in going into medicine or health policy said:

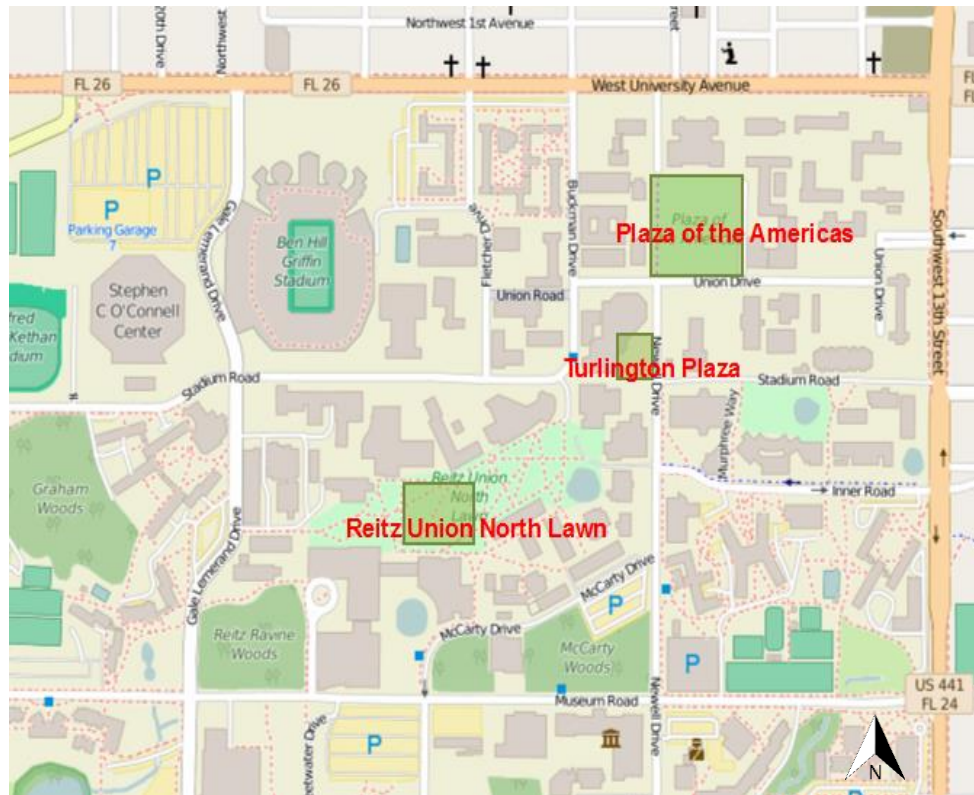
I think that one of the first things that I think of when you asked me that question is this idea of campus involvement, and we kind of shove that down students' throats starting at orientation. So we say, "Yes, yes, yes, you have your classes, you have your major, but you also have to be very involved." Because I feel like there's a lot of pressure to be stereotypically successful, and there's an idea of what success means within the bubble of the UF campus... (Maya, 21, UF).

Additionally, there are campus climate issues that shape the culture of UF that students pick up on and described during their interviews. For instance, John, a junior wanting to go into education, described some of the tensions he's perceived on campus:

Some of the things that I read, like in the *Alligator* article, for example, which is just a student newspaper, about the decreasing trends of Black students here at the University of Florida. That has decreased apparently, just looking at the statistics that they represented in the article. That has decreased a lot over the last couple years, and so I don't know what are the reasons behind that, but that seems to be a pretty big issue for the numbers to decrease in the ways that they have over the past five or six years, or however long it's been (John, 19, UF).

Finally, UF students consistently mentioned Turlington Plaza, the Reitz Union North Lawn, and Plaza of the Americas as the main places on campus where they saw politics happening or they knew they could encounter political messaging (see Figure 5.3 for a campus map). Not coincidentally, these spaces have been branded and marketed by UF administration as “free speech zones” or areas where students, faculty, and off-campus individuals may assemble and disseminate whatever they please. Although, not formally codified anywhere beyond the necessity for student groups to register to use university provided tables, these public spaces have their own norms that students learn over time. The *Political Dimension of Campus Climate* section will make this point clearer.

Figure 5.3: Political Spaces on UF's Campus



Indiana University, Bloomington Institutional Vignette

On my second day in Indiana I decided to attend a Union Board meeting to watch one particular student organization carry out their business. The Union Board is made of a group of students, faculty, and staff that are responsible for allocating a programming budget that facilitates activities, lectures, concerts, and events for the Indiana University community. The Union Board is one of the oldest and most prestigious student organizations at IU because of the scope and scale of the events they put on. They also serve in an advisory capacity to the Director of the Indiana Memorial Union providing student input the management and operations of one of the most critical spaces on IU's

campus. The meeting I sat in on the finance chair was set to give a major presentation on changes to the budget for the upcoming year.

The meeting started out late because the normal room that the Board uses was unavailable that night. There were about 50 people in the room and only about 30 chairs, so many people had to stand or just waited outside. As the finance chair detailed specific changes in the budget, it was fascinating watching how different students engaged or didn't. Some played with their phones under the table, some had side conversations with other board member, and some took notes or did homework. This was clearly an exercise that not everyone was interested in despite hundreds of thousands of student fee dollars being discussed (see Figure 5.4).

What struck me the most was one exchange between one of the senior staff members and the rest of the Board. He asked the Board what their purpose was and how they were being stewards of the budget they were given that was in line with their intended purpose. I interpreted this question to be an effort to push the Board to consider the influence of their collective thinking on their collective impact. What was interesting in the discussion that ensued was that students noted many different purposes that the Board was supposed to live out. Some noted that the board was supposed to unify the campus, others said that the Board was supposed to cater to the unique interests of different campuses constituents, while others felt that the Board needed to inform and entertain students. Needless to say, there were wide-ranging opinions. Rather than a focus on allocation of funds, by the end of the night, the most discussed topic was around clarifying the underlying role and purpose of the board.

Figure 5.4: Indiana University Memorial Union Board Meeting



During this exchange, I began to draw some initial parallels to what I was hearing from students during interviews about how they deal with heterogeneity of ideology within certain political labels. In the UB meeting, these students were all grouped together under the umbrella of being affiliated with this student organization but were being pushed to think through their differences and reach consensus. Would this debate have played out differently if it was recorded and televised to the student body in the same way that the UF Student Government State of the Campus address was? What about if this conversation were occurring on social media? Reflecting on my time at the meeting, I began to wonder specifically how this exercise that was taking place in this semi-public space of a student organization meeting was materially different from other experiences students articulated having. This questioning set in motion a more focused foray into exploring the nuances of what different types of experiences students have in certain spaces.

What also struck me was how students mimicked rhetoric from the socio-political sphere. Talk of “cost of event per student” to indicate how efficient the board was being as well as phrases such as “being held accountable” and “assessing the impact” pushed me to wonder where this emphasis came from. The finance chair explained that the UB was receiving pressure to be better stewards of student fee funds at a point in time when college affordability and the cost of attending IU was a major issue for many on campus. Here is a point of overlap where issues in the socio-political environment were making their way into the localized experiences of students and shaping their experience.

Indiana University-Bloomington Campus Overview

IU is located in the small college town of Bloomington, Indiana, which is located in the southwest region of the state. The campus was founded in 1820 and takes pride in being the flagship institution of the eight campus IU system. The IU website proclaims:

Indiana University students get it all – the storybook experience of what college should be like, and the endless opportunities that come with it. Top-ranked academics. Awe-inspiring faculty. Dynamic campus life. International culture. Phenomenal music and arts events. The excitement of IU Hoosier sports. And a jaw-droppingly beautiful campus.

IU is ranked in the top 50 of public universities and has a highly respected faculty and many top-ranked academic programs. In particular, the Kelly School of Business and the Jacobs School of Music are internationally recognized in their respective academic areas. The university takes pride in being rated as one of “Kiplinger’s Best Value” institutions for IU’s combination of low cost and top tier academic programs. Additionally, given its location in the heart of the Midwest, IU has fostered a remarkably cosmopolitan and international vibe to its climate and culture. IU sends over 2,000

students abroad a semester and welcomes even more international students to Bloomington each year.

In 2020, IU will celebrate the bicentennial anniversary of its founding. Using the impending year as a marker, the IU administration developed the *Bicentennial Strategic Plan for Indiana University Bloomington*, which created 10 strategic goals and initiatives for the campus to work towards in the coming years to set the foundation for IU's third century. Of particular interest to this study were the "An Excellent Education, An Excellent Faculty, Excellence in Research, and Excellence in Engagement and Economic Development." These goals respond to particular concerns floating around in the socio-political environment by centering "student success" and seeking ways to "build a prosperous and innovative Indiana" (IU Bloomington Provost, n.d.). Also of note was that each item called for the development of metrics, presumably to help the campus administrators articulate to legislators how they are actualizing their goals. For example, one goal reads:

Reducing the debt burden for every financially disadvantaged student through financial literacy education and scholarships and fellowships raised through philanthropy to cover unmet financial need (IU Bloomington Provost, n.d.)

The strategic plan presents an interesting challenge for IU as it seeks to raise its national profile while remaining sensitive to the socio-political environment of Indiana centered on student completion and college affordability. While the 2020 plan slowly seeks to change the IU student body, currently IU enrolls about 46,000 students, making it the largest university in the state. Unlike the other institutions in the study, IU is not a land-grant institution, so the academic offerings, while vast, do not include any of the

agricultural and life science majors. IU makes up for this with a School of Informatics and Computing, School of Global and International Studies, and the Integrated Program in the Environment, which are all relatively unique academic programs. The racial demographics of the institution are as follows: White: 69.6%, Hispanic: 4.2%, Black: 4.0%, Asian: 4.0%, Non-Resident Alien (i.e., International Students): 14.3%, Not Reported: 0.9%, Two or More Races: 2.8%, American Indian or Alaska Native: 0.1%, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: 0.1% (University Institutional Research and Reporting, 2013).

There are over 750 student organizations at IU for students to participate in and per the Carnegie classification, IU is considered a primarily residential campus that is more selective and has a low transfer-in rate. Additionally, Indiana receives about a fifth of its budget from the state legislature (Indiana University, n.d.). The main places that students mentioned where they saw politics happening on their campus were Dunn Meadow, the Sample Gates, and the Clock near Woodburn Hall. All of these locations are on the “south side” of campus and Dunn Meadow and Sample Gates are nearly adjacent to each other (see Figure 5.5). Thus, it is entirely possible for a student to avoid these zones if they wanted to. Comparable to the other institutions, these public spaces were known as the “free speech” zones on campus.

Figure 5.5: Political Spaces on IU's Campus



There were many similarities other between IU and the other campuses as far as student pride in the university, lots of participation in outside the class opportunities, and tensions between certain groups of students. Elaina, who is interested in becoming an accountant, described the students at IU as “hardworking” and reiterated the prevalence of student involvement by saying, “whether you’re involved in an organization three people big or your involved in Dance Marathon which has 2,000 committee members, I think a majority of the population has something they’re kind of involved in” (Elaina, 20, IU).

One unique aspect of IU was the political climate of IU. It is seen as a liberal school located in a liberal town and some of the tensions result when students encounter conservative groups or students. For example, Traditional Youth Network (TradYouth),

which is a White-supremacy student group²⁷ (see Figure 5.6) that is unaffiliated with but active on IU’s campus and in Bloomington community, prompted Joe, a senior interested in going into a business career, to describe the campus dynamic like this:

People like them [TradYouth], the university gives them a fair shot to do things. I guess the administration doesn’t particularly discriminate, but even on campus among students, it’s pretty clear how people feel about groups like that. There are a lot of groups that come here and do a lot of pro-life things. Students don’t typically take kindly to it. I would say, generally the campus attitude is not very receptive of the more conservative or extreme factions, particularly on the right, and any political groups that are associated with that. (Joe, 22, IU)

Figure 5.6: A Screenshot of an Op-Ed about TradYouth at IU



It is important to highlight that of the campuses I visited, IU is the least diverse and has the largest percentage of White students. As a result, while there, I was interested in also exploring how students of color experienced the campus climate and if that influenced their political development at all. Destiny, who identifies as a Black

²⁷ “TradYouth” invariably does not consider themselves to be a White-supremacist group but more so one whose stated mission is to support a “Traditionalist School of thought, helping one another apply the principles and spirit of Tradition in their lives, and organizing in defense of Tradition on their campuses and in their communities.”

woman and intends on entering student affairs, described a time when she encountered discrimination on campus:

Yes, I have been discriminated against. I've been called in passing, "a Black B" by a dude who had a confederate flag on his truck, but I expected that being in southern Indiana. I went into that with mindset that something might probably happen and it eventually did. I was not really surprised that it happened. I was shocked when it did, but wasn't really surprised, but I feel that was one or two incidents that happened. (Destiny, 21, IU)

She goes on to say she typically does not "feel that way" and that she thinks that instances of discrimination on campus are "sometimes exaggerated" (Destiny, 21, IU). Nicole, another Black female I spoke with who is interested in going into government relations, provided a complimentary perspective. She also described experiencing situations that made her feel uncomfortable and unwelcomed on IU's campus. In response, I asked her if there were any connections between what she was experiencing on campus and her political identity development. Her response was,

Yeah I would say there's a connection between that. When bad things happen, I think that, it's, you know, you have to respond in a way that is comforting to the American people. And I think that that's important in government because, you know, Americans want to feel safe in their home country and that's how IU made IU students feel, and Bloomington feel. Even though that happened, that we can rally behind that and say, you know that's not okay, but these are measures we're gonna take to ensure that that doesn't happen again. (Nicole, 21, IU)

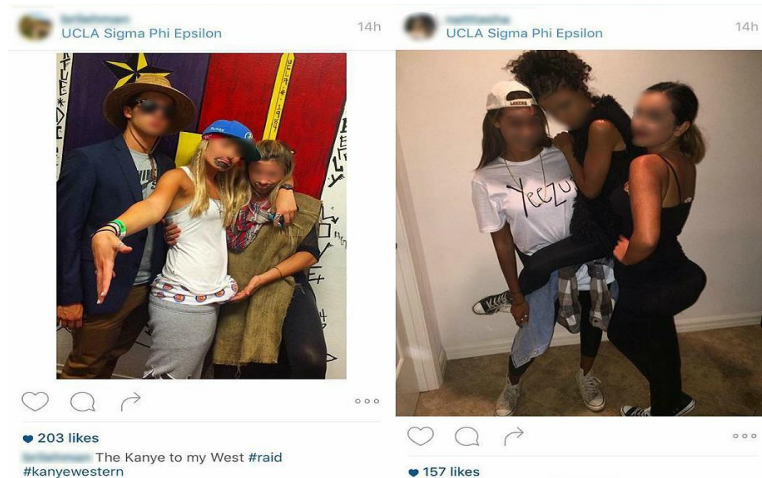
University of California, Los Angeles Institutional Vignette

After completing an interview with a student at UCLA in the student union, I decided I would head to another part of the campus for lunch. As I opened the door to walk outside towards Bruin Walk, the main campus corridor, I noticed numerous people

running past me. I was initially alarmed because I did not know what was going on. As I more stepped fully outside and surveyed the landscape, I began to hear loud chants and noticed a large group assembling on a grassy plot towards the end of the walk. I scanned the crowd and noticed that most of the people in the crowd were Black and most of the crowd was wearing black. There were also people holding signs that read “Black Bruins Matter.” I was intrigued by what seemed like a spontaneous protest, so I scurried over to the grassy area along with many other people to get a better sense of what was going on.

There was a microphone setup, numerous camera crews, and many students congregating around a group of students at the front. The first person to speak was a Black woman who introduced herself as the president of UCLA’s Afrikan Student Union. She said that this protest was sparked by not only a long history of Black students being mistreated at UCLA, but in particular by a racist themed “Kanye Western” fraternity party that had happened the night before. She described how people at the party had dressed up like “gangsters” to caricature Kanye West and to mimic Kim Kardashian West by stuffing their butts (see Figure 5.7). As the student leader spoke, she was often spurred on with chants of “Our culture is not a costume” and “Black Bruins Matter,” which was a reformulation of the national civil rights movement and chant “Black Lives Matter.”

Figure 5.7: Images from UCLA “Kanye Western Party”



Retrieved from
<http://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/celebs/news/a47441/ucla-sorority-under-fire-for-racist-kanye-western-theme-party/>

After explaining the purpose of the protest, the president gave way to other speakers, including a freshman woman who was one of the Black students who had been at the party, felt uncomfortable, and used the social media app Groupme to alert other Black students on campus to what was going on. One of the speakers at the protest later described how they used the app to plan a response and also alert others in the UCLA community to support the planned activities. Following that, a Black graduate student spoke about the importance of solidarity during trying times like this. There was also a spoken word artist whose poem illuminated how the racist campus climate of UCLA and incidents like this made it feel like “she couldn’t breathe” – a nod to the unfortunate passing of Eric Garner and the subsequent rally chant of “I can’t breathe” (see Figure 5.8).

Also important to point out and unusual for these sorts of relatively spontaneous protest, the UCLA vice chancellor for diversity was allocated time to speak to the people

that had assembled at the protest. Jerry Kang, professor of law, was recently appointed to this role and acknowledged that this incident was one of the first major issues he and his team had to deal with and he encouraged students to “hold him and the administration” accountable as they worked through the process of responding to the incident. He let the crowd know that he was there to speak on “three C’s.” The first C was *condemnation*, and he spoke about how UCLA is a place that values free speech and expression but “just because you can do something, does not mean you should.” The second C was *consequences*, and he told the crowd that that both groups involved in the party were on suspension, pending an investigation. Lastly, he talked about *community* and how it was important that UCLA foster a space wherein all students feel included, welcomed, and are supported to actualize their goals and dreams.

Figure 5.8: Student Protestor Speaks about UCLA Hostile Racial Climate



Following the speech and a few short instructions of the president of the ASU, the students marched from the grassy area to the Chancellor Gene Block’s office. I followed the protesting and chanting students there and witnessed hundreds of students fill up the halls of the UCLA administration building (see Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9: Student Protestors Occupying UCLA Administration Building



Following the brief occupation of the office, the students congregated one more time to participate in an “umoja circle” (see Figure 5.10). The leaders of the protest

described that the umoja circle was a solidarity activity that Black Bruins have done for many years to engender a sense of safety, togetherness, and, strength in numbers. After that exercise the students disbursed, and I was able to get some of their initial reactions to the whole event. They described to me “feeling annoyed” and but “not surprised” that something like this would happen. When I asked them why they chose to participate in the protest and how, if at all, these experiences related to their political engagement, the consensus response was that these experiences helped them understand that there is no separation between the “real world” and what was happening on their campus. The protest was a way for their voices to be heard, and they felt that it was an important component of the political process.

Figure 5.10: Students Posing with Signs in an Umoja Circle



Afterwards, I wrote in my field journal and said to a peer-debriefer that this unfortunate experience was paradoxically fortunately for me. I was thrilled that I got to witness first hand students protesting, acting in solidarity, and seeking to hold their peers

and the administration accountable. In many ways, this was a perfect embodiment of student political engagement. However, as a former Black undergraduate and someone who studies diversity issues on campus, the narratives from the students, their hurt and frustration, brought up difficult memories of my experiences in college. I was distressed by the fact that students, particularly Black students, were having to take time out of their already busy schedules, many skipping class, to find a space to heal and act politically.

This experience was a reminder to me of how personal the political is. These students were acting in political ways because of how they felt their salient racial identities were harmed. When thinking about this from an organizational sense, two important aspects are critical to unpack. First, the underlying theme of this section is the idea of space on campus. This protest is a microcosm of how fluid space is. The Kanye Western party happened in a semi-private space (a fraternity house), the protest was planned on a semi-private space (the social media app Groupme), and the protest took place in a very public space, along Bruin Walk. There were also meetings with the administration before the protest, and students had also planned follow up events for later that evening and week to continue to press their message to campus stakeholders.

Students move through these spaces with great agility, but the ramifications of how each space moderates how students see themselves as political and see others as political actors is much harder to peel apart to better understand the unique contribution of each space. We see the spark, the party, and finished product, the protest, but each of the other spaces played an important role and the college environment serves as the connecting hub for of all these spaces.

University of California, Los Angeles Campus Overview

UCLA is located in Los Angeles, California and specifically in the area of Westwood. It is now the largest of the eight UC campuses but opened in 1919 as the “Southern Branch.” In 1927 it was renamed University of California, Los Angeles and moved to its present location in 1929. Given its relative “youth” as an institution, it is important to mention that historically UC-Berkeley has been considered the flagship institution of the UC system, whereas the other institutions in my sample are considered, formally and informally, as their state’s flagship institutions. UC-Berkeley has a unique and storied political history and would have made for a great research site. However, given time and budget constraints, UCLA served as a more than acceptable alternative. Functionally, UCLA is considered a co-flagship (one in northern California and one in southern California) of the UC system, as they both have a wide-array of academic offerings, resources for students, and similar admissions selectivity, ranking, and prestige. A major distinction between the two is that UCLA has the strong presence of STEM students, applied science labs, and tends to be more professionally oriented, whereas UC-Berkeley has the reputation of being more focused on the liberal arts.

