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Spatializing Student Engagement: A Phenomenological Study on Experiencing Space, Place, and a College Campus

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SPATIALIZING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
ON EXPERIENCING SPACES, PLACES, AND A COLLEGE CAMPUS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Ivan Valentin Ceballos Jr.

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Ivan Valentin Ceballos Jr., and entitled Spatializing Student Engagement: A Phenomenological Study on Experiencing Spaces, Places, and a College Campus, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

Benjamin Baez

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Remy Dou

Daniel Saunders, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 16, 2021

The dissertation of Ivan Valentin Ceballos Jr. is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
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Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

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DEDICATION

With love, gratitude, and appreciation I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and children. Yami, from the moment I expressed a desire to pursue this educational experience, you provided me with unwavering support and encouragement. You are my partner in many ways. I especially thank you for engaging as my motivational coach, intellectual partner, and barista. Thank you for continuing to learn alongside me. I will always cherish our conversations about education, methodology, and space. I am forever grateful for all that you sacrificed in the pursuit of “our” dissertation. This dissertation is a testament to our shared resilience. You are in every line and every word. Everything.

To my children, Dominic and Karina. You two keep me grounded and help me maintain perspective on the important things. Throughout my doctoral experience you diverted my attention in the best ways possible. I wish you more and may we forever learn and play together.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Maria and Ivan. Among many other things, I am grateful that I inherited their curiosity and love of learning. Their endless support throughout my educational and professional journey has been a source of empowerment. Thank you for helping me and my sisters create our own paths through your love and hard work. I am as proud of you as you are of us.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to the participants who shared so much of their time and experiences with me. You inspire me to dedicate my work and writing to improving students’ experiences.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

SPATIALIZING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
ON EXPERIENCING SPACES, PLACES, AND A COLLEGE CAMPUS

by

Ivan Valentin Ceballos Jr.

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Daniel Saunders, Major Professor

This phenomenological qualitative study examined how five college students understood their collegiate engagement in relation to spaces and places. The study's purpose was to develop a spatialized understanding by describing the nature of meaningful student engagement as occurring within places and spaces. The problem addressed through this study is the treatment of engagement as understood through institutional metrics which reduce such a phenomenon to campus-centric and measurable place-based characteristics. As argued through this study's framework and findings, experiencing a phenomenon such as engagement is a matter of lived experience and exists in relation to space and place. The participants' lived experiences speak to the implications of space, spatializing, and place, which are not largely reflected in current literature on college environments and students.

Doreen Massey's (2005) *For Space* is held in relation to van Manen's (2016) *Researching Lived Experience* in order to frame this study. Purposeful sampling was used to select five participants. Four semi-structured interviews and a photo-elicitation

interview were conducted to collect data. The fourth semi-structured interview was amended to the study in order to continue inquiry in relation to experiencing spaces and places during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the use of diffractive readings, interpretive phenomenological analysis, and subsumption, three super-ordinate themes and seven sub-themes were identified. The super-ordinate themes are: a) geography of borderlessness, c) the synchrony house, and d) ordering space.

The study's findings suggest that participants experienced engagement in ways that required constant negotiation with one's identities, covered-up borders, perceptions of synchrony, and bureaucratic arrangements. Institutional practices were mostly understood as existing to favor particular ways of being. Such spatialized outcomes of experiencing space according to hegemonic standards induced perceptions and behaviors that do not necessarily promulgate student engagement. Participants experienced college in a self-reflective manner and continually negotiated with spaces of institutionally ascribed order. There is disparity between practices that order spaces of the institution and treating engagement as a matter of lived experience. The present study suggests that inquiry and practice premised on fixity is maligned with students' efforts to generate experiences and relationships in educationally meaningful ways.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I have to learn about going into the real world. This isn't surprising. I guess I'm ready for it. I'm not too scared about it. But college is a bubble. College is here. The real world is on the outside. It's weird being a college student. I don't blame colleges for this, but I'm in dual environments. (Devon, third interview)

I am fascinated by the treatment of collegiate environments as existing somewhat separate from time and space. Among other seemingly dogmatic and integrationist claims, student affairs canon suggests that college is the best four years of one's life, living on campus is the greatest thing a student can do, and getting involved on campus is essential. As discussed throughout my study, there is certainly research to support such claims. However, affixing collegiate spaces and places with particular ways of being is problematic and drives the study's purpose. I recall many times throughout my own collegiate experiences where I sensed one thing, to be told that was not exactly the intended outcome. Such a disparity between what one experiences compared to what one believes should be experienced induces the sense of existing on the fringes of collegiate spaces. Perhaps no greater moment resonates with me than my first weekend living on campus as a first-year student.

Having just settled into my residence hall room, it was time to say goodbye to my parents. After a few hugs and last-minute words of encouragement, they were on their way back to Miami. I walked up the hill back to my residence hall as they drove away. I vividly remember swiping through two access points guarded by heavy steel doors coated with countless layers of paint. Light shone through the double-paned windows with metal

mesh running through the glass. The way each door slammed shut was cold, sudden, and somewhat symbolic of how I felt at that moment.

Passing through these doors gave way to the start of my floor hallway. I had never seen such a robust palette of beige. The floors, which were the embodiment of 1950s speckled linoleum, were mirrored by dropped false ceilings and connected on either side by tall cinderblock walls. Brown doors and fluorescent tube lighting broke up the monotony of the long hallway, which was the new home of fifty freshman men, myself included. There were of course the usual artifacts found in a residence hall such as door decorations, takeout menus, and colorful resource bulletin boards constructed by the resident assistant. Add to this a poorly ventilated seafoam green communal bathroom and a small Formica-lined community kitchen and lounge, and you have the backdrop in which community, engagement, inclusion, and learning are expected to occur (Blimling, 2015). I missed elements of the familiar such as home and loved ones. There seemed to be no time or place for that since mentors and peer leaders suggested that I simply had to let it go and enjoy the bubble of college and living on campus. Besides, college is the best four years of your life and should be enjoyed to the fullest prior to entering “the real world.” My connections to other times, spaces, and places felt rendered as separate and secondary to all things collegiate.

Over the course of my first weekend in college, my experiences with the people in the residential community were fairly pleasant, yet unremarkable. My roommate, whom I had never met before, did not have much to say. I continue to cast doubt as to how seriously the assignments staff considered our living preferences given the dearth in our

common interests. At least he was tidy and shared the Girl Scout cookies his three sisters often sent. The first night was loud and active throughout the hall. Residents of the floor appeared to have gathered together because they came from the same hometown or shared racial or ethnic identities, myself included. Looking back at this, and observing this as a phenomenon that continues today with each generation of college students, almost no time is wasted in the self-sorting of resident friend groups. There was plenty of contraband cheap beer available, video games, and casual conversation. Someone pulled the fire alarm and purposefully clogged the shower drains. Again, these events occurred during the first weekend.

Years later, my experiences living and working in residence halls continues to inform and challenge the ways I think about spaces and people. I lived on campus as a student and administrator. I managed several types of buildings such as an all-single residence hall and a former luxury retirement home transformed to a student housing community. Currently I am working on creating new residence halls for students that balance parent and student demands with desirable educational goals such as sense of community and exposure to institutional resources.

Like many first-time college students, my own transition to an unfamiliar and unstructured living environment with a few hundred other adolescents was a challenging and odd experience. The rite of passage for resident students is most critical within the first six weeks, in which initial experiences with social and academic adjustment have long-term effects on persistence and degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). At the time, I did not pay much attention to the places or

relationships I did or did not find meaningful while living on campus. However, I think about my freshman year often, especially now as a campus housing professional. The institutional expectations for resident students so often cited in professional and academic literature seems to set up what a lived experience should be and does not leave much room for other realities, such as students who never live on campus (Johnson, 2003). I am troubled that such an approach centers the institution as the primary author of engagement, with sparse room for student agency.

For years, even as someone deeply engaged in the campus housing profession, I carried on as if I missed out on something as a resident since I did not identify with the fruitful developmental gains of the residential experience so often foretold by my resident assistant and mentors. My most memorable and meaningful experiences occurred elsewhere. Yet, because the developmental potency of the residence hall did not resonate with my first-year experience, I was often left wondering what I should have done differently. This phenomenon of negotiating one's experience according to perceived norms presents a binary approach to understanding places in college. Either you fit in to the places designed and set up for students and gain from the identified outcomes, or you do not.

An example of a comparative place-based approach is Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) research on college student success and residence halls. In Pascarella and Terenzini's compendium of college student research *How College Affects Students*, the authors posited that living on campus was "the single most consistent within-college determinant of the impact of college" (p. 611). The quotation is often cited in a dogmatic

fashion in the housing profession. According to Pascarella and Terenzini's research, no other factor was as strongly associated with key college student outcomes such as persistence, critical thinking development, and personal development. An environment which places students in close proximity to each other and encourages interactions through dining, socializing, and other experiences strongly influences a student's likelihood of being engaged (Astin, 1985).

However, the place-based narrative of on-campus residential living appears to be changing. In the most recent edition of *How College Affects Students*, the benefits of living on campus have decreased over time, become less universally applicable, and may have even reversed course. Findings from the third edition suggested that students residing on campus, especially first-year students, are more likely to experience negative psychological consequences such as stress, anxiety, and lower self-esteem (Mayhew et al., 2016). Contrasts such as these may support the notion that the pathways to engagement may be non-linear and multiplicitous. Congruent with the nature of rhizomatic pathways to engagement, my study is intended to recognize the intimate and dynamic nature of experiencing space and place (Tuan, 1977).

My concern is not necessarily about residence halls. While I may seem critical of them, it is because I recognize that places and people do not have linear relationships nor can the meaning garnered from experiencing a place be institutionally prescribed. Logics of determining the validity and success of a campus operation, such as student housing, can at times appear to be more concerned with institutional performance and accountability rather than a student's lived experience. As I will discuss, experiencing

places through educationally purposeful ways are grounded in processes of personal construction and meaning-making. Attempting to pre-figure, or fix, space and place, such as attempts at establishing what should be gained from where creates a comparative world which may fail to afford engagement opportunities as experienced and defined by students (Massey, 2005; Tuan, 1977). A student's agency in their own engagement and meaning-making appears to become secondary to institutional definitions and practices of engagement.

Rather than a matter of fixing, spaces are negotiated and spatialized (Holland et al., 1998; Massey, 2005). Spaces may be designed to a certain extent such as through practices outlined in Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad, which will be discussed throughout the current study. However, spatial production and experiencing places are not the products of a monolithic entity readily designed and packaged for consumption. Rather, to experience space and place is to negotiate between oneself and the various intentions that different entities have for that space (Tuan, 1977). Within the context of higher education, administrators have intentions. Trustees have intentions. Students have intentions. Outcasts have intentions. They negotiate their identities and intentions in relation to space and place. Intentions turn into actions, which in regard to space and place is spatialization (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). Spatialization refers to the process of causing something to occupy space or assume properties of space (Lefebvre, 1991). Spatialization is a critical term and act explained in further detail throughout subsequent chapters.