Although UCLA relies heavily on the foundation of the UC system, it has built a distinctive institutional brand over time. It nurtures this brand through its research, civic engagement, and sports endeavors that are internationally recognized. UCLA is ranked as the second best public university in the country, its faculty attract over a billion dollars to the university annually, and its sports teams have won 113 NCAA national

championships, more than any other institution. With respect to UCLA's emphasis on civic engagement, their homage proclaims:

Civic engagement is fundamental to our mission as a public university. Located on the Pacific Rim in one of the world's most diverse and vibrant cities, UCLA reaches beyond campus boundaries to establish partnerships locally and globally. We seek to serve society through both teaching and scholarship, to educate successive generations of leaders, and to pass on to students a renewable set of skills and commitment to social engagement. (UCLA, n.d.)

UCLA boast that it creates 12.7 billion dollars of economic activity for the greater Los Angeles region and has served as an incubator to more than a hundred successful start-up companies. To sustain this legacy, similar to the other institutions, UCLA is currently in the midst of a capital campaign, "The Centennial Campaign for UCLA." This campaign serves as a primary embodiment of the institution's response to the socio-political environment of California and declining state support of higher education. Chancellor Gene Block, the leader of UCLA's campus acknowledges that:

As state support of higher education continues to shrink, we must implement aggressive strategies to operate more efficiently and self-sufficiently in order to thrive in the 21st century. (Office of the UCLA Chancellor, n.d.)

The Chancellor also identified "diversity" as a critical priority to UCLA's future:

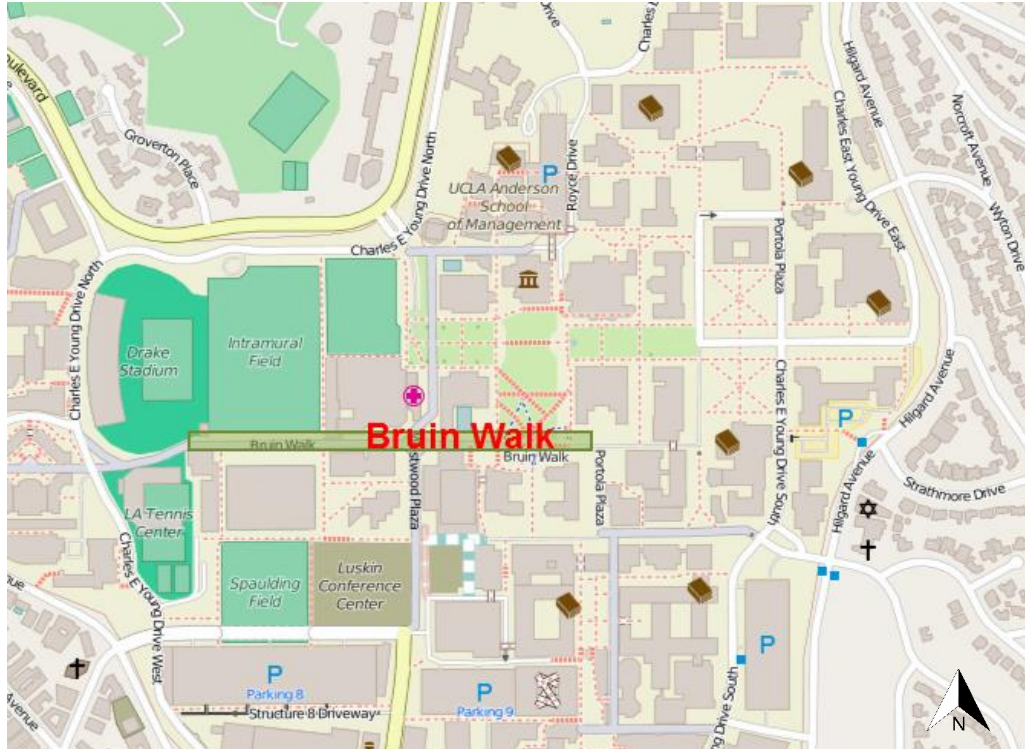
We will continue to increase the diversity of our faculty, students and staff. We are committed to fostering a welcoming campus, as well as understanding and tolerance within the UCLA community. (Office of the UCLA Chancellor, n.d.)

Interestingly, compared to my sample of sites, UCLA is by far the most diverse. The racial demographics are: White: 31.0%, Hispanic: 15.0%, Black: 3.9%, Asian or Pacific Islander: 31.2%, Non-Resident [student]: 14.0%, Not Reported/Unknown/Other: 4.3%,

Two or More Races: 2.8%, and American Indian or Alaska Native: 0.5% (Office of Analysis and Information Management, n.d.). UCLA is considered a primarily residential campus and receives about 28% of its operating budget from the state. UCLA was similar to the other institutions in that the students took great pride in the sports teams, fraternity and sorority life had an outsized impact on the student body, and getting involved in cocurricular activities in general were mentioned as typical traits of UCLA students. Bruin Walk was mentioned as the only public spaces where students were likely to encounter political activity or political messaging.

Students also noted a physical political divide between the “soft majors,” like liberal arts and humanities that were typically housed on the north side of campus and the “hard majors,” typified by STEM majors that were located on the south side of campus. Students identified the north side of campus a place to much more likely encounter discussions about politics (see Figure 5.11). The students that I spoke with who identified as STEM majors declared that if they avoided the north side of campus or Bruin Walk, they would not encounter any political action in their experience. Gary, a biology major whose career plans are undecided, drove this point home when he admitted, “I’ve only been to the north side of campus twice, two or three times. This [the interview] is one of those times” (Gary, 21, UCLA).

Figure 5.11: Political Space on UCLA’s Campus



Finally, as the opening vignette of this subsection highlighted, UCLA is fraught with campus climate issues that all of the students noted, despite the Chancellor’s stated priority of fostering a “diverse campus.” The reverberation of the Black Bruins Matter protest definitely made its way into many of the interviews I conducted. Clarissa, who is the director of a student government commission focused on diversity, explained to me how she is working with her team to also address other prevalent issues on campus, such as “sexual assault, the idea of growing up in a single parent household or the idea of being undocumented” (Clarissa, 20, UCLA). James, a UCLA student who plans to go into student affairs, summed up the frustration of some of the more socially conscious

students when in response to my question about how he makes sense of the response to the campus climate issues at UCLA:

This is not what UCLA is about and we should follow up with these people, but [UCLA's chancellor] couldn't do that. And I'm like, what does this say about Black folks who are tired or who tell me that they're tired of being tokenized and of being reduced because of who they are. If the leader of this campus won't address that immediately, but he can address a donor who gives millions and millions of dollars to our campus in an hour or two, like sending an email to the whole campus, what does that tell me about where our priorities are as an institution? (James, 22, UCLA)

Rutgers University, New Brunswick Institutional Vignette

What stood out to me the most about my time at Rutgers University, New Brunswick (RU) was the geographic layout of the campuses. RU was my first site visit, and at the time I was not thinking that campus geography and the physical location of buildings and student centers was going to be a major finding in my study. What is unique about RU from the other campuses in my study is that RU is made up of 5 distinct campuses that are not contiguous (see Figure 5.12). One of the institution's slogans is "one community, 5 campuses." I had no real sense of what this meant until I arrived at RU and tried to begin my walking tour to pick up on civic and political messages embedded on each campus.

Figure 5.12: Map of the RU College Avenue Campus



It was a relatively brisk fall day, but not extremely cold. Despite this, I noticed that there were few students out and about on the College Avenue Campus. I then noticed a bus stop where at least 60 students stood huddled together. After my first actual interview with an RU student, I learned why there were so few students walking; the campus bus system is the primary way students get around because of the distance between each of the campuses. When asked what her transition to college was like, Abby, a RU student interested in going into medicine, exclaimed:

Oh, my gosh, just figuring out how to get around all 5 campuses, that just took up 2 weeks figuring that out. Figuring out the bus system and how much time to get from one campus to the other. I wasn't really thinking about organizations or anything. I was just trying to get myself to class on time every day. (Abby, 19, RU)

The College Avenue Campus where I set up shop to do my interviews was known by students as the "political campus." This was where most of the liberal arts and humanities were located. The Busch Campus housed the School of Engineering, the

School of Medicine, and the School of Pharmacy, and was aptly termed the “STEM campus.” The Cook Campus is known for the biological and agricultural sciences and is considered to be the environmental campus. The Livingston Campus is home to the School of Business and the Douglass Campus is home to an all-women’s residential college.

After being sensitized to the personalities of each of the campuses as I took my bus tour, I was intrigued by how each of the campuses lived up to their reputations. On the College Avenue Campus, the Rutgers College Democrats were stationed across from the student center trying to register people to vote, and I noticed NJ PIRG posters stapled to multiple telephone poles (Figure 5.13). On the other RU campuses, there was much less overt “political” messaging or activity. Tom, an RU student interested in Journalism summarized the general sense of the students I spoke with when he said he sees political activity:

pretty much everywhere. I mean, ah cause I’m always on College Ave. I rarely go to Busch much. I mean, when I am there, I think I get less of a vibe there of that. Just because of the fact that it’s, like, a very science centered campus. It is not like liberal arts or anything like that (Tom, 19, RU).

The one commonality of the Rutgers campuses is student centers, so I investigated those spaces to see what they were like. They were remarkably consistent in that there was a focus on encouraging students to get involved and making it known that there was a lot of study space. This made sense since Rutgers has a relatively high population of commuter students, especially compared to the other institutions in my study.

Figure 5.13: NJ PIRG Flyer on the RU College Avenue Campus



It has been established that academic major, cocurricular involvement, upbringing, and peer group are all important influencers to a student’s civic and political engagement. What my time at Rutgers illuminated for me is how important space and campus geography are to the student experience, especially when many of the students admitted to rarely going to the other campuses. This raises the issue of how opportunities for political development are stratified depending on where students spends the majority of their time. It is not just how students spend their time that is important to consider but where students spend their time. The implications of this for me as I moved on in the study were less on the choices that students make about where they spend time, but more

on how institutions are set up and organized to provide equitable opportunities for students to learn about politics in different spaces.

Rutgers University, New Brunswick Campus Overview

Rutgers University, New Brunswick is the flagship institution of the Rutgers University state system and was founded in 1766. It is located in Northern New Jersey and the five campuses that make up RU are divided by the Raritan River. The homepage describes Rutgers as “the state’s most comprehensive intellectual resource” and “the region’s most high-profile public research institution and a leading national research center with a global impact” (Rutgers University, n.d.-a). In 2014 the institution completed a seven-year successful capital campaign “Empowering Momentum,” which raised just over a billion dollars for the institution. Also in 2014, the New Brunswick Campus Strategic Plan was released, a strong indicator of how RU is responding to the socio-political environment of New Jersey. Of specific relevance to this study, the plan highlights “enhancing our public prominence, advancing our inclusive, diverse, and cohesive culture, and transforming the student experience” as critical priorities in RU’s pursuit to be “recognized as among the nation’s leading public universities: preeminent in research, excellent in teaching, and committed to community” (Rutgers University, n.d.-b). The plan goes on to note that:

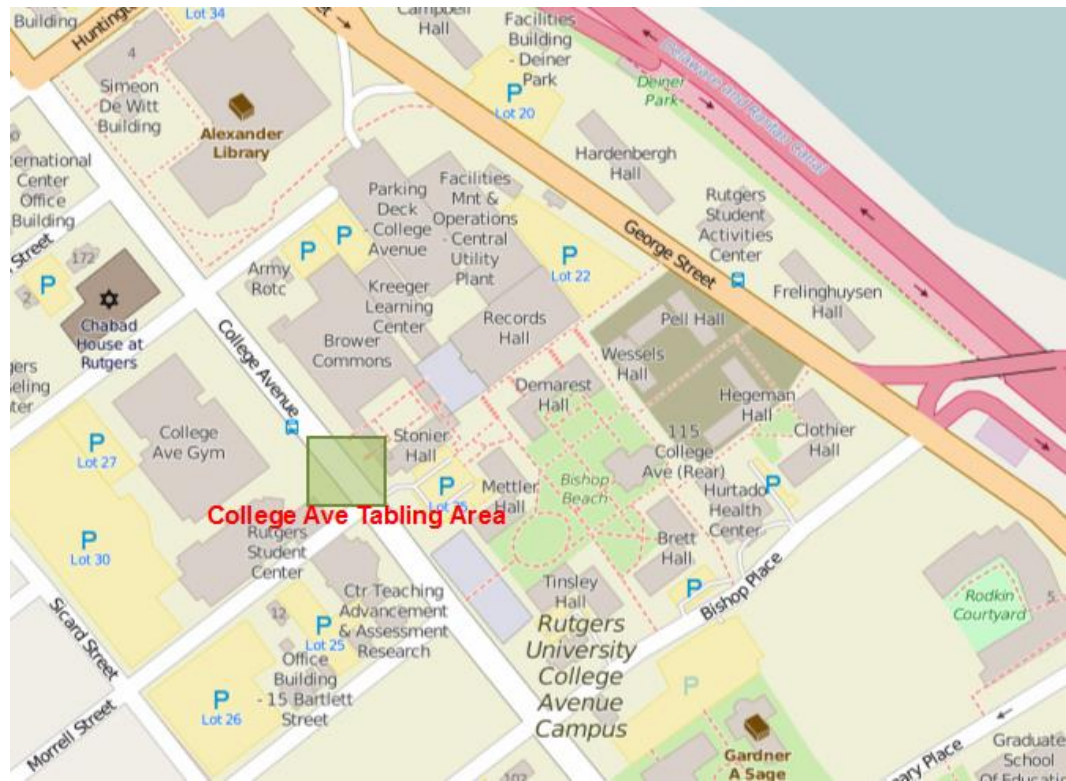
preparing students to lead and to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democracy is a well-established tradition at Rutgers–New Brunswick (RU, n.d.-b).

RU is similar to UF and IU in that it has achieved state and regional prominence but has aspirational goals to be considered a world-renowned institution. Achieving this

while keeping tuition affordable was noted throughout the strategic plan. This tension was a major reason why metrics were included with each of the critical priorities to demonstrate responsiveness to “public perceptions of higher education, return on student/family investment, and accountability to success” (Rutgers University, n.d.-b).

Also of note, RU enrolls over 37,000 students and receives about 21% of its operating budget from the state. Many of the students I spoke with admitted that Rutgers was not their dream school, but it was a lower-cost option that was reputable enough to help them be competitive for whatever their goals were. Also unique to Rutgers, as mentioned before, is the high number of commuter students; thus, it is considered primarily nonresidential.

Figure 5.14: Political Spaces on Rutgers Campus



Demographically, RU is 45% White, 27% Asian, 12% Latino, 7% African American, 4% International, and 5% Other (Rutgers University, n.d.-c). Similar to the other schools in the study, Rutgers has a higher selectivity rate, over 400 student organizations, a strong fraternity and sorority presence, and its sports teams are a part of a Power 5 conference. The main areas on campus where students mentioned seeing political messaging was on the College Avenue campus, across from the student center (see Figure 5.14).

Students also spoke about various tensions between student populations when describing the campus climate of RU. For example, Emily, a RU student interested in a career in law, told me about issues between Jewish students and Muslim students, particularly the actions by the director of the Hillel at RU and students affiliated with Students for Justice in Palestine (see Figure 5.15). There were things said that offended many of the Muslim students, and they resolved to take the issue to the administration for support.

Figure 5.15: Campus Newspaper Headline Capturing Muslim and Jewish Student Tensions



'Die-in' protest anti-Semitic,
counterproductive to peace

Emily described how the group of students she was working with also tried to build a coalition with students working on the Black Lives Matter movement and other students of color who felt harmed by the institutional culture. She noted in frustration that “considering Rutgers touts itself as the most diverse campuses, you’d think they’d offer some sort of support for their diverse students” (Emily, 21, RU). When asked what she learned from this political experience on campus, Emily said she, “realized in terms of diplomacy, you need to figure out where the balance is and go with that” (Emily, 21, RU).

Section II: Commonalities Across Campuses: The Political Dimension of Campus Climate

As these site overviews accentuate, there are many commonalities but also stark differences between each of the states and institutions in the study. All of the institutions espoused efforts to respond to the socio-political environment of their states by focusing on aspects of student success and being sure to articulate impact, to their respective states through economic and civic engagement messaging. The second question of the research study asks in what ways does an institution’s structure and culture shape the political identity development of students? The key finding that emerges from an analysis of the campuses and the unique state socio-political environment is the emergence of a distinct dimension of campus climate. This *political dimension of campus climate* combines the spaces, experiences, and norms of both a state and institution that shape the political identity development of students. In other words, where students experience politics on a campus frames students’ political perceptions, facilitates students’ interactions with

diverse political others, and conveys messages (both positive, neutral, and negative) from the institution that helps students draw parallels to how political systems operate outside of the institution.

The concept that encapsulates this emerging dimension of campus climate and culture can be understood as the *political dimension of campus climate*. Similar to other dimensions of campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2012), students shape this dimension with their activities, energies, and demands. Yet, how the campus is laid out, how faculty and staff moderate this dimension, and the influence of the larger state socio-political culture also have to be accounted for when trying to understand this dimension. For example, each of the institutions is dealing with declines in state funding to higher education. This has material impacts on both the faculty and students that each institution can recruit and retain. The students and faculty that end up on a campus go on to shape the climate and culture of the institution, while also being shaped by the preceding norms of the climate and culture. This ongoing dynamic invariably shapes the issues, policies, and campus dynamics that the comprehensive site overviews highlighted and the institutional vignettes brought to life. What is noteworthy about this finding is that there were more similarities in how the institutions were responding to their state socio-political environments than differences, despite the political array of socio-political environments in the study. Consequently, the political dimension of campus climate is a robust typology that explains how students experience the intersection of their lived experiences, the climate and culture of their institution and the state socio-political environment.

Overview

There are three levels of the political dimension of campus climate: public, semi-public/private, and private. There are also two stances from which students engage this dimension: the consumer stance and the producer stance. When students assume the consumption stance, they are being influenced by the political dimension because they are actively or passively taking-in the political messages or activities of whatever particular space they are operating in. Then there are students who take a producer stance because they are actively constructing the political dimension of whatever space they are operating in. As an example from the UF vignette, the SG President was producing in that particular space and the students who were in attendance or watching online were consumers. The consumer/producer dichotomy is fluid as the IU vignette points out. The finance chair was initially a producer in the meeting but when members began to chime in with their thoughts on the purpose of the institution, he became a consumer in the very same meeting. It is important to also clarify that my usage of “space” in this section is loosely conceptualized as both physical and intangible areas that students may encounter but are delimited in certain ways from other spaces. Table 5.2 provides an overview, and the following subsections describe in further detail the various levels of this dimension and how they come together to influence how students interact with the political system.

Table 5.2: Key Aspects of Political Dimensions of Campus Climate

	Examples	Institutional Influence	Student Production Stance	Student Consumption Stance
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	Examples	Institutional Influence	Student Production Stance	Student Consumption Stance
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Free Speech Zones (e.g., Turlington Plaza, Bruin Walk, Sample Gates, College Ave Student Center) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies (i.e., Determining time, place, & manner of demonstrations) • Resources (e.g., providing tables, electric outlets, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in a protest; Handing out flyers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing a protest; receiving a flyer
Semi-public/private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classrooms; Student Organizations; Social Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty hiring and retention; • Course Sizes; • Course Offerings; • Policies (e.g., registering student organizations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking and answering questions in class; Leading student organization meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending class or a student organization meeting
Private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations in a residence hall room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment Decisions (i.e., who ends up on campus) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debating politics with friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to a debate about politics

Public

The public level of the political dimension of campus climate includes campus designated free speech zones and common meeting areas, such as student centers, study spaces, libraries, and other relatively open areas on campus. These spaces are public because the access to them is the least restrictive. From the consumption of political activity and messaging standpoint, all students have equal access to public political spaces. However, institutions wield much more power when it comes to who has access to generate or produce political activity and messaging. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), which is a watch-dog organization that rates how open institutions are to free speech, is one way to think about how accessible public spaces are. They rate UCLA, IU, and Rutgers with yellow lights, meaning that there is at least one ambiguous institutional policy that can be used to limit the free speech of students on

campus. UF was given a green light, meaning that all their policies nominally protect free speech.

During interviews, students could readily point out where the free speech zones and other public political spaces were on their campus. For example, when asked where political activity happens on his campus, Chris at IU said:

[sample gates] that's right west of here. It's a landmark and I think it might be designated like a free speech center, whatever that means, but there. We've also had during the like a Black Lives Matter movement, we've had like Black Student Union and other protest groups go through the middle of campus and do like march, a walk, and they actually came in the union and did a die-in inside the Starbucks. It was like hundreds of people just lying on the ground. There's also a lot of ... There's lot of proselytization by the clock tower. That happens pretty regularly and that gets very political. (Chris, 20, IU)

The ability to name and to have also experienced these public political spaces has material influences on how some students come to understand the political system on campus and in general. For instance, Genevieve, a student at UF, described walking through Turlington Plaza and seeing "someone with a giant cross saying, 'women shouldn't be in college' and stuff like that, or folks of color." She goes on to say:

I understand where [the institution] is coming from, free speech zone, stuff like that, and neutrality. But allowing that isn't neutral to me. It enforces hate and oppression and power that is already in place, so I think that that's one thing. And then just in general, messages of every voice should be heard, but it seems like the voices that are heard are the people reinforcing status quo and a lot of oppression is a bad thing. (Genevieve, 21, UF)

Other students acknowledged that they appreciated knowing that there was space on campus where they knew they could consume or participate in political activity if they wanted to. Abby from Rutgers, noted, "College Ave. is where all the demonstrations and

all the poli-sci students and all the pre-law students are. There's a lot of political energy here" (Abby, 19, RU).

Semi-Public/Private

The second level of the political dimension of campus climate is comprised of all the semi-public/private spaces on a campus. These include classrooms, student organization meetings and events, and social media. What makes these spaces semi-public/private is that institutions or students can restrict access to them to an extent. For example, not all students have access to particular courses that may readily discuss political events and spur students to think more about their political identity. Course capacity and offerings has a material influence on which students get to talk about politics in a systematic way in a classroom. While access may be restricted to these spaces, students are still sharing experiences in a collective way. Because these levels exist on a continuum, some spaces may be more public oriented whereas others tend to be more private. In the case of classrooms, the way campuses are structurally laid out push groups of students with certain major or career interests together and create these semi-public/private spaces that promote or dissuade political activity in the classroom space just by virtue of who students interact with most often in their academic life. Also, professors have a lot of autonomy in facilitating opportunities for students to think about political issues in the classroom. For example, Al, a student at IU, explained: "being a Liberal with so many college professors tilting Liberal, I think that makes it easier for me to share my opinions than if they were Conservative or I was Conservative" (Al, 21, IU).

However, contrary to the popular narrative that all college students are just as Liberal as the professors, I spoke with many Conservative and Libertarian identified students who also described classroom environments that were open and engaging, despite differences that they may have with peers or the instructor. Michelle, a Libertarian identified student at UF, described how she decided to take a stance on an assignment where she knew the professor “disagreed with it personally.” She went on to say, “the discourse in the classroom has been fine. I’ve never really experienced, especially from students, I’ve never experienced [problems]” (Michelle, 21, UF). For the most part though, students across all the campuses agreed that their classmates and professors did not readily share their political ideology in class anyway, unless it was a course that was about issues that were partisan, like immigration. Most students described taking more of the consumer stance in the classroom, taking notes, asking questions for clarification, and not engaging beyond required amounts. Some students did note that they would try to spark conversations in class and produce political moments, but this was only in certain courses.

Likewise, students self-select and restrict access into different student organizations – not all students choose to or are selected to participate in student government for example. Furthermore, some student organizations, like fraternities and sororities, limit access through financial barriers or other on-boarding obstacles, which create semi-public/private spaces. Additionally, whereas in the classroom students reported assuming a consumption stance more regularly, student organizations inherently coax students to be producers to an extent in their experience. One reason these types of

semi-public/private spaces are important is that they bring students together around common interest, but then reveal differences within certain subgroups. Emily, a Rutgers student, recounts how working for the student newspaper shaped her thinking about politics. She describes herself as “an activist” and then noted that among her peers at the newspaper “there’s a very strong feeling that you’re not supposed to be partial at all. You have to be a robot or not have any feelings about anything because that would ruin your integrity or whatever as a journalist.” She went on to critique her peers by saying, “they ended up not really doing anything” (Emily, 21, RU). Semi-public/private spaces such as student organizations also bring students into contact with political messaging or activities in a more intimate way. Sophia, a student at UCLA, talked about what she enjoys about the involvement culture at UCLA:

A lot of things are brought to my attention. I wouldn’t have had that opportunity anywhere else, because I was stuck with people that were the same as me in the same situation. Sometimes when I think about, why did I choose to come here? It was to get out (Sophia, 21, UCLA).

Finally, on the semi-public/private level is social media. While social media spans all the levels to some extent, I classify social media as semi-public/private because a student must in the least, construct a social network on these technologies²⁸ that may or may not push them to think about political activities. Their activities are semi-public because people in their social network can see what the student posts or likes. Social media is also private because students can limit in many ways what they and others see, creating a very curated experience. This reality means that social media engagement

²⁸ I heard the most about Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Groupme.

takes on many forms. James a student at UCLA explained his use of social media: “if I can spread the word on social media [about political issues] in any way, I think that there’s also a power in that, because small ripples make waves” (James, 22, UCLA). However, Chris from IU said, “I don’t post on social media very often about political topics. I will follow them and read other people’s posts” (Chris, 20, IU).

While there has been a great deal of attention around Millennials and social media, I also heard many students express skepticism about the intersection of politics and social media. For instance, Nia described how she often encounters “unauthentic paragraphs” that are then “posted on social media for some likes.” She went on to lament “that’s not real, and I can’t respect that. I can’t respect the fact that you want to take a serious issue, and turn it into a popularity contest” (Nia, 21, RU). The main takeaway is that students’ political experiences in semi-public/private spaces are highly variable and as a result, the influence of these spaces on their political identity is wide-ranging.

Private

The third level of the political dimensions are the spaces that are most private for students. Students have the greatest ability to define the contours of these spaces and also include the reflective intrapersonal experiences that students have. The next section will expound on the intrapersonal experiences in greater detail, so I want to highlight the role of friend groups for students. All of the students noted that their close friend groups were integral to their political identity development. The main difference I was able to pick up on was that interactions with friends caused more dissonance or left a greater impression

with students than those that happened on either the public or semi-public/private levels.

Ashlyn, a student at UCLA, described an experience that exemplifies this level:

One of my friends was the valedictorian for our school. I didn't know she didn't have papers, but then as we were talking about what college are you going to go to, she said she was going to go to community college. I was like, "Wait, hold up. You're valedictorian. You got into UCLA, UC-Berkley, like, all the top schools here and you're going to go to community? Why?" Then she said that she didn't have papers and she came from a low-income home, so she couldn't pay for college.

Ashlyn went on to say about the political system, "then it hit me, like, okay wait. So then what's going on with this whole meritocracy. Is it really, like, whoever wants to make it can make it on their own?" (Ashlyn, 21, UCLA) Because the private spaces are so close to how students see their own identities, unsurprisingly most students sought out friend groups with like-minded students that did not often lead to dissonant experiences.

Additionally, institutions have the least amount of direct influence on this level.

However, what type of student an institution recruits, admits, and enrolls shapes who students come into contact with, their potential friendship networks. Private spaces have the most impact on student political identity, but at the same time are the least likely to have an impact because students work to keep this space devoid of dissonant experiences.

Summary of Comprehensive Site Overview Findings

The political dimension of campus climate plays an important role in how students experience the institutional environment. As this section makes apparent, the physical layout of campuses, the policies of the campuses, and the socio-political environment of the state, via macro issues that become localized on campuses, all influence how the political dimension manifests itself on campus. Students experience

the public, semi-public/private, and private spaces in many different ways, and the variability leads to many outcomes for their political identity development. Likewise, students take both consumer and producer stances that direct their experiences with the political dimension and also speak to the student agency in the construction of their political identity. While these findings underscore the role of organizational culture in political identity development, they do not fully illuminate the cognitive and intrapersonal process of developing a political identity. The next chapter unveils how this process unfolds for students in this study. The final chapter brings the two findings together to illuminate higher education's role in diverse democracy.

Chapter VI: Model of College Student Political Identity Development

Introduction and Overview

To fully understand higher education's role in a diverse democracy, I set out to explore the nuanced ways students understand their political identity development and build a model that fully encapsulates diverse experiences while honing in on common themes. After data analysis, a core category and four phases emerged that describe the different aspects of the emergent model – *College Student Political Identity Development*. The process that emerged sufficiently responds to the first research question and is simultaneously simple yet complex. Conceptually, the *College Student Political Identity Development* process is similar to a cycle that reaches a focal point and then potentially begins again throughout the course of a student's time in college.

This chapter describes, in depth, the *College Student Political Identity Development* process, which captures the varied experiences and identities of each of the students in the study. The core category that is embedded in all of the students' narratives and drives the process is the concept of *acquiring an attitude of political fluency* or the ability to understand, interact with, and operate in a political system consonant with a student's self-perception. The first key phase, *politically motivating events*, illustrates the spark of the process by describing how students enter into a state of disequilibrium. The second phase, *cognitive negotiation*, describes a student's navigation through and sense-making of their thoughts on the political tensions that arise from the first phase.

Applying political identity(ies), the third phase, is a student's ongoing effort to clarify and enact their political identity in relation to the larger political system. Finally, *finding psychological and behavioral congruence* is the principal phase of the process that involves a student feeling actualized in the ways that are politically and personally congruent. There are two critical modifiers, or guardrails, within the process that influence how students move through the process. These modifiers are a student's sense of their salient social identities (e.g., gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, ability, immigrant status, etc.) and their career aspirations/view of the purpose of college. While the emergent model is primarily concerned with the developmental experiences of students in college, formative political experiences that happened before college for many students became evident in the ongoing process of developing a political identity. Thus, before fully delving into evidence of each of the aspects of the model, it is critical to situate the process in the developmental trajectory of a student's lifespan. The components are assembled into a pictorial representation of the model at the end of the chapter (Figure 6.1).

Precursors to the Political Identity Development Process

Unsurprisingly, many students did not enter into college as blank political slates. In fact, almost all of the students had begun to form opinions about different aspects of the political system prior to college. *Formative political experiences are the totality of the political encounters that students have while still relatively dependent on others for their needs.* This acknowledges the life-span trajectory of students and how difficult it is to disentangle developmental experiences. The key point is that formative experiences

were described by participants as taking place before they started to understand their agency and autonomy as an individual. Examples of formative political experiences could be hearing adults discussing political issues in one's home life, seeing political advertisement in one's community (e.g., bumper stickers or lawn signs), mock presidential elections in schools, or hearing a rabbi, priest, or imam make political during a religious gathering. Starting as early as elementary school for some, students begin to receive and process a variety of political messages from a variety of sources and start to consider whether being politically engaged is an important part of being a contributing person in society (Andolina et al., 2003; D. E. Campbell, 2010). As John, a UF student hoping to work in government put it, "we're all supposed to live in this society with one another, and we all have political obligations to serve in our society, like voting" (John, 19, UF). Other students echoed this general sentiment but displayed more nuance in their assessment of why developing a political identity is important. Abby from Rutgers stated:

I just think people should be politically engaged. Because I feel like if you're not engaged in the political process, you have no right to complain about it. Everyone complains about it, no matter how involved they are. Then at the same time, if you don't want to be super involved, you shouldn't have to be, because you just shouldn't have to be.

Almost all of the students were able to articulate that they had felt compelled at one point or another to think about the political system and consider how they fit into it and how they should or could influence it. This understanding into students' sense-making emphasizes the concept of *formative political experiences* or the foundation upon which the *College Student Political Identity Development* process sits. In short,

formative political experiences are the totality of the political socialization incidents that frame if, how, and why students continue to develop political identities and college. The other important components of formative political experiences are the sources of the political socialization incidents and discourses that surround students before college. The range of sources either prompt students to think about their political identity immediately or plant a seed that is awoken at another time in their developmental process. The following quotes illustrate the variability within this latter component of formative political experiences. In response to a question about his earliest political memories, Joe, a student at IU who wants to go into business or government after college, recounted:

9/11 was definitely the first [political memory]. I remember watching George Bush's speech on the rubble pile in New York and having my Dad explain what had happened and what he was saying. That's as early as it gets. Even past that, I pretty vividly remember the 2004 election. I remember it only because I grew up in a family that was relatively conservative. I remember at that time ridiculing classmates who would say, "John Kerry is the best." I remember doing that. When you're 10 years old, you don't know. You say what you here at home. (Joe, 22, IU)

In slight contrast, Barry, also from IU who plans to go into accounting, noted:

My parents weren't too politically active so [politics] wasn't something that we'd talk about all the time at home. But during high school I joined the debate team, and that's really where I really jumped into politics and government stuff and programs and stuff like that. That's really where I first started thinking, oh, I'm actually interested in this, this is really interesting and cool and I want to learn more about this. (Barry, 22, IU)

Finally, Marie from UF, who also plans to go into accounting, recalled:

I think the first time I ever heard of anything political was in Middle School, eighth grade, when Obama was running. I actually didn't know anything about political parties or anything like that. We were learning about it that year. We did a mock election, and that's when my friends started taking sides, things like that. That was the first time I had ever

heard anything about politics. My family doesn't really talk about politics. They do, but not at that young of an age. (Marie, 20, UF)

While a few students did not think about politics until college, as these quotes illuminate, almost all of the students I spoke with could reflect on formative political moments prior to college. While these experiences were communicated as generally positive or neutral as far as serving as a foundation for students to build their political identities, some students' formative political experiences began to build their apprehension around politics. For instance, Joyce, a UCLA student, explained that seeing politics discussed early on in her household made her "very cautious about approaching the topic in general." She goes on to say:

having seen my dad and brother have such strong opinions about it, it made me a little bit nervous to talk about politics or bring up the subject, because I was just always a little weary of what kind of discussion it was going to incite. (Joyce, 20, UCLA)

The formative political experiences that happen during K-12 schooling and inside a student's household prior to college are reinforced by students' consumption of media, their community environment, and other social institutions that they interact with regularly, such as their faith tradition. Additionally, as the previous quotes underscore, formative political experiences begin to highlight the origin of underlying inequities in the political system due to when and how students encounter these experiences. Students who begin to form their political perceptions at home or in their K-12 experiences have more time to think about their role in the political system compared to the students who start later on and do not have a trusted adult in their social network to help them think through their early political experiences. Juxtapose the earlier comment of Joe discussing

9/11 with his dad with this one from Clarissa from UCLA, who summarizes this inequitable dynamic well: “early on, for me politics were more so not discussed. It was just something more experienced that I couldn’t then understand (Clarissa, 20, UCLA). As the *College Student Political Identity Development* process is described, it is vital to bear in mind that a student’s formative political experiences are constantly framing subsequent political experiences.

Core Category: Acquiring an Attitude of Political Fluency

Acquiring an attitude of political fluency, or the development of the self-concept one has about their knowledge, skills, and motivations that are necessary to understand and navigate their political perceptions is the core category in the emergent model. An attitude of political fluency succinctly describes the concept that propels the *College Student Political Identity Development* process forward. Put another way, acquiring an attitude of political fluency is the continuous self-assessment of one’s current political understanding and resources coupled with their desired outcomes, that combine to form how one traverses the development of their political identity. An attitude of political fluency is a part of a person’s identity because it serves as the person’s own judgment and evaluation about who they currently are in a political system. Understanding in this sense is inclusive of formal civic education, increased awareness of the hidden curriculum of politics, and a command of language unique to politics. Examples of resources one has access to ranges from honing the dispositions needed to effectively engage in political life to gaining experience applying transferable skills like fundraising to political contexts. One’s Political motivations or intentions are also important to consider and are

enmeshed in a student's other social identities, their formative political experiences, and other external forces such as peer networks or time allocated to political learning. The more knowledge resources a student possesses, when coupled with their political motivations to be engaged in political systems, the more likely they are to develop an attitude of political fluency and feel in control of their political identity development. Thus, acquiring an attitude of political fluency can be thought of as the self-evaluation of one's locus of control adapted into the political dimension of campus climate. The concept of acquiring an attitude of political fluency stemmed directly from an interview with Joseph from UF. In response to a question about how he perceived something he had said earlier in the interview to be "politics," he explained:

I don't know, it was just ... I always think that *politics is something that that's just within me* [emphasis added]. Some people are really good at math, some people are really good at science. I'm just really good with social studies and politics especially. (Joseph, 21, UF)

Conversely, Destiny noted that politics for her was not something that was central to her identity, but simply "two or more parties arguing over how to better society." My interview with her began with her very apprehensively telling me, "I just want to say that my views on politics are really, I don't know, not the norm. I feel what I'm going to tell you throughout the interview isn't going to be useful." When asked why she felt this way, she further explained her perception of the political system as external to her identity because she did not, "feel progress is being made." She continued to say, "I feel it's just a lot of talk, and no action. I feel it's a lot of lying, and just conniving people. A lot of smoke and mirrors" (Destiny, 21, IU).

Whereas Joseph embraced his attitude of political fluency, Destiny disassociated from hers as a result of her frustration with her understanding of what was happening in the political realm. These contrasting quotes beg the question, how does a person come to see their political attitudes as something that is within them and something they have control over versus perceiving politics as something that is external to them?

The analysis of the data reveals that all students can be placed somewhere on the continuum that Joseph and Destiny illustrate the poles of, that of an attitude of political fluency as internal or external to their locus of control. The differentiating factor of an internal or external perception of the political system for students appears to be based on the student's ability to acquire an attitude that continuously assesses their political knowledge, skill repertoire, and motivations (i.e., political fluency), which translates to confidence in themselves, their political efficacy, and a higher likelihood that they will see politics as something that is within them. This acquired attitude and understanding of self is critical to the *College Student Political Identity Development* process because an assessment of one's identity, made up of their knowledge, abilities, and motivations, is needed to effectively navigate the political dimensions that students are situated in. This attitude has to be honed over time and there is never "enough" political fluency, because each phase of the model requires the development of a new attitude that stems from encountering different knowledge, skills, and motivations.

Imagine a person arriving in a foreign country with a unique language and customs that are unfamiliar to them. To be able to successfully live and work in that society, a person would need to become literate not only in the language, but also in the

customs and norms of the country to avoid feeling ineffectual and hopeless. Literacy is the measure of one's ability to acquire the necessary tools to be able to take action in a certain context or subject. If for a second, we think of the political system that students operate within as a foreign country, set with its own language, customs, and culture, the underlying desire to acquire a sense of literacy that some students expressed begins to crystalize. However, a literate person may not always attain their intended goal with ease due to difficulty overcoming unfamiliar challenges²⁹. Fluency, on the other hand, connotes such a thorough command of a subject that a person possess the ability to use their knowledge, skills, and resources in an effortless way to achieve a desired end more often than not. An attitude of political fluency combines the intrapersonal assessment of one's disposition (attitude) with concepts (knowledge, skills, motivations) that are more familiar to the higher education and political science world to better convey the inseparability of identity formation and performance while parsing out the nuance.

When Joseph declared that politics was “just within” him, he was calling attention to his level of confidence in his political knowledge and skills and his motivation to be involved in politics. On the other hand, Destiny's critique of the system and her apprehension to share her political perceptions convey an understanding of the political system but an attitude that shows no motivation to be involved and relatively less

²⁹ The idea of literacy is contested in the field of education and many have argued that there are in fact “multiple literacies” (Collins III & O'Brien, 2011, p. 248). Hence, I advocate for a move towards the concept of political fluency, which is adapted from computational fluency. Computational fluency is defined as “a quality that allows a person to effortlessly and rapidly use operations to resolve a problem; having and using efficient and accurate methods for computing; being able to make smart choices about which tools to use and when. The person having this quality has mastered the use of these operations” (Collins III & O'Brien, 2011, p. 92).

confidence in her political self. Students in the study ranged in their attitude of political fluency based on how at peace a student was with their knowledge, skills, and motivations. Both Joseph and Destiny were at peace with their attitude of political fluency (or lack thereof in Destiny's case), even though Joseph considered himself to be very politically engaged and Destiny did not. Accordingly, the underlying recurring task of the *College Student Political Identity Development* process is that students have to constantly assess and clarify if the knowledge, skills, and motivations they possess, their political fluency, is helping them achieve a self-concept or attitude that is congruent with their perception of the political system. There are three main dimensions of this category that illuminate the aspects of what students are thinking about as they acquire an attitude of political fluency, or not. For clarity, I phrased the aspects of this category as the sorts of questions students respond to as they acquire an attitude of political fluency:

- In a given situation, who or what has political power to influence relevant political issues?