Through the study, I emphasize the inseparability of identities and space. Urrieta (2007) defined identity as “how people come to understand themselves, how they come to ‘figure’ who they are, through the worlds that they participate in and how they relate to others within and outside these worlds” (p. 107). To negotiate identity is to negotiate space (Massey, 2005). The close relationship between identity and space challenges the treatment of student engagement as a conjuring by institutional and even absent actors. A person, such as a student, is at the center of negotiating experienced phenomena such as engagement and identity in relation to space and place. Through the study, I address the institutionalization of engagement and the problems associated with divorcing such a phenomenon from space, place, and spatialization.

Fixing College Environments

Within postsecondary education, Astin’s input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model is the standard-bearing framework for understanding undergraduate college students and their environment (Reason, Broido, Davis, & Evans, 2005). Astin defined environments as “the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed” (1993, p. 7). In Astin’s Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) freshman survey, the environment is reduced to 192 measures, which are coded into six factors (1993). According to the I-E-O model and related research, ideal environments support student success and improve college impact.

The environment described by Astin is marked by institutional boundaries and described by measurable factors. This creates a Cartesian understanding of places and spaces (Massey, 2005). A place is a particular and experientially lived-in setting (Relph,

1976). On the broader scale, spaces are comprised of social relations and material practices of power (Massey, 2005). When applied spatially, Cartesian logics tend to create formulaic and fixed projections of what one should experience simply by exposure (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre lamented that Cartesian logic, which he described as concerned with mathematically predictive assumptions and practices, took over the study of space and place and consequently ruled out the political realities, humanity, and meaning-making associated with experience.

Spatialization is not driven by mathematical calculations, but rather is caused by one's own experience, meaning-making, and the senses all of which exist in sociopolitical relations (Massey, 2005). When places are treated as fixed, and supported as such through predictive Cartesian practices of administration and inquiry, there is a diminished ability to support diverse theories of spatial value (Massey, 2005).

Astin's I-E-O model suggests a fixed place-based understanding by embedding a student in an environment defined by variables and boundaries. The I-E-O model, which ostensibly restricts space, has itself become spatialized so that it universalizes a sense of what is defined as a good experience in college. Through cultural and administrative practice, ascribed meaning and potential influence of those variables have already been established by the researcher and the institution (Astin, 1993; Lefebvre, 1991). However, it is in fact both the student and the place who develop (Massey, 2005). By accounting for only the student and not the ways spaces and places are negotiated and produced, the college environment appears to be a place-based passive surface in which students traverse and serves as a neutral backdrop to engagement.

Spatial understandings remain limited for two primary reasons. First, according to Bronfenbrenner, there is an overwhelmingly strong preference to engage in social environmental research that seeks to understand the properties of the person and thus only leaves room for “a rudimentary conception and characterization of the environment in which the person is found” (1979, p. 16). Secondly, research that explores environmental understandings and influences on human behavior tend to extract the place in question and designate fixed meaning, thus limiting opportunities to engage with complex descriptions of place and its relation to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Massey, 2005; Strange & Banning, 2001). The rationale of isolating places also relates to Kuntz’s idea of logics of extraction as well as the Cartesian rationale. Such models and logics seek to fix aspects of identity or space in a commensurable and pre-defined manner (2015, 2019).

Social experiences, such as the college experience, occur in spaces as well as places. While places matter, they are not the exclusive domain of an experience (Low, 2017). Space refers to the political and relational experiences that occur relative to a place and are not necessarily bound by geography (Massey, 2005). Space refers to that which is structured socially and is governed and produced at varying social levels. Moreover, spaces are always changing because of time, perspectives, and social conditions and therefore cannot be fixed. That being said, political practices oftentimes create spatialized practices and illusions of timeless fixity (Massey, 2005). According to Massey, spaces are permeating with politics. An example of space may be The University of Miami or any other university. The spaces of a university extend far beyond the

physical campus and are inclusive of the ideals, traditions, and expectations that encompass collective social understandings and practices associated with the particular institution, such as the spaces of the university experienced by the participants during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Opposing the extractive stance of environments as the plane of the calculable and traversable, Massey (2005) argued that “space is the sphere of coexistence of a multiplicity of trajectories” (p. 63). According to Massey (2005), the highly contextual social and political elements of space cannot be divorced from the intimately lived place. While spaces refer to broader social conditions, a place is that which is experienced among a person, site, and time. Places are reflective of a person’s experience relevant to a site and time (Massey, 2005). Places are unique and often described as intimate because they are contingent on experience, the practices they encounter, and one’s own meaning-making process. Tuck and McKenzie (2014) equated place with practices:

Places are not always named, and not always justly named. They do not always appear on maps; they do not have agreed-upon boundaries. They are not fixed. Places are not more readily understood by objective accounts. Finally, and most importantly, places have practices. In some definitions, places *are* practices. (p. 14)

While the previous example of the University of Miami may represent a space, the physical structures and institutional practices associated with a campus, and one’s experiences in relation to that particular geographic area in a particular time, is a place.

Attempting to separate space and place is often the case in higher education research as exemplified by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). With NSSE, place becomes understood as foreclosed by designating specific and time-oriented

behaviors as “high impact.” By foreclosing engagement to the existence of specific practices, space is unaccounted for because on the surface, all that seems to matter is the place and whether or not a student partook in specific campus-based activities. The economic, political, identity-based, and power-laden nuances of space are unaccounted for in such a place and time-dependent description of engagement. While space is more often discussed in other areas of student-oriented literature, such as with identity development and critical geography research, spatial and political practices embodied by the institution are hardly accounted for in student engagement inquiry (Tillapaugh, 2019).

An area of promise related to treating the collegiate environment as an arena of multiplicitous spaces and places is campus climate research. Climate is a construct comprised of “current attitudes, behaviors, and standards and practices of employees and students at an institution” (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264). A campus climate is often held in relation to institutional access, success, and equity. Whereas campus climate research provides a measure of an environment and its effects on social identity groups, it operates within the confines of the institution and gauges practices such as policies and pedagogies and identifies its influence on particular populations (Chang, Milem, & Antonio, 2010; Johnson, 2012). Campus climate research most closely resembles spatial research since it is grounded in relational elements whereas student engagement research mostly remains concerned with reduced place or practice-based understandings that do not account for space.

Research Problem

The problem addressed through my study is the fixed and oversimplified understanding of collegiate environments for undergraduate college students. The field of higher education has yet to explicitly and reflectively engage with student space. Collegiate environments are typically understood through crude predictive models and attached to the physicality of the campus. Current undergraduate student engagement models, such as Astin's I-E-O model and the campus design matrix are justifiably influential and significant since they have advanced knowledge on student engagement in relation to the campus context (Astin, 1993; Renn & Patton, 2010, Strange & Banning, 2001). However, these models reduce an environment to discreet and measurable place-based characteristics, such as bed counts or student-to-faculty ratios (Astin, 1993). Place-based conceptualizations are concerned with matters of institutional oversight and positioning people, policies, and resources. Environmental factors such as these certainly matter and influence the student experience (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, place and space, as understood beyond institutional metrics, is not reflected in current dominant understandings of the collegiate environment. Space and place should be accounted for in campus environment and engagement research as such frameworks ground a student's experience as well as the relational and sociopolitical aspects associated with negotiating space and place.

An additional problem presented from currently existing environmental research is the consequence of relating the environment to particular practices and normative assumptions. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and NSSE not only

engage in environmental descriptions, but also suggest ways in which they should be arranged. As will be discussed in the next chapter, efforts to identify and arrange space are indicative of problematic spatialization. Lefebvre (1991) described spatialization as the spatial forms that social practices take on in geography and culture. Map-making such as urban planning and descriptions of lived experience, such as the present study, are examples of spatialization. Spatializing can be problematic since at times, particular spatialized practices and knowledge tend to be treated as hegemonic and the preferred way of being or experiencing spaces and places (Lefebvre, 1991).

Massey (2005) claimed that such attempts of hegemonic spatialization are inevitable as a result of the dominance of structuralism and the imposition of a single universal. According to Massey, a single universal is a seemingly immovable and hegemonic conceptualization of experiencing space and place. A single universal is spatialized in a manner that appears to pre-determine an experience with a place “as is,” normal, and even timeless. In a single universal, a very clear norm and way of negotiating a particular place has been spatialized by cultural and political forces (Massey, 2005). A very particular way of experiencing a place has been established and communicated through policies and institutional practices. While spaces and places are spatialized with a variety of stakeholders and actors contributing to their rendering, encounters of the single universal communicate an established reality that supersedes one’s own senses and experience (Massey, 2005; Urrieta, 2007). The establishment of a particular single universal is not a passive phenomenon. Rather, acts of governance, class, identity, and mediations of power render the illusion of fixity which may problematize one’s

experiences in negotiating space and place (Holland et al., 1998). Consider, for example, the imagery and expectations associated with what is so often deemed as the “traditional” college experience.

Through spatialized practices of the single universal, space becomes a binary matter in which a particular reality is established, and other experiences are rendered as atypical (Massey, 2005). Lefebvre (1991) referred to these socially ascribed atypical experiences as underground spatial practices. Treating space as occurring along the singular universal or in the fringes of underground spatial practices diminishes the potential for accepting and supporting spatial experiences as contingent on agency, meaning-making, or negotiation between one’s identities and the worlds they participate in (Urrieta, 2007).

Higher education scholars and practitioners must shift spatial understandings from concepts premised on single universals. Fixing places associated with engagement, through practices of prediction and institutionalization, creates student experience pathways and related inquiry grounded on foreclosure. Undergraduate student involvement and engagement models, such as NSSE, CIRP, and Astin’s I-E-O- model are intended to point out promising behaviors and experiences that advance engagement. While useful in informing research and practice, the sequential nature of such models does not account for the reality of both space and place in informing lived experience or how a student can be engaged outside of institutionally defined ways. Massey (2005) argued, as I do, that space and place cannot be foreclosed. Through my study, I encourage myself and my colleagues to take the risk of fostering engagement in ways that

do not show up on the institutional ledger. Such a stance and associated efforts matter because as students' identities and experiences with college continue to diversify, so too should practice and inquiry related to student engagement and campus environments.

Undergraduate student development models oftentimes depict vectors, stages, transitions, or phases to suggest a general directional nature and progression. Movement and dynamism exist in descriptions of space and place. Massey (2005) described both people and their environments as existing in perpetual states of "becoming." Research and literature from both student engagement and spatial disciplines such as critical geography suggest a never-ending change process in both person and environment. Processes of "becoming," according to Massey, do not have a definite end point. From a phenomenological perspective, the terminology of "becoming" refers to the constant reconstruction of one's understanding of the self and the social world (Gadamer, 1975). "Space and identities exist together" (Massey, 2005, p. 11). The inseparability between spatial and personal development warrants understandings of space that are as robust as that which currently exists on students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to engage with the emancipatory aspects of spatialization and develop an understanding of how undergraduate students experience their spaces and places related to college. If, as I will discuss, space and place are to be understood as spatialized in conjunction with a student's meaning-making, then they have agency in experiencing engagement or educationally purposeful and meaningful involvement with college. I sought descriptions of experiencing collegiate spaces and

places in the context of undergraduate upperclassmen student engagement. I selected the focal population since student engagement literature predominantly focuses on undergraduate student experiences. Additionally, I selected upperclassmen given their years of collegiate experience which positioned them to speak and reflect on their lived experiences related to college.

“When we evoke ‘space’ we must immediately indicate what occupies that space and how it does so” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 12). Lefebvre’s statement, and his related discussion on the importance of articulating space and spatial practices inspired me to take an ontological stance and focus on being rather than a particular site. I deferred to participants to articulate their engagement with the university. I did not confine their experiences to the boundaries of the college campus. Through a phenomenological study that employed photo-elicitation and diffractive readings, I interviewed participants on their engagement experiences and the spaces and places in which they occurred (or did not occur).

I was particularly interested in how the characteristics of space and place are held in relation to student engagement and the institution. A student negotiating space and place is of particular interest to me because engagement is predominantly understood through institutional practices. I sought to recognize the agency exhibited by students in authoring their engagement. The study also moves beyond place-based abstracted notions of collegiate environment literature. I sought to understand how undergraduate residential college students engaged with places as well as perceive and produce space alongside their collegiate experiences.

I wanted to understand how participants became engaged in relation to places and spaces. Such a space-based understanding would challenge the common sensical idea that engagement is simply a function of time spent in a pre-determined place or activity (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2009a). Spatializing engagement is much more complicated, and student-centered, than delimitating to measurements of time or the existence of institutional practices (Massey, 2005; Tuan, 1977). As previously discussed, to experience a space or place is to participate in the process of generating meaning and identity (Urrieta, 2007; Holland et al., 1998). My focus is on undergraduate upperclassmen students with on-campus residential experience because of the possibility of exploring Massey's notion of multiplicity of space, and how occupants of the same place experience similar spaces differently.

Statement of Significance

This study adds to the literature by explicitly engaging with space and place in relation to undergraduate student engagement. Accounting for the social conditions of space, and the lived experiences associated with place, holds significance since it moves away from the representationalism that oftentimes defines environment-based research in higher education. Representationalism creates a normalized assumption about truth and ethics and makes singular truth the object of inquiry (Kuntz, 2019). For example, the NSSE survey data pressures institutions into conforming to practices deemed as "high impact." Consequently, funding and other resources are diverted to further enhancing the "single universal" place-based experience which favors traditionally defined college

students (Tillapaugh, 2019). Such harmful bureaucratic effects appear to exist in order to further “single universal” collegiate experiences.

The present study’s findings also speak to the problematic narrowing of collegiate engagement practices premised on the traditional residential college model. Such endeavors have immediate political concerns and may cast out students who do not experience space and place in institutionally desired ways, such as students who may have never lived on campus. My study also has findings which suggest that students make choices to either accept or reject space-based normative expectations of “the single universal student.” Practices of the single universal tend to reinforce power, identity, and privileged relations (Massey, 2005).

In accordance with producing a single universal engagement experience, the college experience is being over planned by administrators and other institutional agents in positions of authority. Through the current study, I wish to recognize the power and agency students have in contributing to their engagement. Participants determined what engagement looked like in relation to the spaces and places they experienced. I argue that engagement is not entirely contingent on institutional planning or can be reduced to place-based understandings. At best, an institution and its agents can set up platforms and opportunities for engagement. However, the existence of those practices and funds associated with those efforts do not define engagement. I treated engagement as a process grounded in spatialization at individual, institutional, and broader social levels.

Lastly, my study holds significance through its data and discussion related to COVID-19 and student engagement. The results suggest how disparities in spatial

experiences and students' inability to connect with collegiate places diminishes the ability to be meaningfully involved in college. These findings are important because, rather than reduced to place-based understandings, the present study reorients student engagement as a process of negotiating spaces and places and the meanings a student ascribes to such experiences. Moreover, my study's findings are significant because the spatial framework addresses the matter of agency, or lack thereof, a student may experience during their attempts to be engaged with their collegiate education.

Research Question

How do a group of undergraduate upperclassmen students who have lived on campus a minimum of one year understand the spaces and places related to their college education?

Limitations and Delimitations

This is a phenomenological study about undergraduate college students and their meaningful collegiate experiences as defined by them. In particular, I asked participants about experiences in college that were most potent in shaping their education, identity, and purpose. In line with phenomenology, this study is descriptive and interpretive for both researcher and participant (van Manen, 2016). The student participants defined the places, the relationships they were engaged in, and how they were governed. Through the interviews, participants reflected on the meaning of their engagement experiences through the reconstruction of lived experiences (van Manen, 2016). The study is not limited to the geographic boundaries of a campus or places owned by the research site.

The study's purpose was not to evaluate the effectiveness, purpose, or function of any particular place nor did I seek to negate the validity of pre-existing peer-reviewed

research on student engagement or particular spatial elements of the college experience. However, participants were remarkably sincere about their impressions on particular places, programs, and traditions they experienced. I engaged with their narratives, as well as related literature, as the findings are certainly pertinent to the study's purpose. I also did not intend to critique the work of professional colleagues involved in student engagement efforts. We exist in a system which through policies and practice calls for metrics, predictability, and the single universal or preferred ways of experiencing a place such as a campus, which makes carrying out this important work to be incredibly constrained. Some people working within this system were cited by participants as instrumental in fostering engagement in ways that centered a student within caring spaces and places.

The study's findings are informed by the research design and the inclusion criteria used to select participants. The study was delimited to full-time undergraduate upperclassmen students with residential experience at one particular private research institution. The results are derived from interviews with participants. For the purposes of the study, I assumed that participants answered the interview questions honestly and that the participants have all experienced the same phenomena of experiencing college and becoming engaged in meaningful ways. While my study does engage with implications caused by the COVID-19, researching the pandemic is not the study's purpose and therefore does not attempt to engage with related themes or literature such as online learning or public health.

Another limitation of this study was my engagement with the lived experiences of students at a four-year private residential college. College experiences are varied across many institutional types such as community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, and public research universities. The setting in which this study occurred, and the institution in which participants were enrolled, is limited in this way.

I selected Doreen Massey's (2005) *For Space* to frame this study and place the text in relation to van Manen's (2016) *Researching Lived Experience*. Massey was primarily concerned with space in relation to gender as well as geo-politics such as globalization and gentrification. Lefebvre (1991), who I also cite and was influential in shaping my understanding of space and spatialization, grounded his works on addressing labor issues. While I borrow from Massey and Lefebvre's political foundations, I did not explicitly engage with their topics of concern. Rather, I utilized their theoretical foundations and contextualize space in relation to higher education and student engagement. Lastly, I did not engage with other philosophical and methodological aspects of phenomenology as I framed my understanding of phenomenology and hermeneutics according to van Manen's works.

Dissertation Format

This is a phenomenological study that describes students' experiences with spaces and places associated with their collegiate experience and engagement. I utilized semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation to collect data. In addition to interpretive phenomenological analysis, I used diffractive analysis to engage in further discussion of the data. This is not a typical five-chapter dissertation. Given my interpretation of

phenomenology and diffraction, I found it prudent to maintain connections between literature, data, and analysis.

While the next chapter is a review of the literature, I engaged with literature throughout all chapters and place peer-reviewed literature and texts in relation to salient findings and discussion. After the third chapter, the methods section, I dedicated a chapter to diffractive analysis because of its centrality and presence in this study. The three following chapters, chapters five through seven, are the thematic chapters. I subsumed three super-ordinate themes and eight sub-themes. I subsumed themes by analyzing 369 pages of transcripts, 38 memos, 478 annotations, 882 codes, and 60 photographs. Data were collected from a total of 24 interviews with five participants. With the exception of one student who participated in four interviews, the other four students participated in five interviews each. I concluded each thematic chapter by engaging in a diffractive discussion. I selected two texts read in relation to each other and the chapter in order to expand possibilities, questions, and interpretations of the findings. The concluding chapter, chapter eight, synthesizes the findings and also discusses implications for future research and practice.

Chapter Summary

I opened the chapter by discussing the treatment of the typical college experience as occurring separate from the rest of social space and time. Resource concerns, coupled with the idealism and nostalgia ascribed to college creates assumptions of singular spatial pathways with may render particular experiences and identities as secondary. I discussed the discreet and Cartesian manner in which college environments tend to be understood. I

articulated my points of departure from such logics by citing space and place as dynamic and just like students, also existing in states of “becoming.” This problem, of not meaningfully engaging with space and depending on crude campus-centric models, is addressed by this study. My purpose is to develop an understanding on how students perceive and experience spaces and places related to their engagement. The study also argues for recognizing student agency and meaning-making in their engagement experiences.

After stating the research question, I articulated the study’s limitations and delimitations. While I specifically borrowed from theoretical and methodological foundations from Doreen Massey and other scholars, I did not explicitly engage with the same issues addressed through previous scholarship since my concern is with higher education and the student experience. I concluded the chapter by providing introductory definitions to key terms associated with this study and provided an overview of the dissertation’s format.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

During the early stages of my dissertation proposal I became fascinated with a biopic on Albert Einstein. I spent my study breaks concerned with space watching a show about a famed researcher theorizing about space. While the scientific particulars of Einstein's research are outside the purview of my study, the philosophical questions and assumptions that drove theoretical physics in the late 19th century certainly exist today in discussions on social spaces. Einstein (1909) posited that space cannot be empty. He argued that some kind of substance or charge must exist in order to propagate energy. With this logic, one cannot assume that "space" is synonymous with "void." Space is a multi-faceted plane that is both occupied by and charged with energy (Einstein, 1909). In the world of physics, space is occupied and influenced by particles. Within the context of this study, I argue that space is influenced by social relations, politically governed, and dynamic (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Relph, 1976).

My professional experiences and academic curiosities led me to engage with an analysis of spatial production. As an executive director in residential life, I am tasked with creating space for resident students. Despite spatial creation as my charge, little is known about what kind of space can and should exist, how to engineer it, and how to evaluate it (Strange & Banning, 2001). A safe space. Inclusive space. Comfortable space. Diverse space. Affordable space. Developmental space. Revenue-generating space. The term "space" is used so frequently in the student affairs profession that it has achieved an unexamined colloquial status. "Campus climate" and "environments" are

also terms treated in a similar manner (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Strange & Banning, 2001).

The colloquial use of terms such as “space” and “climate” are oftentimes useful metaphors in many ways but have become overused and therefore quite limiting. Within the context of student affairs, I find that space is often measured by number of beds on campus, frequency of bias or gender-related incidents, or number of first-year programs offered. If, according to Massey (2005), space is embedded in political elements and cannot be fully quantified, then such a term depends on more than metrics such as bed spaces or incidents on campus.