In response to seeing tension on campus between Jewish and Arabic groups, Gary told me that it was “upsetting” to see such divisiveness between two student groups but he went on to note: “I felt like there was nothing I could really do about it. I wasn't in student government. I wasn't in either of these groups” (Gary, 21, UCLA). This shows how students understand power dynamics and then make assessments about how their knowledge, skills, and motivations relate to the power dynamics. This is a dimension of political fluency that every student could articulate because it was an inherent assessment of their power and the power of others in a given context.

- What normative aspects of a political system intersect with a student’s core beliefs or social identities.

Examples of normative aspects of a political system include major political communities (e.g., Republican, Democrat, Libertarian); obligatory practices (e.g., voting); dispositions (e.g., believing that “being politically involved is important for the health of my community”); and prevailing discourses (“everyone is talking about Donald Trump’s presidential run”). For an example of how this assessment plays out, when asked about how important political labels were to her, Maya, who identified herself as a Democrat, LGBT ally, and a woman of color stated:

No, no. I think [being a Democrat] is actually very, very important to me. I think probably the first time that I thought about that label was when thinking about LGBT rights and abortion. Those would be like the two easiest ones for me to think about, which I think for me seem very black and white when it comes to Liberal or Conservative. So it’s a very salient identity for me, because I think I fall on that end political of the spectrum pretty much in terms of all social issues. (Mya, 20, IU)

The quote shows how Mya is using her understanding of what Liberals stand for and what Conservatives do not, coupled with her beliefs on salient issues, to assess if she is aligning herself correctly within the political system. Among the three dimensions of political fluency, this was the most variable. For instance, all students were familiar with the stances and platforms of major political groupings and could articulate expected political norms. However, students’ ability to describe their core political dispositions or popular political discourses varied greatly.

- What specific skills and civic literacy³⁰ does a student need to enact their desires on the political systems.

When asked if she has been equipped with the skills to be as politically engaged as she hopes to be in the future, Ashlyn stated:

I don't think I've been equipped with the skills yet. Maybe if I speak to more, like, to the people who are in my [political] orientation. I'm telling you, one of them has gone to the White House I don't know how many times. She's meeting with senators and stuff, so it's like being able to learn from her. How do you get to the White House? How do you, how are you an activist there? Like not just on campus but how do you express your opinions with all these higher people? Kind of learning from, I would say, those two individuals would make me more equipped. But I don't feel like UCLA as an institution has equipped me for it. (Ashlyn, 21, UCLA)

Through this quote, Ashlyn makes the case that she does not yet have the skills and capital needed to make a political impact. She also recognizes how she could go about acquiring those skills and networks, which suggests that while she might not have fluency yet, she at least understands what would be necessary to acquire it in her context. This quote also highlights the importance of accounting for a student's political motivations. Hence, this dimension was frequently operationalized by students who were interested in acquiring greater political fluency.

Where students stumble in these three areas of acquiring an attitude of political fluency is what places them at various points within each phase. Therefore, their attitude

³⁰ Milner (2002) defines civic literacy as "possessing the knowledge required for effective political choice" (p. 55) in an effort to describe the traits needed for civic engagement in a particular society. Civic literacy is an explicit critique of Putnam's (2000) notion of social capital as the primary variable in civic and political engagement. I concur that centering political knowledge rather than one's social network is a step in the right direction in regards to understanding political identity development. However, as Chapter VII will make apparent, civic literacy is also an insufficient concept to explain political identity development because it *only* focuses on political knowledge.

of political fluency is constantly changing, pushing students to continuously assess and adapt their knowledge, skills, and motivations in relation to their political identity. What remains imprecise then, is the point of accruing an attitude of political fluency or not, given that the accrual process is constant. As mentioned briefly earlier, a student seeks to acquire an attitude of political fluency to find congruence with how they see themselves and the political system. The next section unpacks the phase that simultaneously serves as the end and beginning of the *College Student Political Identity Development*.

Finding Psychological and Behavioral Congruence in Political Systems

In contrast to others who use political identity and affiliation with a political community somewhat interchangeably (Dalton, 2013; R. M. Smith, 2003), or others who focus on the performance of a political identity (Binder & Wood, 2013), this study defines student political identity as a student's sense of connection with, adherence to, and participation in the political norms, institutions, groups, and practices of a politically diverse community. The focal point of the developmental model, or the primary reason the *College Student Political Identity Development* process exists, is that students articulated the desire to find or navigate towards *psychological and behavioral congruence* at the intersection of the political systems that they operate in and their continuing cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. Thus, the emergent process is about students resolving politically dissonant experiences in order to feel congruent with their political sense-making. Put plainly, the navigation to find congruence *is* a student's political identity. Elaina, a student at IU, captured this sentiment when in response to being asked how important her identification with a

political label was she said, “I wouldn’t say it’s important, because I think it’s more important to know what your beliefs are than to subscribe to a specific label” (Elaina, 20, IU). Additionally, Al from IU said that his political identity would probably never change:

If it did, I would probably be an entirely different person, because from a very young age, this has been pretty much the core of my identity, and I think it’s going to be with me to the day I die. That it is not just part of me; it is who I am. (Al, 21, IU)

Accordingly, it cannot be understated that how students choose and are socialized to navigate towards psychological and behavioral congruence is highly varied and does not always mirror the outcome that some may believe is best for a healthy democracy (i.e., a politically knowledgeable and engaged participant-citizen) (A. Campbell et al., 1960; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Consequently, the crux of the *College Student Political Identity Development* process is not necessarily just about how students come to be actively involved in the political system via traditional (voting) or even disruptive (activism) ways of engaging the political dimension of their communities. The focal point of this process is that students learn how to think and act in ways that they find personally congruent with their political sense-making, which may include disengaging all together from the political systems they encounter. Consequently, a student’s political identity is not necessarily tied to a political community (e.g., Evangelical Christian), a major political party (e.g. Republican, Democrat, Libertarian), political causes (e.g., 2nd amendment rights), or lifestyle choices (e.g., Being a vegan for environmental reasons), although those things can and do play a role in how many students find congruence.

A student's ability to navigate towards congruence and resolve politically dissonant experiences is predicated on their attitude of political fluency and where and how they are situated in the political dimension of campus climate. This means, for instance, that while one student chooses to find congruence by participating in the Black Bruins Matter protest, another may find congruence by avoiding Bruin Walk at all costs during the demonstration. Mya, an IU student who wants to go into pediatric oncology and whose family identifies as Muslim, gave an account that illuminates the complexity of developing a political identity while in college:

...like in Islam, abortion's not right, gay rights are not okay, all that stuff, completely not okay. I'm all for gay rights. I'm all for abortion. If you want to do that, you feel the need to do that, go do it. That's not my issue whatsoever. *It's like, do I foresee myself getting more political or ending up picking a side? Maybe.* Right now I'm not that religious either. I've kind of taken a break from that. It was like forced into my head growing up, in high school all that. I was all into that, but then when I didn't have a parent there to constantly put that in my head, I was like, okay, I'm just going to take a break from this right now. *I guess, like, once I get that figured out, I think I can get the political part figured out.* I feel like most people who are, like, super faithful to their religion and what not, usually that's how their political views go too. *I feel like once I get that developed, once I figure out what I want to do with that, I'll get the political thing too* [emphasis added]. (Mya, 20, IU)

Here we see a student in the midst of a navigation process as she questions what it means to understand her religious upbringing, where she stands now on a couple of salient political issues, and her understanding of how she might resolve those incongruences. She is making calculations based on her political knowledge of what it means to be Muslim, her core political beliefs about abortion and gay rights, and assessing if she has the requisite skills to be more politically engaged. This tension is an important one for Mya to resolve, whereas other students may find congruence by not engaging the

manifestation of this tension in their life. What makes this process unique to college students is that the campus environment and the totality of a student's college experience, coupled with the increased exploration of their agency and independence, provide the space and time for some students to grapple with these political tensions, as well as the stratified access to an incredible assortment of opportunities that help students clarify and/or apply their political identity in ways that they find to be congruent. For instance, when asked if UF is preparing her to be as politically active as she hopes to be in the future, Sharon explained:

[UF is] giving me opportunities to build the [political] foundation. They're not saying, "Hey, this is the foundation." They're just saying, "Hey, you want to go to this conference where you can learn more about it, here's the chance. Do you want to go to these meetings and learn more about it? Here's your chance." They're not going to do it for me. It's on you to go out and learn it yourself, but they do give you, like ... In real life, there's no College Democrats meeting you can go to. It's giving you a chance to learn, and I think that's all they can do. That's all education can do is give you the equal chance to learn about something as someone else. (Sharon, 21, UF)

Different from Mya, Sharon's pursuit of congruence did not entail questioning her upbringing and core beliefs but was more so focused on her assessment of political opportunities presented to her on her campus. While this illuminates the importance of college in her political identity development, Sharon's observation about "it's on you," raises the issue of why all students don't find college to be the place and time to resolve political tensions. Thus, stratified engagement with opportunities to resolve political dissonance is key here, because not all students recognize or take advantage of the opportunities on campus to clarify or apply their political identity. Nor can institutions structurally influence all the spaces that students might interface with, as the previous

chapter on the *Political Dimension of Campus Climate* detailed. Mya, for instance, went on to say that there isn't anything at IU that is "pushing me one way or another, and I'm very happy about that, because if that were the case, I'd be a very confused student" (Mya, 20, IU).

Conversely, Marie, a UF student going into accounting, succinctly stated the importance of college for her identity development:

I joined groups that tell you more information about how to get in touch with your senators, things like that. I definitely learned a lot about that in college, and learned how to get your voice heard in a place that could be very big, and a lot of people are trying to speak, and they do a good job of that in UF. (Marie, 20, UF)

These quotes reveal that students desire a way to exist that is in line with how they see themselves and the political system. Being able to feel and act in ways that are self-actualizing within the political dimension is gratifying for students; that is the commonality that cuts across all of the student narratives. Yet, the feelings and behaviors that lead to that congruence is different for each student. Likewise, with shifting political contexts, the actions and feelings that lead to congruence at one point in time may not be so at another point in time. That is why this phase serves as both the beginning and end of the cycle.

With the focal point of the model in mind, the remaining features of the developmental process reveal how students navigate the tensions they encounter that cause political dissonance and the tactics employed to resolve these tensions and find congruence within their political identity.

Politically Motivating Experiences

In the process of resolving tensions and finding political congruence, a student will often encounter and begin to make sense of *politically motivating experiences*. Politically motivating experiences emerged from an interview with Emily, a Rutgers student, when she said that a “motivating factor” of her increased political awareness stemmed from her learning more about U.S. foreign policy since most of her family lived abroad. Politically motivating experiences are similar to formative political experiences in that they both frame how students interpret their perceptions about the political system. The fundamental difference between the two concepts is that formative political experiences occur before college, because they come at a time in a students’ life when they are only beginning to explore their agency and independence from their families and other social institutions.

However, many students noted that they perceived politically motivating experiences differently in college as they began to see themselves as autonomous from family structures and other social, cultural, and religious influences (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Sanford, 1966; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). In other words, traditional age college students are in a great state of flux as they transition to adulthood and gain an increased sense of agency. The influx and influence of political experiences during this time has been under-scrutinized as a definitive component of how students come to see themselves as political people moving forward. Additionally, as *the political dimension of campus climate* makes clear, certain spaces on campus bring students into

contact with diverse others in ways that are markedly different from their formative experiences, which tend to be much more homogenous.

Accordingly, politically motivating experiences within a student's college experience plays the role of pushing students into disequilibrium with how they understand the political world. This results in students either thinking differently about political systems, doubling down on what they think and dismissing information that does not square with their sense-making, adding nuance to their level of awareness to incorporate new information. Sharon, a student at UF, recounted a politically motivating experience that led her to think differently about one aspect of the political system:

I think it happened my freshman year when I was really sick and had to medically withdraw. That semester I went through so many procedures. I had so many scans. I had so much going on that I was just like, "Oh my gosh." Then when I got the bill for it, I was like, "Oh my gosh. I'm just going to be sick forever and just accept it." I think when it happens to you, you're more drawn to [certain political issues like healthcare]. This sounds a little ... I really don't know much about LGBT issues and things like that, so I don't talk about it, but with healthcare, it's something I've been through. I've been through the process. I know more about it, and it relates to me. (Sharon, 20, UF)

Politically motivating experiences consist of how students encounter and navigate *political stimuli*. Political stimuli are experiences or events that convey information to students and evoke reactions that have political consequences for both students and their communities. In Sharon's situation, the stimulus was medically withdrawing from college. To better illustrate how political stimuli inform politically motivating experiences, Ashlyn, a UCLA student hoping to become a teacher, describes how college has changed her thoughts about politics:

After coming [to UCLA] and seeing all these issues brought up by students here and then, like, the Ferguson shootings. Did the police really have to shoot this person, kill this person? I'm seeing videos of what actually happened and I'm just, like, wait. All these things... Then these readings, because I've taken Chicano Studies classes, and it's like how they always tell you Chicanos or Latinos are criminals. The whole Donald Trump and criminals. He has issues. All these things that they target us as, but is it that or is it that they just place a lot of emphasis on the crimes that Latinos commit? But they don't see it in the same light when Whites commit the same crimes. That definitely made me question. (Ashlyn, 21, UCLA)

Ashlyn's situation includes four different political stimuli that caused her to question the political system: 1) seeing issues raised on campus, 2) hearing from other students, 3) watching videos, and 4) class discussions. These things taken as a whole constitute a politically motivating experience because they caused her to think differently about the political system or at least question it. Political stimuli are ever present and as the *College Student Political Identity Development* process unfolds, a student's ability to recognize these experiences is enhanced.

The concept of political stimuli most often came up when students made self-assessments about their level of political awareness. The self-assessments were usually made in terms of others in the student's social network. To better understand this aspect, throughout the study, I asked students how they evaluated their level of political knowledge. This response from Abby, a Rutgers student, generally captured the prevailing evaluation from students:

I know the gist of what's going on. I know Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump. I'm keeping up with the race. I'm keeping up with world politics at large. I don't go out of my way to research what most people would think are sideline stories. A very politically engaged person, they know the background of all the candidates. They know more. They just go a lot

more in depth. I feel like I don't go as in depth as a lot of other people do.
(Abby, 19, Rutgers)

All the students recognized that there was always the potential for someone else to know more, as Abby makes clear when she describes her understanding of “a very politically engaged person.” In effect, Abby acknowledges keeping up with political headlines but not knowing much about the details or content of particular political issues. For some students, knowing the headlines was enough to find congruence but for others, the dissonance they experienced compelled them to become more immersed in the political milieu. When this was the case, students would describe how their awareness and knowledge was raised as a result of the different spaces that they operated in. Sharon, a UF student, described how seeing political stimuli on campus impacted her level of awareness:

When you go through Turlington, you'll always see people holding up signs like “Black Lives Matter” and all these political things that I didn't pay attention to before that are coming out now. I think it's good to see what's happening. Even earlier in Turlington they were doing a domestic violence survivors thing. These are issues that we need to pay attention to but sometimes forget about. I think it's good that when you're just walking through campus you get the awareness, and you can learn something on your way to class that's actually of importance. (Sharon, 20, UF)

Another example of political stimuli raising political awareness but through social media came from Chicano Man, a UCLA student, when he described the influence of the Black Bruins video that went viral while he was a student. The Black Bruins YouTube video is a spoken word performance by Black male students at UCLA that was made to call attention to inequities they and other students of color experienced on campus (Mitchell, 2013). Chicano Man explained:

I feel like a lot of people are more aware of our lack of diversity when it comes to people or students of color. I don't know if you remember the Black Bruins video? Yeah, once that came out it got everybody thinking about it. A lot of people of color like myself, had already noticed this. What is this? It wasn't until it came out and people were like, "Wait a minute. This is true." You know? Why is it that there aren't that many people of color here, you know? LA has a high Latino population. A high African American, Black, population. Why is it that they are not represented here? Why is it mostly White and Asian? (Chicano Man, 21, UCLA)

In addition to political stimuli raising awareness, political stimuli can also be perceived in both positive and negative ways. Nia, from Rutgers, provides an example of how one particular political stimulus served as a negative experience when she recounted her time on the social media app YikYak by saying, "I'll be on there and people are just like, oh, if you're a college student you should be a Democrat. After college you should be a Republican." She went on to say, "stuff like that totally confuses me. I feel like, why at different stages of your life do you have to be changing your political views?" (Nia, 21, Rutgers). This experience was one that undergirded her generally negative feelings about politics.

These quotes show that when students encounter political stimuli, they are pushed to reflect on their political understanding and the new information they encounter – setting the political identity development process into motion. Once the process is in motion, the main task becomes trying to resolve the political tensions that the politically motivating experiences creates. The next key phase, *cognitive negotiation*, details how students go about navigating these tensions.

Cognitive Negotiation

As a student encounters politically motivating events, many described a cognitive reaction and a behavioral reaction. The concept of cognitive negotiation demonstrates how students seek to resolve, on an intellectual and abstract level, politically dissonant motivating experiences. In a sense, cognitive negotiation is similar to the concept of “framing” (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Goffman, 1974), in that it captures how students go about giving meaning to and organize underlying political structures, symbols, norms, etc. It is also akin to the idea of “cognitive mobilization” (Dalton, 1984) and the reconciling of various political stories (R. M. Smith, 2003), because cognitive negotiation also describes how students come to understand and discern external appeals to their personal political sense-making.

Cognitive negotiation specifically builds on these ideas by centering how the negotiation process is tied to a student’s attitude of political fluency. Subsequently, the negotiation aspect of the concept draws attention to the agency that students possess or are developing and exert while finding congruence in their political identity. For example, the cognitive reaction to politically motivating events was well articulated by Chris, from IU, when he explained how his political views have shifted from his parents:

Yeah, because once that initial cognitive distance showed up and I was like, wait, both of these can’t really exist at the same time. I can’t be having homosexual feelings and be the same, like, Christian that I was. That happened in puberty and since then it’s like my views have probably gone a lot farther left than theirs are at. (Chris, 20, IU)

In regards to how this cognitive negotiation has continued in college, Chris mentioned that serving as an executive board member for a student organization and dealing with

contentious issues but having to find consensus “forces me to hone what I believe and how to express what I believe, because I wouldn’t have had to before.”

A negotiation alludes to opposing sides, although in this sense opposing does not mean conflicting. The two sides to student cognitive negotiation entails trying to remain “open-minded” while also deepening a student’s feelings or beliefs about political issues. Al, from IU, most efficiently captured this tension to resolving cognitive dissonance while recounting political experiences he has had in the classroom with “liberal” professors:

If [professors] think that’s the wrong viewpoint, they may make you question it. I think that’s a very rewarding thing to have, because no ideology should ever go unquestioned. You should always be seeking to look into your ideology to see, “Well, is there a better way to think about this? Have I become too entrenched in thinking this way and I’m putting the blinders on, I don’t want to look at anything else?” (Al, 21, IU)

He continued: “just keeping an open mind and seeing – in fact, when you question it, you can make those viewpoints even stronger if they hold up to scrutiny. It’s the scientific method, really.”

Most students maintained that their college experiences had not substantially changed their political thinking. As Katie’s quote below shows, for most students, when they realize that they did not fully comprehend a political issue, they seek to add nuance to their political beliefs, not necessarily change it. The context of the interview was that at the time, Katie was studying abroad in the United Kingdom and began telling me about writing a paper on the U.S. parental leave and child care policy. She went on to say:

I’m volunteering here for an organization. It’s called The Women Equality Party, and I’ve been doing a lot of policy research on UK issues like child care, and maternity leave, and things like that. It’s just funny

because before I came here, and before I started working on these projects, I thought I had a great understanding of these systems in [the U.S.] context, and I really didn't. I really don't, and I'm learning how much I don't know. (Katie, 21, IU)

She stated: "I try to keep pushing myself, even on issues that I think I'm an expert in, even things like abortion. I continuously try to read, like, my Google Alerts." The reason that many students wanted to learn more and add nuance to their political thinking was most often to be able to defend their ideology and beliefs to those who disagree. In response to how he plans to remain politically engaged, Chicano Man said:

The next year I want to go to Washington D.C. I feel like I want to open my mind a bit more. I rarely, like, to go into a battle unarmed. I want to learn more before I can actually start the fight. (Chicano Man, 20, UCLA)

For students whose political identity was not as salient, their cognitive negotiation was more about filtering and clarifying their thoughts and beliefs and less about trying to assert or defend their sense-making. The following passage from Genevieve, from UF, exemplifies this dynamic. In response to how salient her self-proclaimed political label of being a "tempered radical" was, she explained:

I'm not ... Like, if someone asked me my identity I would be like, "I'm a cis, queer woman." Stuff like that, rather than like, "I'm a tempered radical." Probably not super important, I would say it's more important in how I filter how I think. It's kind of ... It's not an identity that I'm consciously aware of, but that I think a lot about and think through, like as lens to understand the world. (Genevieve, 21, UF)

Compare that to Katie's response, who was introduced earlier and was very intentional about navigating her cognitive negotiation. She declared in another part of the interview, "Just in terms of social identity, like social identity and political identity for me are very closely linked" going on to state:

I don't see myself putting on the reproductive justice hat, or putting on the Democratic hat and taking it off. That is my head. That's who I am. That is part of the fabric of my body and my being. (Katie, 21, IU)

The cognitive negotiation or the reflective process of dealing with politically motivating events that students described was key moment in their development of a political identity because it shaped their thinking and sense-making. The differentiating aspect of cognitive negotiation for students was in part their modifiers that will be explored later in this chapter and also the level of intentionality that they conjured to resolve political tensions that they encountered. For some resolving the tension was necessary because their understanding of political issues was central to how they saw themselves. For others, resolving the tension helped them move along to finding congruence but it was not a central to their identity development. For these students, a behavioral response to politically motivating experiences was a critical factor in helping them move towards congruence. *Applying political identities* emerged as the phase that aptly defines how students sought to resolve dissonant experiences by taking action.