As previously discussed in the statement of purpose, this study intentionally engaged with the conceptualization of space and place in relation to student engagement. Unexamined assumptions of space are problematic because when left unarticulated, hegemonic forms of knowledge and preferential ways of being with a particular environment become spatialized as “normal” within society (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Resnick & Wolff, 2013). One such consequence of the problematic assumptions of unexamined space is treating space as valueless, which in and of itself is a value claim. Individuals, societies, and relations exist in spaces that are in fact politically charged and deeply connected to social identity dynamics, economics, and institutional or governmental priorities (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2000). Critical geography, environmental psychology, and post structural thought offer lines of inquiry which inform the conceptualization of space in higher education (Hay, 2010; Peters,

1996). I borrowed from these disciplines in order to describe the spaces and places that are entangled with students and their engagement.

Chapter Chronology

I began by discussing my interest in space within the higher education context. I argue that collegiate social spaces and places must be studied in order to identify the political, social, and structural charges that govern and influence its constituents.

Constituents, namely undergraduate students given the context of this study, encounter places and make meaning from their experiences within spaces laden with social and normative expectations. Next in this chapter, I describe my approach to reviewing and engaging with the literature related to this study. Following this, I articulate my choice in utilizing Doreen Massey's (2005) *For Space* as my theoretical framework. The remainder of this literature review chapter centers on discussing foundational concepts and terms that must be understood prior to engaging with the study's methodology and themes. I focused on peer-reviewed and seminal literature related to space and place, campus environments, and student engagement.

Approach to the Literature

I employed diffractive analysis in this study. Discussed further in chapter four, diffractive analysis is in part defined as "the reading of data through multiple theoretical insights" (Mazzei, 2014, p. 742). By using a diffractive strategy, I analyzed data in tandem with theoretical concepts, peer-reviewed literature, and texts related to the study's purpose and research question. This diffractive practice is quite different than the traditional five-chapter dissertation format which typically presents a literature review

prior to the findings. I approached the literature as co-existing with data, not prior to its collection (Mazzei, 2014, St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Within this literature review chapter, I specifically engaged with foundational literature on the philosophical underpinnings, concepts, and practices that frame the study's research problem and purpose. Through diffractive discussions, I engaged with the literature further throughout each of the thematic chapters. I chose to "think with theory" and therefore carry on my engagement with the literature beyond this chapter and in relation to particular findings (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

To frame an understanding of space and place, their related terms, and implications on the student experience, I selected Doreen Massey's (2005) *For Space* as a framework. As previously mentioned in the previous chapter, there are various understandings of space and place. The definitions for those terms I selected for this study align with Massey's articulations of space, place, and spatialization. *For Space* is a text concerned with understanding space, arguing for the recognition of multiple existences, and countering the Cartesian rationale. Massey's work serves as a seminal text useful for understanding space and place. Additionally, her text articulates the behavioral and political spatial implications that often go unexamined. Massey did not explicitly write about higher education or the student experience. However, Massey's concern and desire for understanding space warrants consideration in the higher education context for reasons which will be discussed.

Massey was a critical and feminist geographer. Informed by Marxist thought, her works including *For Space* examined sense of place as well as the geographic implications of politics and economics. Her conceptualization of place, space, and spatialization in *For Space* offer a theoretical framework for thinking about the student experience and the habits of postsecondary institutions. Among other arguments, Massey challenged the Cartesian assumptions of space. Specifically, she criticized the problematic political, economic, and even academic habits that treat space as narrowly understood and often defined by political and hegemonic preferences.

Mostly informed by Massey, I offer a conceptualization of space within the higher education context. I also examine the epistemological assumptions driving dominant understandings of student development and its potential effects on spatializing the student experience. Each thematic chapter in this study and its corresponding super-ordinate theme is grounded in a particular section of *For Space*. I borrowed from Massey's text to not only title each thematic chapter, but also frame the chapters' related data, literature, and discussion.

Space, Place, and Spatialization

There is little agreement on the definitions of space and place (Low, 2017). The delineations regarding the meaning of these terms depends on one's framework and discipline. For example, environmental psychologists generally agree space and place are synonymous terms that refer to human-environment interactions (Low, 2017). French social theory and critical geography offer a more nuanced examination of these terms. According to Tuan (1977), space and place are codependent terms, yet have distinct

meanings. Tuan described space as an abstract consideration. It is what we know and feel when we endow a place with value and meaning. Different than space, Tuan posited that place is a particular site that can be occupied and marked by boundaries. Again, a university's campus can represent place.

To the contrary, Tuck and McKenzie (2014) suggested that it is indeed place that is an abstract consideration and space is a term more aligned with the elements that can be experienced. Tuck and McKenzie's (2014) approach aligns closely with Morgan's (1881) who articulated space as a location of culture. According to the frameworks posited by Morgan and Tuck and McKenzie, spaces are described as a backdrop to daily activities (Low, 2017).

Despite the well-documented variance on the definitions and understandings of space and place, there is general agreement that spatial inquiry addresses the taken-for-granted settings often found in qualitative research such as colonial ethnographies (Durkheim, 1965; Lawrence & Low, 1990; Low, 2017). In line with such logic, my study's purpose also attempts to disrupt the "taken for granted" nature of collegiate settings, particularly those commonly attributed to residential colleges. In order to establish a framework for my study and clear understanding of space and place, I needed to make choices related to my understanding of these terms. I recognize that there are other interpretations of space and place such as those previously described by Tuan (1977) and by Tuck and McKenzie (2014). My selection of definitions and description of space and place is heavily influenced by Massey's works and related poststructural scholarship.

With particular attention given to decoding social practices and analyzing the social experience, French social theory and critical geography consider spaces and places to be influenced by social construction and deeply linked to people and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1989; Low, 2017). I must emphasize this as a poststructural understanding of space since in the broadest understanding of the term, it is the definition I operationalize for this study. Spaces are embedded in political relations concerned with local and global issues (Bourdieu, 1989; Massey, 2005). Moreover, spaces tend to be concerned with social ways of being. Places, on the other hand, are typically part of a person's lived experience since they are the more specific to one's experience, time, and setting. While not necessarily limited to geography, places tend to be oriented to the individual rather than the broader social context.

I must caution that space and place are not mutually exclusive terms where one (space) focuses on the social and global and the other (place) on the intimately lived. Understanding places as intimately lived suggests that a place is constructed by a person's experience and meaning-making. Space and place are bound and influenced by both individual and social experiences, emotions and thoughts (Tuan, 1977). At times, Massey (2005) juxtaposed spaces and places and expressed concerns that the increasingly corporate and globalized tendencies of society and structures are replacing places with spaces. By this, she meant that the interests of the global are rendering out the value and meaning garnered from lived experience:

The differentiation between space and place arose in the nineteenth century. Space is more preferred right now in social science discourse because, as outlined,

typically space is conflated with global, modern, and progressive, whereas place is conflated with local, traditional, and nostalgic. (Tuck & McKenzie, 2014, p. 20)

Poststructural scholars such as Bourdieu (1989), Lefebvre (1991), Deleuze and Guatari (1987) thought through concerns related to spatial relations and the potential to leverage groups from sources of power such as the state (Low, 2017). Habitus, for example, is the generative and structuring principle of collective strategies and social practices that produce existing structures (Bourdieu, 1989). With particular attention given to space, the works of Lefebvre and Massey offer applicability to the college student experience.

Of all French social theorists, Henri Lefebvre was the most intrigued by space. Grounded in a Marxian analysis of labor, Lefebvre's (1991) concern was not only with describing space but also in identifying what appears and disappears as a result of power-laden relations with space. Lefebvre's thinking was important for poststructuralism. He argued that space can never be empty and always embodies meaning (Low, 2017; Watkins, 2006). According to Lefebvre, such meaning cannot be identified until it has been lived. In other words, space does not exist a priori to experience. "Space speaks, it is alive" (p.41). His logic of space as charged with meaning and energy is somewhat reflective of theoretical physicists concerned with the anatomy of physical space. Lefebvre (1991) posited that the anatomy of social space is created through lived practice, theories of planning, and imagined spatial practices. These three elements of space are often referred to as Lefebvre's spatial triad (Watkins, 2006).

The first element of the triad, lived practices, is defined as “the daily routine and urban reality by the routes and networks that link up the places set aside for work, ‘private’ life and leisure” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). Second, theories of planning are the “conceptualized spaces of planners, scientists, urbanists, etc. that trends towards a system of signs” (p 39). Theories of planning are grounded in the goal of representing of space. Maps, models, predictive analytics, and strategic plans reflect theories of planning.

Representationalism is a foundational term for both Lefebvre and Massey. A representation of space signifies an effort to assert “true space” or a “single universal” (Carp, 2008; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). Consider, for example, the ideals and traditions associated with the “true space” of a residential university. Land use regulations and idealized ways of experiencing college, such as partaking in the revelry of football, signify representational efforts. Lastly in the triad are imagined spatial practices. This is the space of values, ideas, and visions for alternative or multiple ways of existing in a particular space (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre’s triad may be a useful tool in understanding space, especially in the context of postsecondary institutions.

Lefebvre also suggested that by analyzing space, meaning is revealed. He took issue with Cartesian logic. Through Cartesian logic, space entered the realm of the absolute. (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre argued that space was appropriated by mathematicians and was therefore limited to fixed descriptions rather than sites of analysis. “Fixed,” “fixity,” “frozen,” “extraction” and other terms that suggest stasis in

space are common nomenclature for poststructural spatial theorists such as Lefebvre (Low, 2017). To describe a space as fixed is to suggest that hegemonic ways of being and even thinking have been established through social practices and persisting through time (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 20005). Massey noted that power-laden and political practices, fixed spaces are resistant to change or even acknowledging alternative existences in space. Such alternatives of experiencing space, which again Lefebvre referred to as underground spatial practices, may be deemed as unlikely or deviant. One example of space as fixed within the higher education context may be the treatment of a student transferring out of an institution as problematic.

Years later, Kuntz (2019) wrote about the dangers of cartesian duality and its pervasiveness in research. According to Kuntz, a cartesian approach to space results in binary categorizations. When applied spatially, cartesian logics produce a “this or that” mentality. Either a student is engaged (with best practices) or they are not. Kuntz’s argument aligns with Lefebvre’s thoughts on the relationship between space and knowledge. The abstraction and fixing of space results in the controlled production and dissemination of knowledge (Lefebvre, 1991).

There is a “meshwork” of mental and social activities that in turn produces space (Lefebvre, 1991). This meshwork can at times juxtapose one’s meaning-making process within social practices grounded in fixity. Lefebvre went on to argue that by fixing space, knowledge and hegemony are controlled in a manner that foregoes the attention of the public. As a result, spatial conditions become perceived “as is” rather than understood as remaining in a state of continual becoming or subject to multiple

interpretations. While spaces can be investigated and described, space cannot be fully figured out (Massey, 2005). At best, we can capture a spatial moment or a point of entry (Kuntz, 2019; Resnick & Wolff, 2013). If space is relational and bound by meaning, then seeking to establish “one truth” denies the possibility of multiple existences.