Applying Political Identity(ies)

Dissonant experiences stemming from politically motivating events cannot always be fully resolved on a cognitive level. Students frequently recalled *applying their political identity*, or taking political action, broadly defined, as a critical way for them to clarify their political identity and find congruence. This concept is related to Binder & Wood's (2013) "political styles" that students enact depending on their unique campus context but it extends the notion of political performance by conceptualizing student political activity as a means to an end, not solely an end in and of itself. Put differently,

applying political identities or engaging in political activity is a way (means) for students to find congruence (end) within themselves. Not just an interpersonal response to their political context.

This is an important nuance because students can apply their political identity in both collective and individualized ways. Accordingly, to be in a place to apply their political identity, students had to at least have a cognitive understanding of what they would find to be both psychologically and behaviorally congruent. Hence, why cognitive negotiation precedes this dimension. A quote by John from UF, highlights the linkage but difference between cognitive negotiation and applying political identity. His response is to a question about if he took political action, as he defined it. He initially responded with hesitancy that he had started a blog about educational policy, but as we continued to discuss why he saw that as political action, his evolving response was revealing:

I don't really know, at least with the blog. I don't think I have my own political aspirations behind writing the blog. Again, it's more for my own academic purposes of just understanding the issue itself. It's not really targeted as, "Oh, I'm supporting X candidate because he supports this educational policy." I don't think I define it as political action in that sense because again, it's there to help better my academic understanding of the educational issue. But for educational policy, it's definitely something that I would take action about. Educational policy and I think the campaign finance system is definitely something I would and plan and would like to budget some time out to actually go out there and do that. I know there's a couple different groups on campus that actually do that, and now it's just a matter of just dedicating myself to it and putting it on the schedule. Those are, I think, two big things for me, is educational policy and the campaign finance system. (John, 19, UF)

John recognized that writing the blog was more of a cognitive exercise to work through dissonant experiences, whereas he espoused a desire and intent to take actual action.

There were many students that were actively applying their political identities. For

example, Jennifer from Rutgers exclaimed, “well, I lead an organization. I’m vice president of an organization, students for environmental awareness. We do a lot of campaign work and advocacy activism.” When asked what she gains from getting to enact her political identity, Jennifer said:

I think the only thing I really get out of it is that I get to see people’s point of views more directly. I get to see how the political system works, and the whole bureaucratic system that is Rutgers University. I think I kind of just get into the circus and understand how the system works better. (Jennifer, 21, RU)

There are other benefits that are afforded to students when they apply their political identity. For example, Kenneth, a student at IU, is a part of a group that advocates for 2nd amendment gun rights for students on campus. He explained that one way he applied is political identity was by leading and participating in an empty holster protest. He explained:

Well, the holster protest takes place all over campus, because the deal is you wear an empty holster and just wear it everywhere you go. That’s with spatially classrooms, on my bicycle, all over the place. (Kenneth, 24, IU)

When asked what he learned from this sort of political action, he said:

I think the most important result out of all this is that I really learned how to be a little bit more diplomatic in talking with people, because it’s great in that I can have one viewpoint that’s completely pro-gun, pro-concealed carry and I can any day of the week or in the course of [working for student organization], I can be arguing, debating and talking with somebody whose viewpoint is completely opposite, there’s no guns in America whatsoever. And I’ve learned to have a democratic conversation with them instead of just getting in a yelling match, and I’ve learned to say things like ... to pick on things. Like I could come out and say, “I think your opinion is wrong and I think you’re stupid and I think this and I think that.” I could say that, but instead I say, “Let’s hold on a second and let’s say what’s the most diplomatic response I could get at this.” Instead I say, “Why do you think that way or why do you think this way? Have you considered this or have you considered this?” If it hadn’t been for the

political action, that thought process might not have happened within me. (Kenneth, 24, IU)

However, it is also important to underscore that applying political identities is not always a positive experience in the political context (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970). In response to saying that she had volunteered in the community, Sophia, from UCLA, recounted:

That's one way I feel like I help, but I feel like I'm not making that large scale. When I think of my political identity, I'm not one who's out on the streets protesting. That's just not my space. Sometimes that's some guilt I have too, especially because we'll have ... When I think about diversity issues on campus and we still see things about Asian Americans being posted on flyers on the walls here or Black students are being more recognized for their sport achievements. I'm not out there walking ... Because I'm in class, because I feel like, how can I help other people if I haven't even helped myself yet? To me, sometimes I question, am I being selfish in that? Why am I waiting to have my things completed and then help out? (Sophia, 21, UCLA)

Additionally, students made efforts to complicate notions of how they could apply their political identity to reformulate what it means to take political action. This nuance stands in contrast to the way that scholars sometimes prescribe to students the types of political activities they can participate in. For instance, Chris from IU, detailed his political action by saying:

I would say I'm more comfortable ... I'm more comfortable writing about something than demonstrating. Yeah, I would say my political action usually happens through individual conversations and seeing people's opinions and me explaining mine and why it might be different. That's probably the most political action that I have, because I don't feel comfortable ... I feel like there is room for misinterpretation if I put a bumper sticker on my car, if I demonstrate somewhere, which to a lot of less moderate people is definitely a form of regression or like a big setback. I have to think about that and try to think about, but I think most of my expression comes through writing, but when I wrote for the student paper, I didn't write for the editorial staff. I would rather kind of learn more about issues, because I'm uncomfortable ever setting ... Well, maybe not ever, but setting a definitive opinion and publicizing it, because I

imagine it's probably going to change in the future. I don't post on social media very often about political topics. I will follow them and read other people's posts. (Chris, 20, IU)

The totality of these examples illuminate that students respond to dissonant politically motivating events by enacting their political identities. This performance of their identity is then evaluated by them to determine whether or not it is congruent with their perception of the political system and how they see themselves within that system. Furthermore, applying their identities can lead to both skill development or increased apprehension. Differences among students within this concept are tied to *where* a student tries to enact their political identity and the internal and external feedback they perceive in relation to the action they took. For students like Kenneth, applying their political identity moves them toward psychological and behavioral congruence because of the positive learning experience they have as a result of taking action. Whereas, for students like Sophia, their actions do not resolve dissonance or create a new dissonant experience and lead them to questioning themselves and trying to either change their action or thinking to eventually find congruence. The next section explores important modifiers to the process that also factor into a student's political identity development.

Modifiers

Two important modifiers also emerged during data analysis that acted as important guardrails to how students moved along in their identity development and adds important gradations to the aforementioned core category and phases. The modifiers are fully entangled within the identity development process but are their own entities with separate but overlapping developmental trajectories. This is a critical component of the model

because it underscores how a person's political identity is simultaneously distinct from their other identities or aspirations while also being shaped and formed by them.

Salient Social Identities

Many of the students that were in the study spoke of other *salient social identities* (e.g., religion, race, sexual orientation, immigrant status, gender, etc.) as informing how they thought about and engaged politics (Abes et al., 2007; K Crenshaw, 1991). For example, Joseph from UF, when asked about whether he identifies with a political label or not, responded by saying:

As a Black, I really think of my demographics, and understanding my political demographics also, so as a young, Black college student at such a liberal school it's very easy to just see democratic or see liberal right now. Also, as someone that does more than just normal research on politics, I get a little bit more, I guess the word isn't very liberal, I guess it's more progressive. But then as a Haitian, very Catholic, I'm a Catholic person, I'm also more conservative. For me, it's very, very hard to define. I don't see myself falling in a direct spot, like this is where I want to be for the rest of my life if that makes sense. (Joseph, 21, UF)

This quote underscores the complex interplay of choosing a political label that accurately reflects a student's understanding of their other social identities and their perceptions of the prevailing norms and discourses that make up the political system. Unlike other social identities that are ascribed to students, a student's political identity is one that they subscribe to and hone over time. This means students have agency to present themselves in any way they see fit to find congruence between their other social identities and their political identity. The following quote from Katie, an IU student who categorized herself as a White female on the demographic questionnaire, highlights how fluid the subscription aspect can be:

I generally say I am left, but I also have used the term progressive Democrat, and I've also used terms like feminist socialist. It just depends on what the context is, but I really like what Hillary Clinton said of it when she said in the last debate about being the progressive who likes to get things done. I think that that's going to be my new mantra. I'm the lefty, progressive who likes to get things done. (Katie, 22, IU)

In this one quote, Katie describes herself in four slightly different ways: 1) "left," 2) "progressive Democrat," 3) "feminist socialist," and 4) "lefty progressive who likes to get things done." Her understanding that how she presents herself in different contexts means that she might need to describe herself in nuanced ways to make sure she is feeling congruent in those respective contexts. This is a prime example of how a student's social identities moderate their cognitive response but also intersect with the different levels of the political dimension of campus climate. How Katie identifies in public spaces is different than how she identifies in semi-public/private spaces, and is different than how she identifies in private spaces. This is not Katie being inauthentic; this fluidity speaks to the complexity of political identity and how relationally and contextually situated the concept is for students.

Not only does the influence of a student's other identities inform their political identity, it also influences the application of their political identity. Asmara, a UF student who described herself as a Black female Christian, had a particularly illuminating response to being asked about how she sees herself in the political system:

Maybe a couple years ago, I would say, Liberal, but now that I see what Liberal means, in terms of ... I'm a Christian. I still hold Christian values, but I still believe in progression of health care and stuff like that, so there's a lot of things that I think that need to be changed, but because the morals are changing of the country, as a body, I think I'm more of a Conservative now, in terms ... If I was going on a scale of how the political schism is, or how they're going today, I would say that I'm

probably Conservative. Conservative-Middle, like Moderate Conservative. (Asmara, 19, UF)

In regards to how she enacts this identity in her college experience, she went on to say:

It really just depends on the question, the person that I'm talking to. Well, I won't say the person, because the answer doesn't change, but I'd say the conversation. If it's on something, like, I know, something really big right now is the LGBTQ community and if it's something like that, then a lot of times, I do waver in the conservative ideal but I do know ... I won't say I'm more accepting, but now I'm more aware of how other people perceive that and how I'm more aware of other people's experience in that. It's more so, just I'm very free. I make sure that I don't attach. I don't try to hold on to a certain thing. I know some people are like, if I'm Conservative, everything I stand for has to be conservative. (Asmara, 19, UF)

Different from Katie whose salient identities were her gender and race, Asmara relates how her salient religious identity informed how she enacts her political identity around LGBT issues. However, she still acknowledges how she moderates her response depending on the space she is in. Another subtlety is that sometimes a student's salient identities increased their dissonant experiences and led them disengage from the political system in order to find congruence. Nia, a Black female student from Rutgers stated:

I'm a closeted Republican, at times though. I don't know, there's just certain things that I feel like I want my Republican leader to do and then there are certain things I feel like I want a Democratic leader to do. I like to consider myself a moderate, but that's also why I just keep my mouth shut. I'm like, you know what, I'm not going to get involved. (Nia, 21, Rutgers)

This quote shows how Nia receives messages about what it means to Black and what it means to be a Republican and to resolve the tension, she chooses not to be politically involved. Similarly, Lus, who described her salient social identities as a Latina/Salvadorian female and spoke about how her formative political experiences were

related to experiencing sexual violence as a teen and her dad being deported from the country. This led to her “negative view of the government” and she would later say in response to how she enacts her political identity:

I don't identify with a political party. I just think there're so many problems with the political system here and I've had people like my partner, and he'll be, because he knows that I don't like to define. Neither does he, but he's, “Oh, yeah, but you're more liberal.” I'm just, but I don't like to put labels on it, because that's one of the problems with having these political parties, I think, because if you want to call yourself Republican, then you feel like you're forced to agree with some of the values or ideals that Republicans usually agree with when that's not always the case. That shouldn't be the case. That you identify with a political party, that shouldn't mean that you don't have your own decisions on how you need to feel about something. Yeah, like I said, I don't identify with a political party, but obviously I have political opinions on these political things. If I'm asked about something, then I'll just answer honestly how I feel or I'll tell you, “This is how I feel about this issue.” (Lus, 25, UCLA)

These quotes illustrate that how a student navigates acquiring an attitude of political fluency towards finding psychological and behavioral congruence in the political system is highly affected by how a student understands their social identities and their political perceptions. For the students where at least one salient identity was a minoritized³¹ identity, there was an increased likelihood that they would highlight how their political identity development was impacted by having to also navigate various hegemonic oppressive forces, such as patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, racism, nativism, etc. Student's social identities modified both cognitive and behavioral responses and

³¹ I use the term “minoritized” in agreement with Harper's (2012) explanation that not all persons are minoritized in all contexts, but are deemed minorities in particular institutional contexts that sustain hegemonic forces.

clarify more of why there was such variability in where students were in terms of the development of their political identity.

Career Aspirations/Purpose of College

The other important modifier in a student's political identity development process was their career aspirations and how they viewed the purpose of college. This served as a guardrail for students, because it moderated what they chose to get involved with and subsequently where and how they spent their time. For example, the last chapter highlighted when Gary from UCLA admitted that as a STEM student he rarely visited the north side of campus where more of the humanities and social science students took their courses. Part of the underlying dynamic is the structure and climate of the institution. The other aspect is Gary's career aspirations and his beliefs about the purpose of a college education. To this end, almost uniformly, when asked what they believed the purpose of college to be, the conversation went as follows:

Demetri: What would you say is the purpose of a college education?

Abby: To get you a job after you graduate.

Demetri: Okay, where did that message come from? Where did you pick that up?

Abby: No, in an ideal world the purpose of a college education would be for you to... I honestly believe that you should go to college to expand your mind. (Abby, 19, RU)

This exchange is emblematic of the influence the neoliberal forces into education that promote career and technical training at the expense of more holistic and critical education experiences (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2002; hooks, 1994b; Slaughter & Rhoades,

2004). Destiny from IU echoed this sentiment bemoaning, “[the purpose of college is] very abstract. I’d like the answer to be learn specifically about the profession that you want to pursue. I know that the real answer is just to get a degree, just to be financially stable and average” (Destiny, 21, IU).

As these quotes bring into focus, each student in the study brought up this tension where on one side, they felt the need to be in college to gain the skills to become gainfully employed or go on to graduate school after graduation. On the other hand, they also felt a need for their college experience to be about more than just going to school to get a job. Some students like James, unabashedly felt that college should be about the latter. In regards to being asked about what his college experience has been like for him at UCLA, he responded:

I’ve met a lot of people who are smarter than me. I’ve met a lot of people who are different from me, and I’ve met a lot of people who are similar to me. I think that being able to broaden your perspective beyond your own, especially at a public institution, gives you the ability to function as a valuable citizen in a democratic society. I think that just being exposed to different fields of research, different people with different walks of life, because I don’t think that theory alone is sufficient to inform me of what I decide to do. I think that as far as politics is concerned, it’s important to also take in lived experiences. Being able to empathize with others, I think that’s probably the biggest concern of mine. (James, 22, UCLA)

Xalis, a student at UF had a very different view of the purpose of college. He detailed at length:

[The purpose of college is] simply to get the piece of paper in order to be able to go onto the next thing, and there’s this libertarian I like who’s his next book is on the college, and he says is that there’s a lot of evidence for this that, that getting the degree significantly increases your earnings and it does so a lot more than just three years of college. It’s the degree itself that seems to be the important thing, and the theory about this is that it’s

the degree signals that you're smart, that you can follow orders, that you're driven.

It's a really expensive IQ test, as one might put it. That seems to be what college is. It's just a really convoluted weeding out process so that the cream of the crop graduates college and then if you want the cream of the crop, you go find a college graduate. I hope that that mold is broken by things like online education or code school, but for what I want to do, I need a degree and I need to go to college for another five years to get the PhD, and then I'll be able to get a job researching economics and politics. (Xalis. 20, UF)

Despite the differing views from James and Xalis, they both went on to articulate how their aspirations and view on a college education influenced their politics. The following passage by Elaina, an IU student, provides evidence for how the majority of students make the connection between their aspirations and view of college and their political congruence:

No, I think they're definitely related, because I do think college is about making the world a better place. Not necessarily the world, but doing what you can to make yourself and those who come after you better. I think that's what politics aims to do. Politics aims to take something, whether it be a small campus organization or the President of the United States, his goal is to make the world a better place, and so it's people's way of choosing how to do that. And that's where those different issues come into play. (Elaina, 20, IU)

Where students got these messages from about the purpose of college was highly varied. Most pointed to pressures from their parents or discourses about the state of the economy they were familiar with from traditional and social media avenues. The critical point that these quotes highlight is that how students articulated the purpose of their education was related to how they went about acquiring an attitude of political fluency and what would help them feel psychologically and behaviorally congruent in the political system. This also begins to clarify why students fall into many different places

in their political identity development because students who take a more expansive approach by getting involved, interacting with others, have more increased opportunities to experience politically motivating events, respond in cognitive ways, and to apply their political identities in an effort to find congruence.

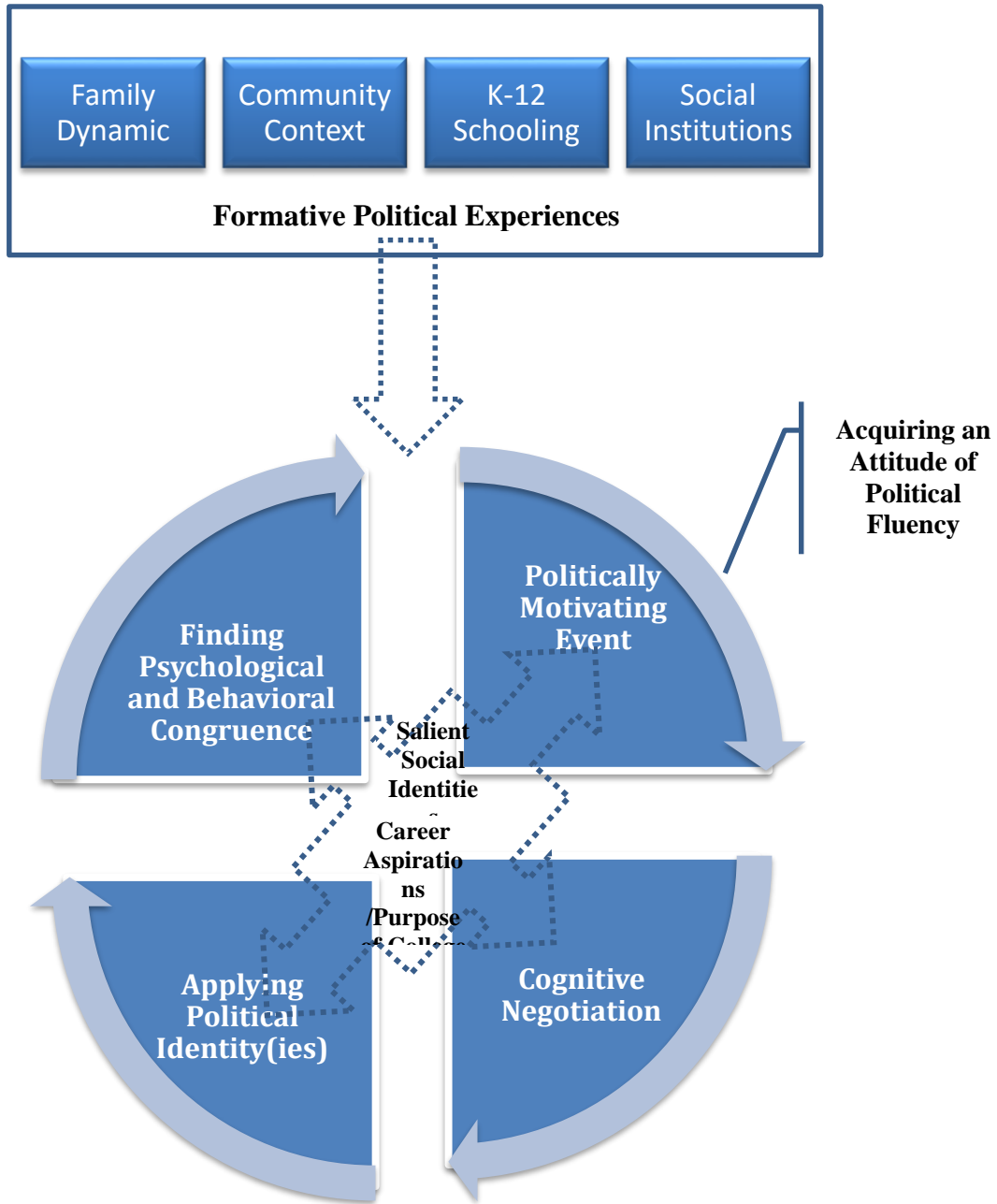
Summary

This chapter unveiled the model of *College Student Political Identity Development* and supporting evidence from many of the participants in the study. Figure 5.16 combines the various components of the model to illustrate how they fit together to form the developmental process. The process emerges from formative political experiences, or the knowledge and perceptions about the political system that students bring with them into the college setting. The central underlying task of developing a political identity in college is that of acquiring an attitude of political fluency or the increased ability to understand and navigate political systems that one operates within. The acquisition of an attitude of political fluency begins with a student experiencing a politically motivating event, or a situation that pushes a student into political disequilibrium as they grapple with their preconceived notions about their political perceptions and behaviors and new political information that must be processed.

Politically motivating events can lead to two responses, one on a cognitive level and the other being a behavioral response. Cognitive negotiation, is how students navigate their knowledge, feelings, and emotions, whereas applying political identities, helps students understand how their actions contribute to their understanding of themselves and the political system. This all leads to the focal phase of the process,

finding psychological and behavioral congruence within the political system. This phase alludes to the desire of students to resolve dissonant experiences but also connotes that in the midst of searching for congruence, the developmental process could be set in motion again. How a student understands their other salient identities and their view of the purpose of college serve as two important modifiers to the process. The modifiers can either propel or restrain the developmental process and thus serve as enmeshed guardrails to the developmental process.

Figure 5.16: Model of College Student Political Identity Development



Chapter VII: Discussion, Implications, Future Research and Conclusion

Given the lack of theory about the ways in which institutions within a democratic society contribute to how people come see themselves as political beings, this chapter intends to build on current literature to advance what is known about higher education's role in a diverse democracy. First, the findings from the previous two chapters are summarized and integrated to make the clear argument that institutions of higher education both perpetuate and remediate political inequities in the U.S. political system. The varied political outcomes witnessed in society among college educated individuals are the result of the structure, culture and climate of an institution coupled with the unique characteristics, skills, and experiences students bring with them to, and develop during, their time in college. The chapter then engages current literature in disparate but relevant disciplines and fields to augment and supplement what is known about aspects of higher education, student development, institutional space, and larger neoliberal forces. This discussion funnels towards implications for policy and practice that stem from this study's contributions to knowledge. The chapter closes with an overview of the study's limitations and future research that would address the issues raised.

Towards a Theory about the Role of Higher Education in a Diverse Democracy

Integrating the *Political Dimension of Campus Climate* & College Student Political Identity Development Process

The research questions that guided this study were: 1) What is the process of political identity development for actively involved sophomore and above students at 4-year, not-for-profit, public institutions in geographically diverse regions of the United States of America and 2) In what ways does an institution's structure and culture shape the political identity development of students? The *College Student Political Identity Development* process emerged in response to the first question. The process explains how students come to develop political identities while in college as a result of the development of an attitude of *political fluency* that they have accrued and are able to wield in a given political context. This process is modified by their salient social identities and career aspirations/view on the purpose of college. Secondly, the findings from a systematic review of the four state socio-political environments and the institutional cultures and climates led to the development of the *political dimension of campus climate* and a typology of the levels that make up this concept. Braiding the findings together reestablishes that students have and exert agency as they develop political identities. However, less apparent to students, but also made clear from these findings is that their agency is constrained not only by their modifiers but also the political dimension of the campus climate and culture.

Students who develop an attitude of political fluency are better positioned to overcome these constraints. Yet, who has the ability to accrue an attitude of political fluency is not equitably situated in society, much less on college campuses. Resultantly, these constraints at times compel some students to find psychological and behavioral congruence by disengaging from the political system while others go on to master how to navigate, manipulate, and attain desired outcomes from the political system, often to the detriment of those that disengage. Thus, it is imperative to acknowledge and affirm a student's sense of agency in their political socialization while also attending to the forces, spaces, and experiences that influence a student's political socialization and (re)produce political inequities. Put simply, contrary to prior research, most students in this study did not just take on the political attitudes and practices of their precollege upbringing and opportunities for political socialization are not created equal. As a result, institutions of higher education both perpetuate but also have the capacity to remediate political inequities in a diverse democracy.

The Façade of Neutral Space

One way institutions perpetuate political inequities is by assuming that the policies they set or resources they provide that intersect with the political dimension of campus climate are neutral, meaning that they influence students in similar ways. For instance, the findings noted how differently students perceived demonstrations a campus permitted in public spaces like free speech zones. Less apparent are the political implications of the type of faculty an institution hires or the type of student an institution enrolls. These and related actions that structure the culture of the campus are not neutral

political stances or actions. The different levels of the *political dimension of campus climate* are all influenced by different aspects of the institution and have material effects on how students develop their political identities. When we assume that these realities are politically neutral, political inequities are able to persist because institutions do not intentionally work to understand or respond to the political ramifications of their influence on different levels of the *political dimension of campus climate*. Like Lus or Ashlyn from UCLA, oftentimes students are then left to their own devices to respond to the political dimension of their campus. Some students are able to effectively navigate these spaces while others disengage, as Joseph and Destiny illustrated. Thus, it is critical to disrupt and reimagine the concept of neutrality in both the cognitive and spatial sense of the word and how it shows up on campuses.

This finding consistent with previous research on organizational theory and the campus climate literature in higher education that asserts that students can be differently affected by the same spaces and experiences (Hall, Cabrera, & Milem, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2012; Rankin, 2005; Reason & Rankin, 2005; Tierney, 1997; Torres et al., 2003). Within the *political dimension of campus climate*, the outcome of this reality is that since a student's attitude of political fluency is varied and their ability to shift their attitude is stratified due to the dynamics of the spaces they operate in, if institutional actions are assumed to be neutral the inequities that existed upon a student's arrival into a particular space, are likely to remain.

Remediating Political Inequities

However, the second key concept that shows how higher education's role in a diverse democracy is that these spaces can serve as sites where students are actively developing attitudes of political fluency by having the chance to cognitively negotiate or apply aspects of their political identity. For instance, students in the study noted that student organizations served as important experiences wherein they were exposed to peers with different views that induced them to explore their previously held political ideas. Consistent with previous research, student organizations are a quintessential space within a campus context for student development (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reyes Verduzco, 2015; Terenzini et al., 1998). In this study, students reiterated that opportunities to challenge their previously held political beliefs and/or enact their political identity in ways that felt affirming helped to resolve dissonant experiences. Likewise, the findings recount experiences on campus that propelled students to question political norms or to grapple with material in a class that challenged their political sense-making. As students were able to navigate and resolve these cognitive or behavioral impasses, they often felt their identities were aligned and became more confident in their political understanding of themselves and their skills. Consequently, institutional contexts and the culture and climate of a university can also serve as a way to remediate political inequities if and when institutions are structured in ways that make the types of experiences and opportunities students articulated as being useful more equitable by through increased availability, accessibility, and political scope.

At the end of almost every interview participants noted that the interview was the first time they were systematically reflecting on their political perceptions and understanding in their college career. This indicated to me that there is great potential for faculty and student affairs professionals to more readily invite students to process their political sense-making. Some students seek this out with friends, but that often means they are only deeply engaging with like-minded peers. To effectively respond to all the various ways students may develop their political identities, institutions need to proactively think about how they use their institutional influence. The Political Engagement Project (Colby et al., 2010) demonstrated that systematic and intentional efforts by institutions can yield positive outcomes for students political engagement. It stands to reason that similar efforts tailored to help students explore their political identity might also be beneficial. There is a small but growing chorus of scholars and practitioners focused explicitly on “political learning” (Reyes Verduzco, 2015; Thomas, 2015) in higher education or the way institutions integrate political debates and issues into the curricular and cocurricular experiences of students as one approach. If campuses can take up these recommendations while centering student political identity, a wider array of students will have access to the experiences and opportunities necessary to find congruence for themselves in the political system.

Contextualizing Student Development

Finally, the third strand that ties the findings together is how the socio-political environment of the state constantly shapes and reshapes the *political dimension of campus climate* and thus influences student political identity development. Torres, Jones,

and Renn (2009) contend that “the role of environment in identity development remains undertheorized and understudied” and go on to call for studies that “contribute substantively to what is known about how specific environments and changes in the environment interact with identity development processes” (pp 591-592). The findings from this study show why institutions must account for the influence of larger political trends and discourses on the campus climate and student’s experiences. This dynamic is evidenced in the pronounced ways that students articulated how discourses on national or state level issues become localized on their campus and in their experience. For example, for students in Indiana seeing the Supreme Court rule that gay marriage was legal in all states and then to see their state pass a law that seemed to try to limit the impact of this judicial interpretation was a politically motivating event for many.

Some responded by getting involved in campaigns to protest the law and others just clarified for themselves whether they supported gay marriage or not. Previous research has documented how the socio-political environment affects other aspects of an institution such as budget and finance issues (Heck et al., 2012; Koven & Mausolff, 2002), academic governance (McLendon, 2003b), and faculty labor (Kezar, 2012; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), but this study is one of the first to theorize about how the socio-political environment of a state influences how student’s develop while in college. This is a critical step in the advancement of student development theory as few identity theories are simultaneously intersectional and situated at the juncture of the micro, meso, and macro environments of an institution (Abes et al., 2007; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Torres et al., 2009).

Summary

The aforementioned assertions form a triad that presents the contours of the paradox of positioning institutions of higher education as a “defining site for learning and practicing democratic and civic responsibilities” (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, p. 2). While there is great potential and capacity for institutions to actualize the desired outcome of contributing to the public good by helping to develop people that are equipped with an attitude of political fluency to respond and address changes in a democratic system (Matthews, 2009), institutions are doing too little to substantively address the dynamics and forces that compete and undo efforts by institutions and students to advance the democratic purposes of higher education (Hurtado, 2007; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). In other words, the normative assumptions that faculty, administrators, policymakers, students, the media, and the broader public have about students’ political identity, the political dimension of an institution’s climate and culture, and the socio-political environment does little to disrupt and in fact, at times, perpetuates higher education’s inability to serve as a site of democratic learning and practice. If the role of higher education in a democracy is indeed to contribute to the public good and remediate political inequities, then there is a need for integrating this more nuanced understanding of college student political identity development and organizational theory in higher education to other areas of scholarship to anchor this framework in a larger dialogue about the ways in which democratic theory and practice can be enhanced. Consequently, the next section delves into three key areas

that that are concerned with the potential and capacity of democratic institutions to alleviate problems of a democracy that systematically disenfranchise members of society.

Discussion: Bridging the Role of Higher Education in a Diverse Democracy to Existing Literature

Complicating Research on Political Group Membership

One of the central roles of higher education in a democracy is moving towards equitably aiding all students in their political identity development (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). It is important to state though that the development of a political identity for students is not solely about political group identification, but it can be an important aspect for some. Given the preoccupation with political groupings in political science, it is critical to interject nuance about the role higher education plays in the socialization to political labels and groups (Huddy, 2001). As students noted throughout the study, how they resolved dissonant political experiences was influenced by their cognitive negotiation, how they saw themselves applying their political identity, and the context they were in. Identifying with a political group was one tool students had at their disposal to navigate dissonant experiences in both a cognitive and behavioral way. A student must learn what different political labels mean as well as the characteristics and behaviors that people who subscribe to those labels typically enact (Huddy, 2001). Hence, identification with a party is one manifestation of a person's political identity, not the totality of it.

As Chapter II touched on, the idea of socializing people into the political groups, norms, customs and ideologies of a society is an interdisciplinary area of literature that is contentious and rife with gaps. On one hand, there are scholars who contend that partisan group identities are paramount to a person's political identity because of their utility in helping people make political evaluations and judgments (Biezen & Poguntke, 2014; Borre & Katz, 1973). Yet, research on party dealignment in the U.S. context has tracked the increased likelihood of people to use political group labels such as "moderate, independent," or a similar term to convey their political practices, sensibilities, and understandings as not fully encapsulated by the norms of the two major U.S. political parties, the Democrats or Republicans (Dalton, Flanagan, Beck, & Alt, 1984; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Dalton, 1984). The most recent surveys of college freshman corroborates this dynamic in the higher education sphere as 44.9% of respondents characterize their political views as "middle-of-the-road" (Eagan et al., 2015) compared with only 31.4% who did so in 1970 (Staff of the Office of Research, 1970). Political scientist Russell Dalton (2013) who has done much work in this area argues somewhat persuasively that the reason for the decrease in party identification is due to the combination of motivation and his notion of "cognitive mobilization" or the idea that due to increases in education:

people now possess the political resources and skills that better prepare them to deal with the complexities of politics and reach their own political decisions with less reliance on affective, habitual party loyalties or other external cues. (p. 186)

Dalton (2013) describes those that are cognitively mobilized and politically motivated as "apartisans" or political independents that are engaged, rational, informed, and untied to a

political party. However, throughout his work, Dalton (2013) takes for granted what the theory of higher education's role in a democracy makes explicit – that education generally and higher education in particular, is not politically neutral or equitably experienced by people in a particular educational context. Hence, when Dalton (2013) asserts that the implications of party dealignment and the rise of apartisans is the remaking of the norms of the electoral and political engagement landscape, it is crucial to question for what groups and in what contexts this may be true. This is one area where the modifiers of a student's political identity development expose important nuance within a student's educational experience that many take for granted. Education and motivation are important to political identity and engagement as having an attitude of political fluency makes clear and corroborates part of Dalton's (2013) thesis. Yet, if education and motivation are moderated by a student's salient intersectional identities and this influences them to experience their education differently, then it is dangerous to conclude that *only* education and motivation lead to the development of apartisan traits or affiliation with any political label. Additionally, educational experiences are contextually bound as the *political dimension of campus climate* and the state socio-political environment make evident. Thus, without fully accounting for modifiers and the context of where educational experiences are taking place, on a state and local scale, creating a new political demographic, even if it is political scientists "ideal rational type" of voter, continues to marginalize certain students and leads to the perpetuation of political inequities.

An illumination of some of the problematic challenges associated with the intersection of party identification and education, yet, the reminder of the normative role party identification plays in a democratic system means that a more complex examination is warranted. Given the issues associated with tacit party identification, other scholars have sought to focus more on “deeper political processes through which particular political regimes and membership positions, and also distinctive senses of collective political identity” serve as outcomes and tools of a respective political community (R. M. Smith, 2001, p. 73). The role of higher education in a diverse democracy is to help students better understand how they intersect with, navigate, and can change the political systems that operate within. The intrapersonal process of developing an attitude of political fluency and resolving dissonant political experiences is a fundamental precursor to but overlapping process to a person identifying with a political grouping. This complex process is highlighted when situating the *College Student Political Identity Development* process next to Smith’s (2001, 2003) theory of how people come to develop commitments to different political communities.

This area of scholarship does not take for granted that political groups exist as a normative institution in a democracy and focuses on how those groupings are formed and why people come to associate themselves with particular groups. Smith (2001) contends that particular human associations, groups, or communities become “political people or communities”:

when [they are] a potential adversary of other forms of human association, *because* its proponents and adherents believe its claims can legitimately trump many of the demands on its members that are made by other associations [emphasis original] (p.74).

Hence, Smith (2001) argues that there are varying “senses” of political peoplehood ranging from strong to weak. Strong senses of political peoplehood are characterized by “a distinct society that is entitled ultimately to override the claims of not just many but all other groups. Its rules or laws are the ones that they must obey. It is the community for which they should be willing to fight and die. (R. M. Smith, 2001, p. 74). The premise of this framework rests on the idea that political communities are the product of “long conflict-ridden histories.” “created via asymmetrical interactions between actual and would-be leaders of political communities and the potential constituents for whom they compete” and finally, leaders and constituents of a community “have agency in the forms of peoplehood they support” (R. M. Smith, 2001, pp. 75–76). From this foundation Smith (2001) advances five points that begin to intersect with the theory of higher education’s role in a diverse democracy:

1. In the politics of people-building, competing narratives, accounts, or stories of peoplehood advanced by present or potential leaders necessarily play a prominent role
2. Leaders seek both to prompt constituents to embrace membership in the community or people they depict, and to persuade them to accept as leaders the very sorts of persons who are advancing these people-building accounts.
3. The politics of people-building is always an ongoing as well as a competitive politics, even within apparently well-established and unified political communities.
4. The politics of people-building always involves both maintenance and modification of pre-existing senses of political identity.
5. The politics of people-building almost inevitably centers on senses of peoplehood that are to a significant degree exclusionary.

To effectively advance this politics of people building then, Smith (2001) argues that leaders and constituents must convey and find agreement on issues of trust and worth. Accordingly, to Smith (2001) trust alludes to the sense constituents of a group have their peers and leaders will seek to advance the interests, values, or identities of the group. Worth (broadly defined), alludes to the sense that a group has the capacity to *succeed* in advancing their aims. Consequently, Smith (2001) argues that there are three types of stories, economic, political power, and constitutive, that when intertwined have the ability to inspire trust and worth and as a result build political communities with constituents that have strong senses of their political peoplehood. Economic stories promote trust and worth by arguing that political groups can advance the economic well-being of constituents (worth) and that this advancement positions leaders and group members to continue to advance these ends (trust). Political power stories suggest that leaders and members will exercise their power through institutions and policies that preference members of a political community (trust) while also enhancing their political power (worth). Finally, constitutive stories are those that present political group membership as inherent to who a person is along ascribed and subscribed to social identities. These provide trust through shared experiences and worth through socially constructed value that is afforded to certain social identities.

Smith (2001) goes on to question “what sorts of economic, demographic, and social conditions and contexts are conducive to particular sorts of combinations prevailing peoplehood” (p. 84). While Smith’s (2001) analysis focuses largely on the role of “leaders” in combining and conveying these stories, the theory of the role of

higher education in a diverse democracy begins to make it clear that democratic institutions, such as higher education, serve as a key contributor to the promulgation of stories of trust and worth in political communities. However, Smith's theory assumes the intrapersonal development of a person and focuses on the interpersonal jockeying of a person and the potential political group memberships they may affiliate with. Put plainly, my study argues that a person must understand their political identity *before* they can participate in a political community. Thus, the theory of higher education's role in a diverse democracy build's on Smith's (2001, 2004) theory by uncovering the separate but overlapping processes of developing a political identity while building political community.

In other words, acquiring an attitude of political fluency and resolving politically dissonant experiences may be another way of viewing how one comes to gain a strong sense of their political personhood. In a sense then, the cognitive negotiation and application of political identity that a student goes through to resolve dissonant experiences is an effort to make sense of and navigate the economic, political power, and constitutive stories that they encounter. Both Smith's and my theory should be considered co-processes because not all students were concerned with identifying or clarifying their affiliation with a political community. Although, it was evident that they were still responding to and operating within a political system where political communities exists. Thus, it is critical to view the concepts of trust and worth within a developmental framework where the meaning of those concepts may change over time and draw meaning from their context.