Doreen Massey built upon Lefebvre’s works in *For Space* and presents a compelling argument for the reimagination of space. Her text, which again serves as the theoretical framework for this study, provides a way to understand the complexity and influence of place and space. Massey drew connections on the ways in which power, privilege, history, and political rhetoric work together in order to create nearly singular understandings of place and space and inhibit the ability to infer different spatial meanings. Massey suggested that space is socially produced and “is a site of struggle involving major systems of power and inequality related to class, gender, and other social divisions” (Moss & Richter, 2011, p. 139).

Massey defined space as “the product of interrelations as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny” (p. 9). Space is dependent on their inhabitants and their political and social relationships (Low, 2017). A second characterization of Massey’s conceptualization of space is the existence of multiplicitous and contemporaneous realities. Space as multiplicitous suggests that no single and complete conceptualization of space can be established or lived, which is often attempted in the materialist tradition which focuses on representative claims (Kuntz, 2019).

Space is always under construction and not exempt from political influence (Massey, 2005; Relph, 1979). Space, which again reflects the socially relational experience, occurs in relation to place. As previously mentioned, place refers to particular and lived-in environments (Massey, 2005). Experiencing the campus in relation to the broader university's space exemplifies the relationship between place and space. A residence hall, campus office, or even a social media platform are also examples of place. While not strictly bound by geography, place is more localized and intimately lived (Massey, 2005). Given the more intimate nature of place, the practices one experiences also characterizes place (Tuck and McKenzie, 2014). At the same time, the previously aforementioned example of a residence hall can also represent space when thought of according to its associated broader social norms, traditions, and expectations.

Massey's description of place and space clashes with the narratives of environments so often found in empirical literature. Similar to Lefebvre, she attempted to reclaim space from the mathematician. Structuralist and postpositivist frameworks, which remain prevalent in the social sciences, attempt to freeze and dissect space (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kuntz, 2019; Resnick & Wolff, 2013). Dissecting space in the name of overdetermination is a form of representation, to which Massey strongly opposed and called for a new approach towards spatial analysis (Resnick & Wolff, 2013). When space is conceptualized in a narrowly-defined or frozen manner, it has been spatialized in a hegemonic and singular way.

Spatialization is the act of gaining and contributing to an overall sense of a space and time (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). To spatialize is to act on the desire to identify

socialized assigned meanings and representations of space. Cognitive maps, ethnographies, and institutional regulations may suggest spatialized efforts (Shields, 1991). A particular problem with spatialization is when it hegemonizes particular experiences and ignores the dynamic and multiple existences of space as defined by Massey. Spatializing therefore can at times go beyond an act of materializing space and also establish space in a particular way. Massey (2005) posited that spatialization can be a tool of governance and facilitate the imposition of particular imaginations of space. She opposed the scientific and political obsession of fixing place and space, which in turn creates power-laden spatial assumptions and disregards particular subjectivities.

I offer the collegiate tradition of homecoming as exemplifying space and spatialization. Understood in a spatialized manner, homecoming and its related practices typically instills a particular sense of space and time among alumni. Such practices are commonly associated with nostalgia and a shared meaningful experience. However, this is just one, although dominant, spatialized understanding of homecoming. If spaces are constantly relational and changing, then everyone has a different homecoming since “you can never simply go back, to home or to anywhere else. When you get there the place will have moved on just as you yourself have changed” (Massey, 2005, p. 124).

The homecoming example and high impact practices reflect the act of spatialization at the institutional level. Again, to spatialize is to recognize, and potentially influence, space through articulating particular understandings. Beyond this, spatialization can also be associated with practices that normalize particular behaviors (Massey, 2005). Homecoming becomes spatialized not just by articulations and practices

associated with this particular campus-based tradition, but also by the funds, policies, and institutional involvement that further this particular space as produced by nostalgia, fellowship, and shared meaning. In this example, the institution spatializes knowledge about the institution that effect a sort of normalizing power through those who move through the institution.

Spatializing can also be a political process which results in the hegemonization of a particular place and experience. Spatializing has the potential to establish dominant forms of knowledge and relations (Lefebvre, 1991). Once a place has been spatialized in a hegemonic manner, meaning at individual and societal levels tends to be held in relation to what has now been deemed as “normal” or “traditional” (Massey, 2005).

Definition of Terms

Throughout this study I use terms that may be commonsensically understood but must be engaged in meaningful ways. In order to provide clarity to the reader, I provided foundational definitions of the following words. As previously discussed, I must caution that according to the literature, there is no single definition for these terms and I assume their meaning and understanding to be quite dynamic. I offer the following as the lowest common denominator of their respective definitions. I engage further with these terms and concepts throughout this study.

- Space – Spaces are contextualized broader social relations such as power, privilege, and identity. Spaces are produced mostly through publicly influenced matters such as governmentality and politics. The product of relations of power and politics, spaces exist in multiplicitous and open-ended ways since they are

ultimately subject to experience at individual and social levels such as by a shared identity group. Since space tends to be politically connected, material practices and knowledge at varying social and organizational levels are often concerned with producing impressions and rules that privilege particular ways of experiencing and perceiving space. I previously suggested the idea and expectations associated with the University of Miami as an example of a space. (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005)

- Spatialization – The process of understanding spaces is known as spatialization. Spatialization refers to the ways that knowledge, social activities, relations, phenomena (such as student engagement), and processes take on spatial forms. Spatialized knowledge and practice typically influence culture and how one experiences a place. Since spatialization refers to the material practices and knowledge associated with the production of space, spatialized practices can at times become mechanisms of reinforcing power and politics. Organizational policies and resource allocations are institutional exemplars of spatialization. Hegemonic spatialized practices can affix values and social meanings in ways that favor people and entities with power and privilege. (Lefebvre, 1991)
- Place – Places are experienced between a person, site, and time. Colloquially, places tend to be simply understood as a location and its associated practices. However, and for the purposes of this study, places are created by human experience and are part of a person's meaning-making process. Compared to space, places are intimately lived and can be considered the intersection of

geography and ascribing personal meaning to a site that was experienced. Since places are a process and not a site, they are held in relation to experience and meaning-making and are therefore subject to reinterpretation. Similar to hegemonic spatialization, places can be socially or institutionally treated as fixed and presumed to be experienced in particular ways. I previously suggested the University of Miami's campus, and how one experiences it, as an example of a place. (Relph, 1970; Massey, 2005; Tuan, 1979)

- Involvement – Involvement is a fairly broad term which refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience. Involvement occurs along a continuum and generally understood to positively correlate with a student's ability to learn and succeed in college. Quantitative measures such as time spent studying or grades tend to gauge involvement. (Astin, 1993; Harper & Quaye, 2010)
- Student Engagement – While there is overlap between involvement and engagement, engagement refers to the time and effort a student devotes to educationally purposeful and meaningful activities. Most commonly, engagement is understood as participation with particular collegiate activities that are linked to institutionally-ascribed desired outcomes of college such as graduation and satisfaction with their learning experience. Student engagement also entails what the institution does to entice students to be engaged. Built upon involvement theory, student engagement links time and behavior to particular institutional practices often dubbed as high-impact. (Kuh, 2009a, 2009b)

- Student Development – Within the context of student affairs, student development refers to the ways a student changes as a result of enrollment and involvement with a postsecondary institution. Development refers to growth in cognitive-structural, psychosocial, and social identity aspects. (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016)

Human Ecologies

A spatial experience exists through the symbiotic relationship between people, the places they occupy, and the environments they create. Yi-Fu Tuan elucidated this relationship between a person and space when he stated that “human beings live in environments of their own construction” (1977, p. 101). He went on to describe designed environments as the primary texts for defining and disseminating traditions. Considering place and space as a text opens up possibilities for further understanding human cultural meanings and activities (Lavery, 2003). In line with Tuan’s description of built environments as texts, Moos (1986) posited that “the arrangement of environments is perhaps the most powerful technique we have for influencing human behavior” (p. 4). Therefore, an attempt to understand the environment suggests an effort to comprehend behaviors and the desired outcomes associated with a particular experience.

The study of the developmental relationship between humans and environments exists across disciplines and is a somewhat commonsensical notion. “To assert that human development is a product of interaction between the growing human organism and its environment is to state what is almost a commonplace in behavioral science. It is a proposition that all students of behavior would find familiar” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.

16). Theories of psychoanalysis, organizational management, student development, and other academic areas of inquiry serve as evidence to the prevalence of this concept (Daft, 2015; Gladding, 2005; Patton et al., 2016). Kurt Lewin (1936), who posited that behavior is a function of the person and the environment, is credited as elucidating the linkage between people and their environments.

While the concept that people and their environments are linked may be somewhat common knowledge, methodologies that embed persons in space remain sparse (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Hung and Stables (2011) used the term ‘geo-phenomenological’ to describe methodologies that examine the interrelation between person and environment. Geo-phenomenologies are an effort to understand the lived experience embedded within a particular context. Such lived experiences can be vastly different, even when sharing the same place. Space affords multiple ways of being inhabited (Massey, 2005; Tuan, 1977).

The familiar to one may be the estranged to another. This is a problem that is quite common in higher education and can result in student withdrawal, departure, negative campus climate, and other detrimental effects (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2008). Embracing spatial difference, and accounting for those differences is a gap in higher education political and administrative practice which appears to remain unfulfilled. To do this, we must move beyond accounting for what exists in an environment, such as quantifying students of color or international students, and account for the relations and experiences that connect them to their surroundings (Harper & Quaye, 2010). Spaces and places are processes in motion and cannot

accurately be captured through strictly Cartesian means (Lefebvre, 1991). Moreover, changed spatial realities over time should also be accounted for. Through this study, I present multiplicitous spatial experiences and perspectives as presented by participants. I also emphasize space and place as constantly in states of change by discussing implications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Campus Environments

In addition to Astin's I-E-O model, there are three major frameworks often utilized to describe place and spatial relationships within college. The first, and most often cited, is Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology model (Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Jessup-Anger & Aragonés, 2013; Ryder, Reason, Mitchell, Gillon, & Hemer, 2016). "Ecology models explain the processes—but not the outcomes—of human development" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 41). The utility in Bronfenbrenner's model is in its ability to position a student relevant to people, experiences, and policies. Renn and Arnold (2003) made a compelling argument as to how Bronfenbrenner's model can serve as a framework to better understand peer culture, which they define as "the forces and processes that shape individual and collective life on campus in terms of identity, group membership, acceptable discourse, and desirable behaviors" (p. 262).

Bronfenbrenner's ecology model is useful in identifying contexts, but not in describing their effects or relationship with a person. Ranging from the mesosystem to the macrosystem, researchers can arrange the proximity of contexts to a student (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This framework can also inform access to certain contexts such

as Greek involvement or to identity-based communities (Renn & Arnold, 2003). While Bronfenbrenner's model lends itself to understanding the people and places involved in a student's experience, it is limited in two ways. First, space is treated as fixed and ordered. When applied beyond a single student, Bronfenbrenner's model may represent a cataloguing effort which runs contrary to Massey's (2005) understanding of space as dynamic and always "becoming." Visual representations of student development through Bronfenbrenner's model closely resemble the solar system, which once again resembles a world in which place and their meanings are static and universal. The second limitation is in regard to the purpose of the model. Since ecology models cannot explain outcomes, such as spatialization or meaning-making, Bronfenbrenner's model is better suited to describe culture and access rather than a lived phenomenon (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

The second framework utilized in spatial understandings of student engagement in college is Holland's person-environment theory. Formulated from vocational research, Holland posited that people possess varying degrees of six personality types (1997). Relatedly, there are six environmental models that align with each kind of personality. The relationship between person and environment is grounded in the assumption that people seek to be in environments that support their talents and values. Similar to Bronfenbrenner, Holland's theory "does not describe a developmental trajectory" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 45). This theory seems most suitable when researching transition experiences, academic and career exploration, or when seeking to describe the values and preferred behaviors of a particular environment (Chen & Simpson, 2015; Mendoza,

2009). It does not appear to be conducive in research that takes on a more cartographic and phenomenological orientation.

Strange and Banning's (2001) research on learning environments is the third framework. According to the authors, human environments are comprised of physical conditions, characteristics of the inhabitants, organizational structures, and inhabitants' collective perceptions. Elements of Massey's conceptualization of space exist within Strange and Banning's work. For example, Strange and Banning identify three kinds of environmental influences. Determinism resembles environments which strongly direct the behavior that exists within them. Possibilism sets limits, but does not restrict behavior. And lastly, probabilism reflects likely behaviors because of influences of a particular feature of the physical environment. I drew parallels between the deterministic, or spatialized world, so often described in student engagement literature and the possibilism that exists if spatial assumptions are mitigated. Strange and Banning's *Educating by Design* has a distinctly administrative and campus-centric orientation, which does not make it the best framework for describing a lived experience from the student point of view.

Campus climate research also frames the student experience in relation to the environment. Campus climate research looks past traditional markers of the environment such as the percentage of people of color in the student population and focuses on the relations and experiences created as a result of that composition. The attention given to relations, politics, and possibilities of change reflect a space-based understanding. For example, without proper support, students of color experience negative environmental

and political practices that result in feelings of racialized segregation and discrimination (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Loo & Rolinson, 1986; Rankin & Reason, 2008). The institution-centric approach of campus climate research is limited by campus boundaries and therefore is not suitable for a student-centered cartographic approach since the world beyond or even before the college student experience is unaccounted for.

Beyond Borders

While I find campus climate research appealing because of similarities in the treatment of space and people, I chose not to select a campus climate text as a framework since no borders or geographic boundaries have been established in this study. The research question is not held in relation to a particular place. I do not equate the term “college” with “campus.” This is intentional as the establishment of borders would rule out possible places of meaningful engagement not often considered. Borders serve as a distinct form of spatialization and communicate foreclosed values and behaviors. While it is very unlikely Gloria Anzaldúa thought of the college campus in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she spoke to the problems and limits we create when, in this context, we bind ourselves to such distinct boundaries. In her words:

Borders set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (1999, p. 25)

If, as Massey suggests, space can occur from the society to the individual, then spatial convergence and divergence is also a matter worthy of discussion. Higher education is in the business of establishing borders, despite messaging that may suggest

otherwise. Pre-admission fit and predictive analytics reflect these profiling efforts (Sacks, 2009). In the spirit of convergence, institutional decisions are made that attempt to create spatial harmony. While culture, mobility, and mutability are often celebrated, “disturbances” to anticipated ways of being and thinking are viewed with alarm (Massey 2005).

Massey referred to actions related to the concerns from the majority on perceived disturbances as “gatedness.” Gatedness reflects efforts to keep particular persons, practices, and knowledge kept out of particular spatialized practices. This practice of gatedness applies to more than just matters of admissions and enrollment. Space is an incredibly effective motivator of behavior, particularly with college-aged populations. The desire to fit in or assimilate to an institution’s culture practically defines social integration theory and its potency on influencing student development and persistence (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1988; Weidman, 1989).

Meaningful moments in education often require transgression from boundaries (hooks, 1994). By removing boundaries, I am free to answer “Where does engagement happen?” This question is often answered in research in relation to a defined place (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Blimling, 2015; Gumprecht, 2006; Mayhew et al., 2016; Patton, 2010). However, I am curious what happens when the place is not defined. The phenomenon of interest is the students’ experience, not the effectiveness of a particular place or practice. Gone are the days of the Tintonian assumption that engagement in college requires withdrawal from life beyond the campus gates (Tinto, 1988).

Spatial Paradigms

The foremost paradigm influencing the dominant understanding of space and place in higher education is postpositivist and quantitative (Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Central to Massey's (2005) argument is the belief that space is nuanced and immeasurable. Massey's stance runs counter to quantitatively driven efforts to code and catalogue the world. Peter Magolda exemplified the depth garnered through qualitative exploration in his description of the campus tour (2000). In his study, he explored the implicit beliefs and values deemed as "normal" by the institution as pointed out to him by his tour guide. I considered this to be a study on the mechanisms and implications of spatialization. For Magolda, the campus tour was a spatial experience that emphasized "the ways" of the university. He pondered, as I do, how the institution values particular places and appears to ignore others. He also explored how meanings are assigned and emphasized on those particular spatial relationships. Doing so, which again is a spatialized act, serves to "ratify and legitimate the dominant culture" (p. 38).

Space and place must be accounted for in higher education. Student development does not occur in a vacuum. Within higher education literature space may sometimes be roughly translated as the environment or climate, yet there are distinct differences which I previously discussed. Previous research that engages with studies of space are accompanied by paradigmatic assumptions that run counter to Massey's framework or examine elements solely within the confines of institutional control (Astin, 1993; Strange & Banning, 2001). Post-positivist campus environment studies have been instrumental in

advancing knowledge on the relationship between collegiate practices and student behavior. However, engaging in a post structural conceptualization of space requires a different paradigmatic lens that accounts for the complex dynamism of space, the non-linear nature of development, and the circumstances surrounding individuals and institutions.

Magolda's analysis of the campus tour exemplifies the complexity of space. If, according to Massey's framework, space is assumed to be subjective and multiplicitous, then quantitative variables can only provide a limited understanding. Place and space cannot exist without experiencing it (Lefebvre, 1991). Student engagement within place and in relation to space is the phenomenon in question. To capture and describe the essence of that experience requires a rich description and the recognition that any effort to describe place and space is incredibly context specific, yet highly valid given the meaning and influence those lived experiences have had on the participants. By moving beyond variables and deferring to the participant to draw their own boundaries, this study can advance current notions of student engagement as well as create awareness of the multi-dimensional, yet simultaneous existence of space.

Contextualizing Spaces and Places in Residence Halls

While my study is not one focused on the on-campus residential experience, given my professional background I reviewed literature on residence halls in order to demonstrate space and place within a particular setting in higher education. The literature on the residential experience offers a case study as to why an enriched understanding of space and place is warranted. Simply living on campus was once considered "the single

most consistent within-college determinant of the impact of college” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 611). According to Pascarella and Terenzini’s research, no other factor was as strongly associated with key college student outcomes such as persistence, critical thinking development, and personal development. An environment which places students in close proximity to each other and encourages interactions through dining, socializing, and other experiences strongly influences a student’s likelihood of being engaged (Astin, 1985). However, this narrative appears to be changing. In the most recent edition of *How College Affects Students*, the benefits of living on campus have decreased over time and may have even reversed course. Findings from the third edition suggest that students residing on campus, especially first-year students, are more likely to experience negative psychological consequences such as stress, anxiety, and lower self-esteem (Mayhew et al., 2016).

A growing body of research supports the claim that today’s students possess a lower tolerance for stressful situations and therefore less likely to thrive in an unfamiliar residential environment (Bland, Melton, Welle, & Bigham, 2012; Much, Wagener, Breitzkreutz, & Hellenbrand, 2014). For first-year resident students, moving away from home, sharing a living space for the first time, navigating a new environment, and adjusting to new academic expectations can be disorienting (Mayhew et al., 2016). The stress and environmental press associated with a negative rooming and community environment are exacerbated for students of color, who are less likely to seek assistance and tend to experience hostility in their residential community based on their identity (Erb, Renshaw, Short, & Pollard, 2014; Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012).

Over time, the single most influential determinant of a successful college experience became a possible detrimental factor to a student's well-being and barrier to degree completion. Certainly, changes in student demographics, technology, and upbringing influenced the degraded developmental potency of residential living (Mayhew et al., 2016). However, if as Kurt Lewin (1936) suggests, behavior is a function of the person and their environment, then one can assume that the environment is also an active agent in this matter. Students have clearly changed. It is likely, if not possible, that the spaces and places they experience have changed as well. While much has been written about students and their identities since Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) claimed the potent developmental role of on-campus housing, much has yet to be understood about spatial experiences.

An analysis of space is incomplete without comprehending the societal values assigned to that spatial experience (Low, 2017). As previously discussed, to spatialize is to account for spatial forms and evaluate the assigned values of a space (Massey, 2005). Most importantly, spatialization tends to be a process which can at times result in the politicized hegemonization of a particular place and experience. Consequently, spatializing can potentially establish dominant forms of knowledge and relations (Lefebvre, 1991). As part of the spatialization process, meanings and values are either articulated or assigned and held in relation to a particular space. Within the residence hall setting, institutional spatializing through forms of knowledge and practice may result in a student's feelings of compatibility and acceptance or on the contrary, abnormality and isolation.

It is my hope that my study on the student experience as embedded in space and place can serve to recognize the currently dominant static conceptualization of student engagement literature and how such ways of thinking foreclose opportunities and impose boundaries on the student experience. There is an “up there and out there” assumption regarding collegiate environments that must be disrupted (Massey, 2005). Space is occupied by relationships and politics which in turn spatialize particular experiences and ways of being (Lefebvre, 1991). Place is intimately lived and sensed (Relph, 1979). The spaces and places so often written about in higher education are anything but pure and absent of meaning. I offer this phenomenological study in order to illuminate the ways in which spatial production occurs in college and how places are experienced.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is a term often held in relation to the environment and therefore serves as the aspect of the collegiate experience positioned within place and space (Kuh, 2009a). The history of college student engagement literature is dynamic. The first iteration of engagement in college was introduced as involvement by Alexander Astin in 1985. Involvement is “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 297). Astin recognized that the energies expended by a student occur within an environment. He divided environmental variables into six discreet categories: institutional characteristics, curriculum, faculty, peer group, residence, major and financial aid, and student involvement (Astin, 1993).