Take for instance the concept of worth. One of the key modifiers of the *College Student Political Identity Development* process was how students viewed the purpose of college coupled with their career aspirations, which may inform how a student understands political community appeals that seek to convey notions of worth. The tension of seeing a college degree as either a means to job or an opportunity to experience a well-rounded education is an example of an economic story that students encounter modified by their understanding of their constitutive stories, that together shape their political development in college and how they see the worth of a college education and higher education in general. These narratives come both from the leadership and rhetoric of state governors/legislatures as the socio-political environment findings showed but also from the subtle and overt shifts in how institutions operate and structure themselves as the strategic plans and capital campaigns from each campus made evident. This economic and constitutive story then is also conveyed as a political power story as a result of the neoliberal forces exerted by certain groups in society that have pervaded higher education and shape the institutions and experiences that students have (Giroux, 2002; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

For example, Rhoads and Slaughter (1997) argue that as most institutions have embraced academic capitalism, and in a society where corporate employers are seen as higher education's customers (rather than a focus on advancing the public good (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011)) and students are the input and product of institutions, there is an increased focus on improving the "input" or type of student that gains admission to the institution, rather than on equitably educating students. Not only is access to

education affected but students' experiences within an institution are impacted when institutions endorse policies and make changes that serve the interest of the private sector to the exclusion of a focus on the public good (Marginson, 2011; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). However, there are many on the conservative side of the political spectrum both in and outside of education who laud these shifts as efficient and in the best economic interest of students and their families (Loss, 2012; McLendon, 2003a, 2003b; Pusser, 2003). By examining both the building of political communities and the development of a political identity, it becomes more clear how forces inside and outside an institution differently affect groups versus individual students. For instance, the idea of neutrality of political space is supposed to convey to groups on campus that the institution does not endorse one over the other. From the institutions point of view, this aura of neutrality enables campuses to not alienate consumers such as businesses or legislators who may not support certain political activity. Yet, as the findings showed, students on an individual level experience the campus differently, even from someone else who may associate with a similar political community. Thus, it is critical moving forward that theories concerned with political membership attend to the cognitive and intrapersonal realities a person encounters as much as the interpersonal groupings and boundaries that make up the current landscape of the political science literature.

Civic Literacy → Political Fluency

A major contribution of the *College Student Political Identity Development* process is the core category of acquiring an attitude of political fluency. The utility of political fluency as a concept is that it centers a student's agency in their development

while recognizing that that the skills and dispositions needed to navigate the political system are not inherent. A person learns how to effectively move through the unique political systems they operate in as they experience and resolve political dissonance. As the previous section shows, this unfolds on both an interpersonal and intrapersonal level and political fluency is the bridge between the two. An attitudes of political fluency pushes against deficit narratives of youth or students being “disengaged” (Levine, 2013; Niemi & Hanmer, 2010; Snell, 2010; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Rather, an attitude political fluency shifts the field by pushing scholars and practitioners to better understand what students’ intended political outcomes are coupled with their knowledge and skills. For example, if a student like Lus is consciously choosing to not vote because she thinks the system is corrupt and voting perpetuates that, seeing her as disengaged belies the fact that she has some pretty critical insights on the democratic system in the U.S. Likewise, as other findings highlighted, often students assess their political activity in terms relative to their peers. Thus, a dichotomous classification of politically “engaged versus disengaged” creates an artificial threshold, usually based around voting habits, that is then placed on student’s political understanding and engagement, rather than meeting students where they are at politically.

This analysis is similar to Henry Milner’s (2002) critique of Putnam’s (2000) social capital. Milner (2002) argues that viewing political participation through the lens of social capital is problematic because the idea of capital suggests that it is “stockable” by people in a given political community. In other words, if a student were to be involved in five student organizations, given Putnam’s (2000) logic, we would expect them to be

five times more civically engaged than a student who is only involved in one student organization. In contrast, Milner (2002) calls for a shift to the concept of “civic literacy” which denotes those in a society “possessing the knowledge required for effective political choice” (p. 55). To operationalize this term, Milner (2002) focuses on survey questions that assess the factual political knowledge of respondents and indicators of cognitive proficiency in reading, math, and science. Based on the strong negative relationship of average voter turnout with citizens lacking basic literacy skills, Milner (2002) concludes that a focus on civic literacy is indeed a fruitful way of measuring and predicting political participation.

While I concur with Milner’s (2002) critical evaluation of social capital as the preeminent measure of civic engagement, the concept of civic literacy is also severely limited when juxtaposed with an attitude of political fluency. Knowledge is critically important, but it is only a piece of the puzzle when a student is constructing their political identity and subsequent political activity. An attitude of political fluency combines a student’s intended political outcomes with their political knowledge and ability to develop and use their skills to resolve dissonance. In contrast, Milner (2002) quips that a person is “either literate or they are not” (p. 55), which may seem true when simply measuring literacy in quantitative ways. However, this study shows that there are complex ways that students display and enact their political knowledge and that may not always manifest in voting or political knowledge that can be measured. An attitude of political fluency captures this by placing students on a continuum that recognizes that what may resolve dissonance for a student may entail them disengaging, it centers the

student's self-concept, not just their knowledge, skills, or motivations. Correlating civic literacy with reading, math, and science should also be challenged since it has been established that the development of these fundamental skills is not equitably accessed in the U.S. (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Consequently, some students have to work differently to acquire an attitude of political fluency than do other students and civic literacy as a concept does not account for this. Given the issues raised with both social capital and civic literacy, shifting towards the concept of an attitude of political fluency may be a productive way for scholars and practitioners to contend with the complexities that students are facing.

Politics, Campus Climate, and Campus Space: The Necessity of the *Political*

Dimension of Campus Climate

The final point of discussion that the role of higher education in a diverse democracy induces me to revisit is the role of political space on campus. The *political dimension of campus* climate is an important contribution to the campus climate literature because it establishes a spatial reality that students experienced and articulated as having material effects on their political identity. Conceptualizing political space on campus as public, semi-public/private, and private, enables scholars and practitioners to be more precise when thinking about the influence and outcomes that certain spaces have on different students. While the Multicontextual Model of Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE) recognizes the role of the socio-political environment via what their model terms as the “policy and socio-historical context,” the MMDLE does not consider the

political dimension *within* the institutional context (Hurtado et al., 2012). In *Becoming Right: How Campuses Shape Young Conservatives* Amy Binder and Kate Wood (2013)

pick up on and respond to this oversight. They assert that:

political action is the result of shared understanding about the larger world held by people in interaction who know each other well, and who talk about the ideas and practices that are most appropriate for their group setting (Binder & Wood, 2013, pp. 315–316).

In explaining why similar Conservative student organizations operated very differently on their respective campuses, they go on to simply conclude that campus culture and peer interactions produce certain styles of political activity (Binder & Wood, 2013). What their analysis omits though is that student organizations operate within the semi-public/private level of the *political dimension of campus climate*. As the findings from this study make clear, students are able to self-select into certain spaces, like student organizations, and thus have more agency in shaping the culture of this space and who they interact with relative to public spaces on campus or other semi-public/private spaces such as class rooms. Likewise, students may not also choose to enact their political identity in a collective fashion. Sometimes, for students like John and his political blog, enacting their identity can be an individualized exercise. Thus, an acknowledgement of the level of *political dimension of campus climate* that a student is operating in most frequently is important to take into account as each space has its own subculture, inhabitants, and outcomes. Furthermore, Binder & Wood (2013) do not account for the nuance of whether students are consumers or producers within a particular space. With an emphasis on the conservative styles that their participants enacted, they take for granted that students in their study appear to be producers. What about students

(Conservative and other) who take more consumption stances when they interact on campus and may not identify with some of the provocative (e.g., affirmative action bake sales) or intellectual (e.g., hosting debates) ways that their peers choose to produce their conservatism on campus. While there is indeed fluidity in the consumption and production stances within a space, it is nonetheless important to understand how political identity may manifest differently depending on how a student is accustomed to approaching a space.

Finally, the Binder and Wood (2013) theory assumes that campuses have similar influence in all spaces when they paint with the broad stroke of “campus culture” without attending to the nuance that exists within. How an institution chooses to structure the general education curriculum and programs of study for a student is going to have different effect on a student’s political identity than is a student’s engagement on social media or the amount that they discuss politics with friends in their residence halls. Accounting for these differences may seem intuitive, but similar to Binder and Wood (2013), far too often campuses are treated as political monoliths and broad calls for renewing commitments to the public good that democratic engagement purports to bring about rarely make efforts to connect and intentionally craft strategies that promote political learning with the various levels and stances students take within the *political dimension of campus climate* (Levine, 2013; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012).

Implications

The previous sections establish the numerous ways in which a more sophisticated understanding about the role of higher education in a diverse democracy fills intellectual gaps and moves the study of democracy and higher education forward. The illuminated role of higher education in democracy also has important implications for both policy and practice. This section is broken into two relevant stakeholder groups that will find specific recommendations based on the findings and analysis of this study.

The previous sections establish the numerous ways in which a more sophisticated understanding about the role of higher education in a diverse democracy fills intellectual gaps and moves the study of democracy and higher education forward. The illuminated role of higher education in democracy also has important implications for both policy and practice. Based on analysis from this study, I am calling for a renewed focus on political pedagogy in higher education that promotes politically dynamic and inclusive institutions. A political pedagogy is one that is concerned with “putting into place spaces, spheres, and modes of education that enable people to realize that in a real democracy, power has to be responsive to the needs, hopes, and desires of its citizens and other inhabitants around the globe” (Giroux, 2010, p. 108). Politically dynamic and inclusive institutions are where student affairs professionals, faculty, policymakers, and students work together to infuse a political pedagogy into the culture and climate of both curricular and cocurricular spaces in order to help institutions remediate political inequities. Politically dynamic and inclusive institutions recognize that students are at different points in their political identity development while being able to recruit the

required resources, people, and spaces that help move students along in their political identity development towards congruence. Politically dynamic and inclusive institutions are also spaces where tension and disagreement are encouraged and worked through without devolving into ad hominin attacks. Furthermore, in politically dynamic and inclusive institutions, faculty and students with diverse political ideologies and political activities are called into the campus community, rather than called out for their non-normative political identities or actions. Finally, institutions that are politically dynamic and inclusive are not satisfied with surface level indicators of political disengagement among students. Institutions that are committed to remediating political inequities work with disillusioned and cynical students to reflect on and eventually channel their sentiments into activities or practices that disrupt the political status quo and move towards a political system where they want to participate in. Taken together, this type of campus culture and climate is one where there is more of a focus on the process of political learning and the many opportunities for reflection and political meaning-making, rather than simply a focus on being neutral or just supporting students' political performance. The rest of this section is broken into three relevant stakeholder groups that will find more specific recommendations on how they can contribute to politically dynamic and inclusive institutions.

Student Affairs Professionals

Often in graduate programs student affairs professionals learn about race, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, religion, and other key social identities that students possess (Evans et al., 2009; Flowers, 2003; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). However, very

rarely, if ever, is student political identity discussed or talked about in the field. Similar to the literature base, in practice there is a focus on political activity, with implicit assumptions about how students come to arrive at enacting certain styles of political activity (Barnhardt, 2015; Binder & Wood, 2013; Reyes Verduzco, 2015). Consequently, it is imperative that student affairs professionals seek to understand how a student's political identity may be informing how they choose to engage outside the classroom and the ways their political identity could be shaping interactions with their peers. To this end, higher education and student affairs graduate programs must better prepare oncoming professionals to engage in political discussions with colleagues and with students in an effort to help students reflect and resolve the common occurrence of political dissonance. Specifically, course readings should include topics on the socio-political environments of different regions of the country and the political socialization of students. Furthermore, graduate training should normalize political discussion and model systematic reflection of political sense-making in order to help practitioners better understand their own attitudes of political fluency.

In addition, student affairs professionals should consider reviewing spaces on campus for the political messages they are or are not sending and no longer treat spaces as politically neutral. Asking students on their campus how they experience different spaces in a political way would go a long way in helping disrupt political norms on campus that are privileging some students and marginalizing others. For example, Kenneth, the student at IU that advocated for the concealed carry of guns on campus, noted how difficult he found the process of registering his student organization and

challenges his group faced being able to demonstrate in the ways they wanted.

Institutions must balance efforts to appear content neutral with intentional institutional support of students and student groups in ways that are equitable. Different student groups and students need different supports in the political realm and providing those supports does not necessarily mean that the institution is endorsing one political view over another. Quite the contrary, when political students or student groups do not have knowledge of campus policies, the neutral stance inherently privileges students that do know how to navigate the institution. Consequently, a group advocating for guns on campus may need extra support as the students involved in the group may not be made of student leaders who are accustomed to the rules and regulations of the campus. To deny extra support for these students under the guise of wanting to appear neutral sends messages to students about what the institution does and does not value and that is a political statement that could influence how a student understands their attitudes of political fluency and ultimately to their disengagement from political systems.

Relatedly, student affairs professionals should interrogate their own political identity development and acknowledge how it may be affecting their work with students. Often, student affairs professionals get messages that they must be view-point neutral in their dealings with students as an extension of campus regulations and policies (Morgan & Orphan, 2015). That stance is political in and of itself and conveys to students that only certain people on their campus are open to political conversations or interested in their political identity development. Not having student affairs professionals who are willing to engage students' sense making about how they are developing attitudes of

political fluency leaves the development of a student's political identity to happenstance. By understanding their political biases, student affairs professionals can work to remain aware of how they are hurting or helping students that are developing their political identities by understanding how they are involved in the developmental process. Specifically, student affairs professionals should consider what issues they may agree or disagree with students and what issues they feel comfortable discussing with students and in what spaces on campus they find these conversations to be appropriate. Then student affairs professionals should consider how frequently the practice having challenging conversations and work to build their political pedagogy by attending national conferences such as the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement conference put on by NASPA. In addition, student affairs professionals should take stock of current socio-political issues and intentionally check-in with students they work with to allow time and space for students to reflect and learn from the issues that are happening around them. For example, the student led Black Bruins Matter protest at UCLA would be an important topic for student affairs professionals to reflect on with both students that were involved but also with students that were not.

Finally, student affairs professionals must devise ways to evaluate and assess political learning. Much has been gained in the areas of diversity and student leadership because tools have been developed that help student affairs professionals speak to the impact that they are having on students in those domains. The same needs to be done for political learning and political identity development or the concept will have difficulty gaining traction as a fundamental concern for student affairs professionals. Student affairs

departments could devise specific political learning outcomes at the beginning of the year and then evaluate whether those goals were achieved. For instance, once a month a student affairs staff member could be designated as the political point person that holds office hours for students to come and talk about how they are experiencing politics on the campus environment. Information from these sessions could be compiled and used to inform strategic plans or the development of programmatic outcomes.

Faculty

Despite the overwhelming evidence that the professoriate is a very liberal profession (Bennett et al., 2012; Gross, 2013), the idea that this means students are more likely to become liberal was not present in my study. What is probably more concerning is that for many students, particularly in the STEM/Health fields, they could navigate most of their academic career without a substantive political discussion in the classroom. By substantive political discussion, I mean the type of classroom activity or debate that serves as a politically motivating experience for a student because it challenges their current political perceptions, attitudes, and actions with new information that they have to try and find congruence in. While students do develop political identities while in college, the notion that they are easily indoctrinated elevates a deficit view of a student's political agency. In other words, it suggests that students are unable to acquire an attitude of political fluency that aligns their self-concept, motivations, skills, knowledge and actions in ways that are self-determined by them and not an external source. Thus, I call for faculty to make connections between their subject matter and the political world more readily apparent. Inviting differing political opinions and pushing students to reflect on

their sense-making regardless of their political identity. This call is no different than the best practices found in many curriculum and pedagogy texts (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994b). Yet, very few faculty members receive training on how to teach or structure their courses for transformative learning experiences due to the way that graduate training socializes oncoming faculty towards focusing more on research than honing their pedagogy (Gardner, 2008). It is not surprising then faculty member's political biases come across to students in ways that are not effectively translated into learning opportunities. If all courses are treated as potential sites for politically motivating events, then training faculty members receive around teaching should equip them with the skills to help students reflect on, make sense of, and enact their political identities.

In order to best help faculty foster political learning, faculty senates and faculty associations such as the American Association of University Professors must continue to fight for tenure and tenure-track positions for faculty. One explanation for why political learning is not more centered in the classroom could be because faculty fear that getting too political could put their jobs in danger. Recent examples of politicized attacks on tenure in Wisconsin and the dismissal of Steven Salaita from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign because of political tweets that detractors used to called into question his ability to foster a safe learning environment underscore the importance of tenure protections. These instances have undoubtedly led faculty across the country to question whether it is worth it to engage students in political learning that could come back to haunt them. The essence of tenure for faculty members then, manifested in the

classroom space grants them protections and the relative peace of mind to explore controversial political topics with students. Relying on graduate students and contingent faculty labor, as all four of the institutions in my study are guilty of, as are many other institutions, undermines an institution's ability to create classrooms spaces that are transformative. Institutions interested in fostering political learning should affirm their commitment to tenure and provide workshops that help faculty understand how tenure should be used in the classroom to help fostering transformative political learning experiences for students.

Additionally, faculty need to be cognizant of the political implications of their course content, research, and pedagogy. Social science faculty tend to be more aware of these issues given their subject matter, but it is imperative that all faculty make intentional and systematic assessments of their courses and teaching style in order to better understand and prepare for how different students might be influenced by learning from and working with them. Students in the study spoke highly of faculty that were explicit about their political biases but were also able to encourage students to be explicit with their political sense-making. These faculty were open to a range of political opinions or interpretations on course content and were unafraid to play devil's advocate to stoke discussion. It is much more challenging to foster course activities that affirm differences in opinions than it is to write students off as wrong or uninformed. Hence, faculty need professional development and training, whether through centers for teaching and learning or departmental meetings, that challenge them to build the skill-sets necessary to foster political learning for a range of students with different political identities.

Policymakers

Given the findings of this study, state legislators and campus administrators need to balance affordability concerns with issues of access. As the strategic plans from each of the institutions in the study made evident, all of the campuses are engaged in efforts to raise their institutional profile. These actions are corroborated, through funding allocations, by the state legislators and have led to a shifts in the student profile or what type of student ends up on campus. These direct and indirect efforts shape the student body and who students on campus end up coming into contact with, ultimately shaping their political identity. If policymakers are concerned with developing students that are engaged citizens, it is vital that the student body is reflective of the diversity of the state and the country. Yet, policymakers should not be satisfied with representational diversity alone. There needs to be funding for programs and initiatives that help students interact with and learn from students that are different from them. Capstone projects done in teams, common reading programs, and first-year experience courses are good examples that could be augmented to more systematically integrate and take up political issues. Relatedly, policymakers need to be just as attuned to the makeup of the faculty and staff of an institution.

Finally, high-impact practices such as study abroad, undergraduate research opportunities, internships with political organizations, and service-learning that engages political issues in a community need to be supported and aligned in ways that can foster political learning. Students at Rutgers spoke of the Eagleton Institute of Politics and students at UF spoke of the Bob Graham Center for Public Service as quality examples of

campus spaces that offered multiple touch points for students to learn, think through, and enact their politics. The capacity of these types of centers though needs to be expanded to not only cater to students with established interest in politics but to also help students learn about the intersection of politics and their respective interests, whatever those interests might be. Policymakers interested in fostering political learning on campuses need to create or elevate the role of these types of campus spaces and ensure they are well resourced and have the opportunity to collaborate and interact with a range of campus stakeholders and departments.

Future Research

With the budding theory of the role of higher education in a diverse democracy that this study produced in mind as well the separate strands of the *College Student Political Identity Development* process and the *political dimension of campus climate*, there are numerous avenues for future research. These include efforts to study different institutional types and different regions in the U.S., focusing on deeper explorations of different student populations and nuances of their political identity, developing constructs that can measure student political identity or a multi-institutional survey of civic and political engagement, and investigations that lead to a more sophisticated understanding of campus space. The purpose of this study was to reveal the role of higher education in a diverse democracy. While this aim was addressed, the following research areas will enhance this study by adding additional rigor and credibility to the findings and interpretations and the development of a research agenda that positively influences higher education and the U.S. democracy.

Explore Different Institutional Types and Regions

This study focused on large, public, flagship-like, institutions. As has been established by others, there were more differences within the institution than between (Kuh et al., 2010; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014). This approach was useful in getting to hone in on institutional similarities that cut across all of the institutions and led to creation of the *political dimension of campus climate*. However, would this be the same for private institutions (religiously affiliated and otherwise), minority-serving institutions, regional comprehensives, community college or for-profit institutions? The U.S. system of higher education is very large and diverse, so to substantiate the findings of the study, it would be critical for future research to engage different institutional types. This could lead to a comparative analysis that fleshes out the unique aspects of different institutional types that leads to a more comprehensive picture of how the entire system of higher education affects democracy in the U.S.

Additionally, this study focused on four regions, midwest, south, west coast, and northeast. There are other regions (e.g., Northwest, Southwest, Mid-Atlantic, Plains) of the U.S. where this study could be replicated to ascertain how the socio-political environment of those areas informs that institutional context and *political dimension of campus climate*. Furthermore, other studies could focus on specific regions or states and look at different institutional types within that geographic space.