Astin (1993) defined environments as areas to which students are exposed to institutional policies, faculty, peers, and educational activities. The quality of the

environmental experience, according to Astin, is measured in time or length of exposure. Therefore, spending time potentially equals gains in development. This is problematic since a time-oriented assumption frames engagement as a linear process mostly dependent on the student's behavior. "Time is too often conceptualized in the same manner as space" (Massey, 2005, p.22). Duration is misunderstood as a justifiable measure of space. Doing so "places too much emphasis on the purely horizontal and too little recognition of the multiple trajectories" (Massey, 2005, p. 51). A time-oriented approach towards engagement assumes a particular kind of social capital or identity, such as even knowing when and where to engage with faculty, having access to particular places, the free time to engage in such endeavors, or even the motivation to be involved in meaningful ways (Braxton, 2000; Tillapaugh, 2019).

Astin's (1993) time-oriented theory of involvement suggests that involve results in the achievement of the positive outcomes of college, such as retention. Notwithstanding, developmental and achievement results such as gains in critical thinking skills or degree attainment remain mixed regardless of reported measures of engagement (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Despite the establishment of best practices, college attainment rates remain stagnant (Mendoza, Malcolm, & Parish, 2015). I argue that context, including place, matters. This is the "E" in I-E-O which remains mostly undefined. For example, distance learners are catching up and at times surpassing their on-campus peers in their reports of being in a supportive learning environment (Kuh, 2009b). The answer as to why this happened cannot be solely answered by assessing time spent studying.

There is a spatial element involved. A particular set of conditions may need to be in place in order for meaningful engagement and development to occur. If so, then meaningful involvement and engagement must be understood as more than time spent on a task or behavior. A time-based definition of engagement offers little consideration to the production of space in which engagement presumably occurs. Conceptualizing engagement on a neutral and fixed plane removes realistic interactions, depoliticizes the experience, and removes meaningfulness that is potentially generated through spatial interactions (Massey, 2005).

Astin (1993) stated that involvement reflects a student's physical and emotional energy devoted to college. Kuh elaborated on this concept and shifted away from involvement and elaborated on engagement (Kuh, 2008). The key difference between Astin and Kuh is that the time of the student and the institution are both directed towards specific activities. These activities, dubbed high impact practices are first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008). The places in which these efforts can be exerted and deemed to be "educationally effective" are pre-determined and value-assigned. According to Kuh (2009b), "engagement is the amount of time and energy students put forth and are positively linked with the desired outcomes of undergraduate education" (p. 683). The kinds of activities that may be "educationally purposeful" are defined by empirical literature and the institution, and not necessarily the student (Lange & Stewart, 2019). I

consider such practices as an exemplar of spatialization at an institutional and cultural level.

High Impact Practices

High impact practices in higher education are the empirical findings of the NSSE (Kuh, 2009a). The effectiveness of these practices and the importance of student engagement is well documented and supported by the literature (Kuh, 2001, 2008, 2009a; Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, Kuh, & Gonyea 2003). According to Trowler and Trowler (2010), the value of NSSE's measures of engagement are no longer questioned. In fact, it has become a marker of institutional quality (Kuh, 2009a). Kuh himself cautioned about the nuances and flaws in assuming universal applicability and effectiveness of high-impact practices (Harper & Quaye, 2008; Kuh, 2009b; Lange & Stewart, 2019; Tillapaugh, 2019). The universal spatialization of high-impact practices is particularly problematic for students of color, part-time students, or those enrolled at non-residential postsecondary institutions (Tillapaugh, 2019). Despite more recent literature grounding engagement in relation to student identities and critical theory, there is little doubt that within the higher education industry student engagement has become narrowly defined as involvement with high-impact or other institutional practices (Lange & Stewart, 2019; Tillapaugh, 2019).

It appears that there is a dominant profession wide assumption that meaningful engagement mostly occurs within the previously mentioned high impact practices or within the purview of the institution. Such logic presents a very particular and fixed version of spatial reality and the college. It is a spatialized collegiate experience designed

to favor first-time, full-time traditional undergraduate students at residential colleges (Bloland 1994). Seventy percent of students enrolled in American postsecondary education possess at least one non-traditional student characteristic (Chen & Hossler, 2017). It is possible that the pathways of engagement and meaning-making can be just as non-traditional as students themselves. A multiplicitous spatial experience can hardly be recognized when higher education theory and practice call for synchrony in engagement (Massey, 2005). It is evident that the college student developmental experience has been spatialized in a very particular way.

Sites of Engagement

Returning to Astin (1993), involvement suggests in part that time spent appropriately results in the achievement of the positive outcomes of college such as retention (1993). Astin's conceptualization of the environment is guided by the notion that college happens within the campus. This is evidenced by the prominence of high impact practices (Kuh, 2008). The places in which a student's involvement efforts can be exerted and deemed to be "educationally effective" are pre-determined and value-assigned.

While the developmental and educational effectiveness of high-impact practices and the classroom experience are well-documented and justifiably positioned within the higher education experience, they are sites of institutional oversight strongly influenced by research informed by first-time and full-time college students (Lange & Stewart, 2019). Despite increases in non-traditional student enrollment, administrators continue to vie for expansive institutional positioning within student space. At best,

administrators can provide engagement opportunities, but space and place are not marked or determined solely by the institution (Massey, 2005; Tuan, 1977). Therefore, administrators of postsecondary institutions should look beyond their campus gates and consider the natural temporality and space occupied by students. Engagement opportunities intended to be developmental can and should center the student, not the institution. Living at home, working off campus, raising children or dependents, have been institutionally spatialized as somewhat counter-developmental. This logic presents engagement opportunities for such populations as diminished and therefore less likely to engage in “educationally effective” institutional practices.

There may be power and developmental potency in supporting students to be engaged in their space, rather than narrowly defining engagement through campus activities and institutional practices. This in turn will reduce the dualistic lives often reported by commuting and non-traditional students, who feel stuck between personal and institutional commitments (Tillapaugh, 2019). Doing so would likely support the spatial multiplicities and potentialities which warrants recognition (Massey, 2005).

Engagement in Space

Space is traditionally considered to be a kind of voyage of discovery, as something to be crossed and maybe conquered and colonized (Massey, 2005). Since space is embedded in political, identity, and relational matters, it is not exempt from the hegemonic tendencies of humanity. A campus cannot simply appear. People and policies govern and influence a place such as a campus. The wholesomeness and universal potentiality of the college experience so often communicated in marketing

materials and the campus tour hardly reflect the actual college experience and student development (Abes, Jones, & Stewart, 2019). What is actually marketed, and spatialized in a practically universal manner, is “the” college experience. This often means full-time enrollment and full-time institutional engagement. The centrality of social integration with student engagement suggests that if a student is not progressing satisfactorily or not fitting in, then it must be an issue with the student (Tinto, 1988). In the battle of person-environment fit, the environment almost always comes out the victor. This is largely because of the ethereal or unseen nature of the environment.

With Massey’s notion of multiplicity, variance in lived spatial experiences are already in existence. Recognizing them and sharing their narratives diminishes the “othering” effects experienced by those who do sense a lack of fit with socially broadcasted spatial narratives or “normal” identities and experiences (Abes et al., 2019). Efforts at de-othering would likely frame student engagement in places and spaces from the student’s perspective and less so the institution’s. The difference in such an effort is best noted by Tuan (1977). He described place as security. We are attached to it. It is the domain of comfort, normalcy, and order. In contrast to this is space, which is freedom and what we long for. Tying knowledge and practices, such as student engagement, to a strictly bordered physical and fixed place, results in reinforcing dominant structures of knowledge and only serves to confirm previously spatialized ways of knowing and being (Massey, 2005). To connect engagement with the dynamism and multiplicitous nature of space would challenge what is defined as

legitimate and opens opportunities to engage in discourse about numerous ways of developing and being.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed literature related to space, place, and spatialization. I presented Doreen Massey's *For Space* as the theoretical framework for my study. Massey's text as well as related poststructural scholarship on space are important because it challenges the notion that suggests space as a void or an environment that is absent of value. Concerned with the political, economic, and otherwise governmental influences of space, the literature posits that narrow or singular definitions of space create practices of hegemony and exclusion. I also reviewed research related to human-environment ecologies and the campus environment. It is clear that a symbiotic relationship exists between people and their environments. With this in mind, I discussed literature that defined student engagement. Mostly understood through high impact and other institutional practices, engagement suggests educationally effective student involvement in relation to the campus. This study seeks to articulate the spaces, places, and spatialized practices that exist yet are hardly articulated in student engagement literature.

Chapter 3: Methods

This is a qualitative study employing a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology consistent with the approach van Manen (2016) outlines. I interviewed five full-time undergraduate upperclassmen students with residential experience. The participants discussed the spaces and places related to their collegiate experience and the meaning they generated from such experiences. Because the research topic is about understanding a particular lived experience and its meaning, a phenomenological study is appropriate and fitting as the selected methodology (Barritt, Bleeker, Beekman, & Mulderij, 1985; Lavery, 2003). Data collection occurred from December 2019 through April of 2020. This period of time includes the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in extended data collection and analysis. I collected data through semi-structured interviews and photographs submitted by the participants.

A hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand lived experience and also accounts for the interpretive and subjective nature of individuals (Barritt et al., 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2016). I am interested in understanding how lived experience can be thought of spatially. Therefore, I place the phenomenological focus on lived experience posited by van Manen (2016) in conversation with Massey's (2005) understanding of space and place. Through my review of the literature it was evident that lived experiences such as that of a college student's involvement with the institution, are often not contextualized within space. As previously described, articulations of lived experience are typically treated as occurring on a blank canvas divorced from an individual's engagement with space (Massey, 2005).

Consistent with qualitative approaches, I do not aim to generalize but rather present results and discussion that highlight the phenomenon of interest within particular spaces. The results may be informative and partially transferrable to other spaces, but such decisions would depend on the material conditions and social relations shaping those spaces. “Ultimately it is up to the reader to decide whether the research has struck at some shared experience or not” (Barritt et al., 1985, p. 221). Within phenomenology, the concern lies with the nature of lived experience, not generalizable facticity or the nomological (van Manen, 2016). “The nature and number of possible human experiences are as varied and infinite as human life itself” (p. 40).

My assertions and the participant stories I shared are entry points in a collective meaning making process (Resnick & Wolff, 2013)¹. Resnick and Wolff suggested that relational phenomena are open and unfinished rather than discreetly whole and should not be presented as such. My findings are existing-in-motion and situated in relations and interpretations that are never fully complete (Kuntz, 2019). I state this in order to emphasize the inherently relational and interpretive nature associated with the participants’ accounts, my engagement with the data, and the identification of super-ordinate and sub-themes.

¹ In their discussion of overdeterminism Resnick and Wolff suggest a process “cannot occur alone, for in that case they would be empty of content, meaningless, or simply nonexistent” (p 342). Processes, such as meaning-making, exist as a combined impact with other processes. Resnick and Wolff argue that any attempt to isolate a process is logically impossible. Meaning making is collective because it is a process dependent on context and relations.