Focus on Different Student Populations

Another important line of future research is to investigate the political identity process of different populations in greater detail. This study took the approach of

sampling a wide-array of students rather than focusing on a particular student demographic. Despite this, differences around gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other salient identities campus up. Future studies could center these identities and add greater complexity to the political identity by better understanding how the modifiers actually modify the students' political identity. Other populations that need attention include adult-learners in higher education, veteran students, and students that engage their institution mostly online. These experiences were not captured in my study but other research points to these students existence on many college campuses (Hall et al., 2010; Kuh et al., 2010). Additionally, using critical theories or methodologies might be another way of interrogating some of the dynamics of how social identities influence the developmental process that were not explicitly dealt with in this iteration of the research (Carspecken, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hernandez, n.d.; B. A. Levinson, 2011). Finally, following students over time in a longitudinal fashion could also illuminate how different characteristics and experiences continue to influence their political identity over time.

Development of Quantitative Constructs or Multi-Institutional Survey

Of the major national surveys that exist in higher education (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Higher Education Research Institution (HERI) Freshman/Senior Survey, Student Experience in the Research University (SERU), etc.) only a few items are concerned with political engagement. Often, researchers have to combine various measures to construct proxies for political engagement (see Binder & Wood, 2013; Dodson, 2014). It is important to note that these surveys each collect data

and study students for different purposes. NSSE, for example, broadly looks at the way students' engagement with college campuses leads to a host of desirable educational outcomes. HERI on the other hand studies the impact of college on students. If higher education's role in a diverse democracy is to remediate political inequities – understanding how institutions are contributing to this end on a wide-scale is increasingly important. The findings from this dissertation show that student political identity development is an important part of student engagement and the impact of college.

However, these national surveys need better ways of measuring student political identity development and engagement. Based on concepts this dissertation developed, such as the model for *College Student Political Identity Development*, new frameworks could be employed for adding more precise items and constructs to these national surveys which will help researchers understand the political environment, engagement, and development of college students. The power of these surveys to influence organizational change at institutions is undeniable and while part of me rejects the essentializing effects of survey administration, the other part understands that as a member of the higher education research community it is important to find constructive ways to improve these prominent surveys.

It may also be worthwhile to develop an independent instrument that is solely focused on student political and civic engagement, in response to the growth of service-learning and calls for higher education to embrace the “public good.” Accordingly, future research could involve developing and validating a multi-institutional survey that is focused on civic engagement with a subsection focused specifically on political

identity development. Constructs could include exposure to politically motivating events, opportunities to reflect on political sense-making and/or apply their political identity while in college. This could reveal important aggregate trends about what is happening on college campuses in the political dimension and what institutional practices best support political identity development. Coupled with other qualitative forms of research, institutions could then better allocate resources to helping students develop political identities and assess changes they have made over time to ascertain if they were improving on intended areas.

Reinvigorating Research on Campus Space

The final area of future research will inform both the political identity and campus climate literatures. The *political dimension of campus climate* revealed that where and with whom students spend time with informs the development of their political identity. Yet, often research does not conceptualize students' experiences in a spatial sense. In other words, we know that students operate in different spaces, but we do not attend to how those spaces are differently structured. In this realm, much can be learned from urban planners, geographers, and sociologists that employ geographic information systems (GIS) to better understand how, where, and with whom people interact with in given spaces.

Likewise, a research agenda in this area could track students' use of and experiences in different types of spaces while in college. By making space the unit of analysis, a researcher can then scrutinize the political dimensions of the space for example or explore what types of students operate in certain spaces and why. Often,

when people question why certain students do not exist in a given space, the blame is placed on students. Shifting to better understand campus space can help deconstruct how implicit norms of the climate and culture of certain spaces make it feel welcoming for some students and not for others.

Study Limitations

There are five key limitations of the study that are important to make clear as a reader engages with the findings, analysis, and interpretation of the study. Bear in mind, as detailed in the trustworthiness section, that painstaking effort was put into mitigating many of these challenges but every research study has numerous flaws that must be accounted for in a transparent fashion. First, as a Black, temporarily able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gender, “well-educated,” conservative-leaning, U.S. male-citizen, the interpretations and findings in this study are decidedly colored by my socialization and worldviews. Similarly, I attended two of the institutions as a student and have spent significant time on a third. This intimate access while useful in many ways, might also have closed me off to data or findings that a person who was less familiar with the contexts may have seen. Therefore, a different person could look at the same data and come up with an entirely different process or set of concepts during analysis. Hence, it was imperative to engage in member-reflections and use critical inquiry groups to help insure that others were seeing what I was seeing in the data (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). Second, while the student sample of the study is highly diverse, there are still some student identities that are not reflected. For example, the political identity development process may unfold very different for adult-learners or veterans.

Hence, the call for future research that seeks to remedy this limitation by expanding the types of students studied. Third, on the institutional level, I only sampled large public universities. Many other institutional types exist and it would be unwise to suggest that these four campuses represent what is happening on all campus types across the country. Consequently, my push for research that attends to different institutional types and regions responds to this limitation.

Another concern some may have is the use of language in the study that suggests causality. Rather, my study illuminates the relationship between experiences, concepts, and spaces that students articulated. The theory that has been produced is plausible but at this point, it should not be mistaken for a grand or formal theory (Charmaz, 2014). Multiple lines of the future research will need to build on this study before a grand theory can be claimed. Finally, the interview protocol asked students to reflect over their life-span. This means that students may have brought up different experiences had they been asked these questions in the moment due to recall bias. Also, students may have found different aspects of their political experiences to be salient and not shared other aspects during the interview because of wanting to provide socially desirable responses. This was why member-reflections and encouraging students to edit their transcripts was useful to capture information that did not come up originally. Although it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of the study, the important contribution this study makes to advancing knowledge around college students and democracy remain.

Conclusion

In the midst of such a unique presidential election cycle, working on this dissertation has been enlightening because it has enabled me to see how a budding cohort of people in society think about and make sense of the political system in the U.S. While many are concerned about the future of the politics in the U.S., my participants leave me hopeful. They are smart, politically engaged in various fashions, and for the most part care deeply about much more than getting a job. Yet for far too many students opportunities to continue to develop their political identity are beyond their grasp, unbeknownst to them and through no fault of their own. In a member reflection email exchange with Sharon from UF, she wrote the following:

The processes described do relate to my college experience. I became more involved once I saw other people being involved and being in areas (such as Turlington) where political agendas were discussed. It made me want to learn more about what was happening. Career aspirations are also important. As someone who wants to go into medicine, I should definitely be more aware about health policies and how politics will affect my career.

This reminds me that so much political development is already happening on campus in haphazard ways. This also keeps me wondering how much more could and should be done with some intentional focus from institutions on fostering political learning in the public and semi-public/private spaces on campus. Hence, first and foremost, this study describes and explains the current ways students develop political identities at four campuses in geographically diverse regions of the U.S. It adds students' narratives to a body of research about student political engagement that up until this point has decoupled political identity development and political engagement. It also asserts the great potential

of institutions to more intentionally respond to the pernicious shifts in democracy that privilege some people and marginalize others. My hope is that this study sparks a research agenda that fleshes out how institutions can become an exemplary democratic institution that remediates political inequities in spite of declining resources and the objections of cynics.

Appendix A: Student Recruitment Email to Nominators

Email Address: <INSERT EMAIL ADDRESS>

Subject Line: Request for Nominations of Students for Dissertation Study on Student Political Identity Development

Greetings <INSERT NAME OF NOMINATOR>

My name is Demetri L. Morgan and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. I have received IRB approval from my institution and permission to engage your institution from your <INSERT VPSA NAME> to embark on my dissertation project. My study is focused on exploring the political identity development process of seniors at public flagship institutions in four different states. My goal is to develop a theory of political identity development based on interviews of a diverse array of seniors who are actively involved at the institution.

I am writing you today in hope that you will be willing to help me conduct my study. I need help identifying actively-involved seniors at your institution so that I can contact them to be interviewed for my study. Do any actively-involved seniors come to mind that you think might be able to speak about their experiences at <INSERT INSTITUTION>? They need not be politically active necessarily, just engaged in the culture of the institution.

Additionally, I plan to visit your campus this coming fall and would love to briefly interview you (no longer than 30 minutes), in an effort to get multiple perspectives about the climate and culture of the institution.

I understand that you are probably very busy, so any assistance you can provide would be greatly appreciated. More information about the study is attached to this email for your reference.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I look forward to working with your institution and appreciate your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Demetri L. Morgan

Doctoral Candidate – Penn GSE

Research Associate – Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education

Pre-doctoral Fellow – Penn Alliance for Higher Education & Democracy

(c) 561-271-9930

demetrim@gse.upenn.edu

Appendix B: Types of Student Organizations Contacted

- Asian-American Student Union
- Black Student Union
- College Democrats
- College Republicans
- Green Student Organizations
- Hispanic Student Union
- Interfraternity Council (IFC)
- Inter-Residence Hall Association
- Large (50+ members) Religious Student Groups (Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Judaism)
- McNair Scholars Program
- National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)
- Panhellenic Association (PHA)
- Pre-professional Student Organizations
- Student Government Association

Appendix C: Student Recruitment Email to Students

Email Address: <INSERT EMAIL ADDRESS>

Subject Line: {ACTION ITEM} Request to be Participate in New Study on Student Political Identity Development in College

Greetings <INSERT NAME OF NOMINATOR>

My name is Demetri L. Morgan and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. I received your name from <INSERT NOMINTAOR NAME> – OR – I found your name on your institution's student organization website and am contacting you because you seem to be an ideal candidate to participate in a study I am doing about the ways that students develop their thoughts and beliefs (i.e., their political identity) about politics while in college. My study specifically focuses on seniors at public flagship institutions in four different states, and it's the first of its kind! My goal is to develop a theory of political identity development based on interviews with students such as yourself that are really involved at their institutions.

I am writing you in hopes that you will take 10 minutes out of your day to take this short questionnaire <LINK TO QUESTIONNAIRE> to help me get a better understanding of who you are and to make sure I get a diverse sample of students from your institution. Once I review all of the questionnaires, I will follow up with certain students and to arrange in person interviews to be held when I visit your campus in <INSERT MONTH>.

Having been a former student leader myself, I understand that you are probably very busy so your participation is greatly appreciated. More information about the study is attached to this email for your reference.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Demetri L. Morgan
Doctoral Candidate – Penn GSE
Research Associate – Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education
Pre-doctoral Fellow – Penn Alliance for Higher Education & Democracy
(c) 561-271-9930
demetrim@gse.upenn.edu
PoliticalIdentityStudy@outlook.com

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

SPID - UF Questionnaire

Q1.1 Student Political Identity Development in College:

Study Information – You are invited participate in a dissertation project conducted by Demetri L. Morgan, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania under the supervision of Matthew Hartley, a professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

Purpose of the Project – The purpose of this project is learn more about how the college experience influences people’s political identities. You do not have to have an interest in or prior knowledge of politics to participate.

Potential Risks and Discomforts – The potential risks involved in this project are minimal. Of course, it is possible some participants may experience some discomfort thinking about difficult or troubling political conversations they have had with family or friends.

Potential Benefits – You will not benefit directly from your participation in this project beyond having the opportunity to share your experiences with the interviewer. However, there is the intrinsic benefit of knowing that you will be contributing to knowledge that will be used to enhance how institutions contribute to the political development of college students. Thus, the primary beneficiaries of your participation are other students and your institution in that information derived from this project will be used to inform research and practice on campuses across the country.

Voluntary Participation – Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with the university. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, which you are allowed.

Questionnaire Procedures – The information you provide on this survey is being collected to help me sample a diverse array of college students for follow up interviews. Identifying information will only be seen by me, and numerous steps are being taken to insure your confidentiality (e.g., data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive). However, if you disclose illegal or dangerous behavior during the interview (e.g., serious harm to yourself or to others), ethically, I must report this information to the appropriate university and law enforcement personnel.

Q1.2 I’ve read and understand the information above:

- Yes
- No

Q1.3 Do you consent to participating in this study:

- Yes
- No

Q2.1 What is your:

Full Name:
Age
Hometown
Home State

Q2.2 Including this year, how many years have you been enrolled at UF:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

Q2.3 What is your current major:

Q2.4 What career field do you hope to work in post-graduation:

Q3.1 In one to two sentences, explain why you chose to attend UF:

Q3.2 For this academic year, where are you living:

- On campus, alone
- On campus, with roommates
- Off campus, alone
- Off campus, with roommates
- Off campus, with your family
- Other

Q3.3 When on campus, where do you spend the majority of your time?

Q3.4 Have you lived abroad while in college for either academic credit or service:

- Yes
- No

Q3.5 Thinking about your time at UF, how often would you say you participate in the following experiences:

	Not At All	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Undergraduate-Faculty Research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Organizations/Clubs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Service-Learning (e.g., Courses that link classroom and community based experiences)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious/Faith Activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political Activity or Activism on any level (e.g., Student Government, working on a campaign, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3.6 Currently, what student organizations or clubs are you most involved in (when possible please spell out acronyms):

Q4.1 Do you identify with a political party?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q4.2 Which political party do you most align yourself with?

Q4.3 In a typical semester, how often would you say you discuss politics with:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classmates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus administrators (e.g., hall director, student services, staff, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People unaffiliated with the university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4.4 Based on your understanding of “Liberal,” “Moderate” and “Conservative,” How would you describe the political culture of:

	Mostly Liberal	Somewhat Liberal	Moderate	Somewhat Conservative	Mostly Conservative	N/A
Gainesville	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your hometown (if different from Gainesville)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Florida	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your home state (if different from Florida)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4.5 What is ONE social or political issue you are passionate about:

Q5.1 Which of the following social media sites are you active on (i.e., check daily):

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat
- Google+
- Tumblr
- Vine
- YouTube
- Other

Q5.2 Which of the following social media sites do you receive political news or information from:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat
- Google+
- Tumblr
- Vine
- YouTube
- Other

Q5.3 Which traditional media sources do you receive political news or information from:

- Newspaper (virtual or paper)
- Magazine (virtual or paper)
- Radio
- Cable News Television (e.g., CNN)
- Political Commentary Shows (e.g., The Daily Show)
- In person events / rallies
- Billboards / Paper Advertisements / Signs

Q6.1 What is your gender identity:

Q6.2 What is your race/ethnicity:

Q6.3 What is your sexual orientation:

Q6.4 Do you identify with a faith or religious community? If so, which one:

Q6.5 Do you have a disability (e.g., physical, learning, mental, emotional, etc.):

Q6.6 Do either of your parents/guardians have a college degree?

- Yes, Both
- Yes, One
- No
- Unsure

Q6.7 How many siblings do you have:

Q7.1 Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview:

- Yes
- No
- Maybe, I'd like to learn more before I decide

Q7.2 What email address do you check most frequently:

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Student Political Identity Development in College Study: Introductory Script (to be read to each participant):

Hello, my name is Demetri and I am a doctoral student in the higher education division at the University of Pennsylvania. I am working on a research project that is seeking to explore how students develop their political identity while in college. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in how your experiences in college inform your political identity.

As I mentioned in the email, I would like to record this interview if that is ok with you. The interview should be around an hour. Also as a reminder, your name or any identifying information will not be used in any reports or publications that result from this study. If at any time during our interview you want to end the conversation, please feel free to do so.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Along the lines of protecting your identity in the study, I am asking all participants to select names that I will use to refer to you during the study instead of your actual name. Do you have a preference for a pseudonym?

Ok. So now I want to briefly give you a sense of how the interview is going to go. Since I am interested in how you've developed a political identity over time, my questions will help you to guide me through your life. So we will start out with some questions about your life before coming to college focused on high school, then we will transition, for the bulk of the interview, to questions about your experience in college, and then end off with some questions that ask you to try to make sense of it all. Does that make sense? There are not right or wrong answers, and this should feel like a conversation. Great, so let's begin:

1) Opening Questions:

- How would you describe the person you were when you were in high school?
 - Did you get involved in clubs, play sports? Why did you do those things? Who pushed you to get involved?
- When you hear the word "politics," what are some things that come to mind for you? How do you define the word?
 - Has that definition changed over time? When and how?
- Can you tell me about some of your earliest "political memories"?
 - Where did they happen?
 - What precipitated them?
 - What did you learn?
 - How did they grow?
 - Was politics a part of your home life?

- Tell me about how you decided to attend UF...
 - What, if anything, did you know UF traditions, values, and culture before getting here?
 - How did you learn these things before coming here? Who taught you them?
- Were you aware of the increase in tuition that the state was working on with performance funding as you were applying?
 - How did you learn about these issues?
 - Did these issues influence your decision to attend? If so, in what ways?

2) Reflections on their current understanding of their political identity and the process involved in developing that identity:

These next few questions are concerned with your transition to college:

- Can you tell me what you remember from the first month or two when you transitioned to UF?
- UF is a big place. How would you describe the subculture of the institution that you interact in the most?

Now let's shift back to thinking about politics, but this time try to think of your time during college:

- What was your initial read of the political culture/climate of UF?
- Say you wanted to learn more about a political issue going on, take me through your process of learning more about a political issue
 - Can you explain to me how you verify information?
 - Who else was involved?
 - What did you learn?
- Where has the majority of what you've learned about politics taken place while you've been in college?
- Can you describe a time where you interacted with a faculty or staff member about political issues?
 - Where did this happen?
 - How do you feel about this situation now?
 - What did you learn?

3) Sense-making of experiences in college that contribute to their understanding of political identity:

- What do you think the purpose of a college education is?
 - Where did you get this message?
 - Do you think you've been realizing this purpose? In what ways?
- Some people use words like "liberal," "conservative," etc. to describe how they fit into the political system. How would you describe your political identity?

- Have your experiences in college informed your understanding of your political identity? If so, in what ways?
- As you think back over your time in college, can you identify a time that you took action and did something about an issue that you care about?
 - Where did this happen?
 - How did you build up the skills to take action?
 - How did you feel as you were going through the event?
 - What did you learn about yourself? Others? The institution?
 - Do you consider this to be a political action? Why or why not?
- Do you feel like your political identity has shifted greatly from when you were growing up?

4) Reflections on campus climate and culture:

- How would you describe the typical UF student to someone who was unfamiliar with the campus?
- Do you feel like a Hoosier?
 - If so, when did you get that feeling
 - If not, why not?
- What are major traditions or campus events that a lot of students participate in?
 - How did you learn about these traditions?
 - Do you participate? Why or why not?
- Have there been any issues on campus that have caused a lot of tension between students?
 - How did you learn about these issues?
 - How did you handle it?
 - How was it resolved?
- Are there certain groups or people on campus who are treated differently than other groups?
 - How did you come to learn this?
- Do you hear from others that the campus has changed a lot while you've been a student? How is this explained to you?
 - How do you feel about those changes?

5) Reflections on the socio-political environment of their state and its contribution to their political identity:

- Do you follow political issues affecting Florida or Gainesville?
- How do you see those issues playing out on campus?
- Does that inform your thinking about politics? If so, how?

6) Closing Questions

- How could UF change to encourage students to be more politically aware and active?

- How do you think your political identity or level of engagement will change once you leave UF?
 - Do you think UF has prepared you for your desired level of political engagement?
- Do you have any closing thoughts or reflections you'd like to share?

Appendix F: Examples of Initial Codes

“arranging a meeting”
“asking people about things”
“asking us to vote”
“becoming more involved”
“becoming social”
“being exposed”
“being exposed” to politics
“being informed”
“bringing it up”
“bringing political consciousness”
“building bridges”
“carrying out RA protocol”
“coming from a catholic background”
“coming to Rutgers”
“communicating with others”
“deciding what actions”
“defying those notions”
“doing all these crazy things”
“doing research”
“draining experience”
“driving into a foggy area”
“educating people”
“expanding horizons”
“exposing us to ideas”
“feeling at home”
“feeling kind of alone”
“finding different spots”
“flyering at Bruin Walk”
“getting off topic”
“getting paid”
“getting people registered to vote”
“getting people to vote”
“getting that mindset”
“getting voices heard”
“giving a voice to people”
“going along”
“going into battle unarmed”
“going through training”
“going to keep around”
“happening across the country”
“having a bunch of options”
“hearing the bad side”
“helping solve”
“helping”
“interacting with different types”
“keeping an open mind”
“learning about different experiences”
“learning more about civics”
“learning to listen and adapt”
“looking at a variety” of news sources
“looking at other people’s opinions”
“making valid arguments”
“making your own decisions”
“making your own opinions”
“motivating factor”
“moving to the residence halls”
“ongoing process”
“paying attention”
“planning stuff”
“presenting both sides”
“putting on programs”
“questioning the system”
“raising awareness”
“reading my own stuff”
“searching for organizations”
“seeing people campaign”
“spying”
“steering away”
“sticking to the facts”
“sticking up for myself”
“surrounding me similar”
“taking my education with me”
“talking openly”
“teaching myself”
“trying to get rid”
“trying to looking unbiasedly at things”
“victimizing themselves”
“voting for somebody”
“walking down Bruin Walk”
“watching what my family was doing”

“working in the newspaper office”
“working towards it”

“worrying about paying bills

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