Study's Epistemology

Epistemology, or the study of knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified, underlies any methodological discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kelly, 2006). Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that a researcher's philosophical assumptions ought not be hidden from view, especially in a phenomenological methodology. Articulating my epistemological stance in relation to my study provides insight on methodological selection as well as assumptions that inform the research process. It is my desire to understand the experience and meaning associated with student spaces and places in relation to the campus. Meaning, in the hermeneutic sense, recognizes and accepts interpretation as part of inquiry and knowledge claims (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016).

My approach to research reflected in my methodology aligns with a constructivist framework. Constructivism suggests that realities are constructed and co-constructed at local and specific levels (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). I find that both hermeneutic phenomenology as well as Massey's description of space and place are grounded in a constructivist orientation. My study attempts to better understand spatial realities within a very particular context in higher education. A subjectivist orientation exists within constructivism, thus operating under the assumption, and acceptance of that assumption, that interviews and focus groups are a valid means of data collection (Bredo, 2006). Such kinds of data collection are assembled subjective evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using interviews, especially in-depth, lengthy, semi-structured, and even repeated

interviews, is an act which supports the stance that knowledge can be identified through understanding meaning and experiential awareness.

I employed a hermeneutic phenomenological method as defined by van Manen (2016). Hermeneutic phenomenology, which is built upon the works of Heidegger as well as Gadamer, examine both lived experience and its meaning. I examined lived experiences and the meanings ascribed by participants. Van Manen (2016) suggested that a characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenological interviews is the prominence of narratives that lend themselves to rich and deep understandings of a particular phenomenon. This study is concerned with the nature of students being in relation to student engagement, space, and place. Describing essences associated with a phenomenon are subject to interpretation (van Manen, 2016). Phenomenological studies recognize and accept interpretation, such as that offered through interviews, as part of inquiry and knowledge claims (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016)

In addition to data collection measures, my own role as researcher and writer within the study needs to be recognized as grounded in informed but subjective choices. The data collection, analysis, and discussion presented are not untouched by being and time². Heidegger (1971) described an embedded humanness in all forms of thinking. He proposed that language, being, and thinking are one. According to Heidegger, these terms

² In a discussion on connections between lived experience and the objective world Merleau-Ponty (1973) advised that “reflection can be carried away by itself and installed in an impregnable subjectivity, as yet untouched by being and time. But this is very ingenuous, or at least it is an incomplete form of reflection which loses sight of its own beginning.” (p. 10).

are in fact not different things at all but rather refer to the inherently connected nature between person and thought. Van Manen (2016) applied Heidegger's supposition of thinking and being as one to phenomenological research through the notion and practice of reflexivity. Writing, of any kind and especially in a phenomenological study, is a text informed by reflective thought and subjective choices³.

Methodology

A phenomenology is the study of essences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It is a methodology "based on the conscience of phenomena in which the pure essences of the contents and consciousness stand out" (Padilla-Diaz, 2015, p. 102). Within hermeneutic phenomenology, researching an essence is not essentializing. Similar to Massey, van Manen (2016) articulates an anti-essentialist stance. Essentializing, in the form of seeking to describe immutable facts, represents a kind of spatializing effort that ignores the dynamic and relational spaces in which lived experience occurs. Van Manen suggested that essence "may be understood as a linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon"⁴ (p. 39). For the purposes of this study, I selected and operationalized van Manen's (2016) understanding of essence. Through this choice, I employed descriptive

³ Lavery (2003) described writing as texts that serve as reflections of human cultural activity. Thinking of writing as a kind of cultural text introduces the idea that multiple and even conflicting interpretations of an idea may exist (van Manen, 2016).

⁴ Heidegger (1962) also called into question what essence and "existing" means. He challenged the ontological belief that "being" can be defined in an ultimate manner. An entity is always held in relation to something else. Therefore, the essence of a lived experience is always embedded within relationality and structures. This is akin to Massey's understanding of space.

writing in order to articulate the essence of the participants' lived experience in relation to collegiate spaces and places.

Phenomenological studies are not novel within higher education research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Padilla-Diaz, 2015). However, as previously discussed in the literature review, there is a common essentializing effort that ignores space and place. Student development typologies and the dominance of best practices are indicative of this mindset. In order to address this problem, I placed van Manen's (2016) phenomenological framework in concert with Massey's articulation of space and place. Both describe a highly contextual nature of lived experience that is partially dependent on structures and interpretation. I also drew from Resnick and Wolff's (2013) discussion on overdeterminism. Lived experience cannot be isolated from its context. As an example of this, student participants seemed unable to separate the meaning of their previous experiences from the sudden impact of COVID-19. This is discussed further throughout subsequent chapters.

It is difficult to prove a single style of phenomenological research (Qutoshi, 2018; van Manen, 2014). This is because of the different perspectives and theoretical points of view that have influenced phenomenological research. When considering methodological choices for this study, including other variations of phenomenology, I selected van Manen's (2016) understanding and implementation of phenomenology since I consider there to be alignment between van Manen and Massey. I found that drawing upon this connection between van Manen and Massey affords the opportunity to expand phenomenological understandings within a spatial context. While I privilege van

Manen's phenomenology, I also cite other phenomenological scholarship I found informative.

While there are certainly philosophical claims to be made with all methodologies, phenomenological research, perhaps more than most, is both a philosophy and methodology that is open to interpretation and application (Laverty, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). Discussing my epistemological stance and understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology addresses the need to articulate the philosophical underpinnings of this study. Within the context of this study, the assumptions regarding texts, truth, research design, and analysis are all informed by the works cited related to a hermeneutic understanding of phenomenology and its methods. Literature related to space and place, specifically the works of Doreen Massey, also informs the study's design.

Since I utilized van Manen's (2016) phenomenological methodology for this study, interpretation plays an important role in this research design and must be recognized. "The interpretation of people's meaning-making activities is central to phenomenological inquiry" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 18). Similarly, Kvale described hermeneutic phenomenology as "the study of human cultural activity as texts with a view towards interpretation to find intended or expressed meanings" (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p. 24). Experiences with physical and social environments serve as valid forms of human cultural texts as described by Laverty (Tuan, 1977). Considering the participants' narratives and photographs as texts, I used the data to develop a description of a particular reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2016). I engaged with not only

the participants' interpretation of the phenomenon they experienced, but my own interpretations of their accounts as well (van Manen, 2016). It is through hermeneutic analysis in which the understanding and meaning of a text, such as space, is revealed (Laverty, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).

Research Design

In addition to van Manen, I also selected Barritt et al.'s (1985) criteria for phenomenological research. Barritt et al.'s criteria offer practical guidelines and also supplemented van Manen's description of phenomenology. Barritt et al. argued that in order to qualify as a phenomenology, a study must possess three minimum requirements. First, the study should start by exploring and describing an experienced phenomenon. This is an entry point into a context whose circumstances and meaning for the participants is always changing (Kuntz, 2019). Second, the study should attempt to grasp at the structures associated with and influencing the phenomenon of interest. Spatial production and spatialization is deeply rooted in context, thus serving as a fitting framework for this study and methodology. And lastly, the study should serve to explore how the phenomena exists in one's consciousness. Moustakas (1994) offered a very similar definition of phenomenological research, but also emphasized the need to explicitly distinguish philosophical associations of phenomenology within the research design. This was articulated in the previous section.

With Barritt et al.'s (1985) criteria in mind, I engaged in van Manen's phenomenological activities throughout my research process. According to van Manen (2016), a phenomenology typically includes six activities. First is the researcher's turn to

an “abiding concern” of interest. Generally, I am interested in college campus environments and how students experience such spaces and places. The abiding concern I identified, which informed the problem statement for this study, was the need to address essentializing assumptions of student engagement in college. Student engagement and the meaning-making generated from such experiences does not occur in a vacuum. Following Resnick and Wolff’s (2013) argument on the inseparability of processes, my study sought to embed student engagement within space and place. Meaning-making, which is a process, is inseparable from the context in which it occurs (Resnick & Wolff, 2013).

The second phenomenological activity according to van Manen is the investigative experience which focuses on what is lived, not conceptualized. This activity strongly mirrors Massey’s (2005) argument that space is produced through lived and sensed experiences. Like Massey, van Manen (2016) argued that the individual’s experience should be centered in order to better understand that which is lived. I interpret this as a concern for describing that which is experienced rather than engaging in acts of prediction (Resnick & Wolf, 2013). This is reflected in the interview protocol, which frequently asked participants to engage in storytelling (Seidman, 2013)⁵.

I facilitated four semi-structured phenomenological interviews as well as one photo-elicitation interview with each participant. From the onset of this study I consciously avoided engaging in a method that would produce attempts to further model desired ways of being in college. If anything, I sought to disrupt the clarity falsely

⁵ Husserl described this story-telling aspect of phenomenology as turning “to the things themselves” (1980, p. 116).

promised by studies engaged in the pursuit of prediction (Lefebvre, 1991). Through story-telling and engagement with meaning-making, I sought to describe what is lived and interpreted by students while occupying collegiate spaces and places.

The third of van Manen's activities is engaging in reflection with the essential themes. This occurred through highly iterative memo-writing, annotation, and coding. Phenomenology constitutes a great deal of reflexivity. The memos and annotations I wrote serve as artifacts of the deep level of thinking and reflection involved in analyzing data.

The fourth of van Manen's activities is describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting⁶. This activity certainly was prevalent even from the earliest stages of data collection. I present my description of the phenomenon through photographs, excerpts from conversations with participants, continued engagement with the literature, and my written analysis of the data. The importance of writing as a phenomenological activity is also demonstrated through the manner in which this study is presented. Following Resnick and Wolff's (2013) argument that phenomena cannot be presented as discreetly whole, I did not find it appropriate nor feasible to separate data from their related analyses. Therefore, I present super-ordinate thematic chapters rather than a more traditional five-chapter dissertation format.

⁶ Gadamer (1975) noted that language, rationality, and thinking derive their meaning from the same root word: *logos*. "Phenomenology is the application of logos (language and thoughtfulness) to a phenomenon (an aspect of lived experience), to what shows itself precisely as it shows itself (van Manen, 2016, p. 33). Exercising language and thinking through writing is a critical activity in the phenomenological process.

The fifth activity within van Manen's phenomenological approach is maintaining a strong orientation and relation to the study and not defaulting on abstraction or aimless wandering. This activity calls the researcher to stay grounded in the study's purpose and not reduce findings to disembodied and generalizable themes. I adhered to this activity by maintaining Massey's work as the study's orientation and the means in which each super-ordinate theme is connected. The title and content of each thematic chapter are informed by Massey's (2005) *For Space*. Another method I utilized to avoid abstraction or distraction was by maintaining strong connections between participant narratives and analysis. Each super-ordinate theme and their related sub-themes are richly described and supported by participant narratives and photographs. Moreover, I engaged with the literature in order to present themes grounded in both lived experience and research.

The sixth activity requires the researcher to balance the study by considering the parts and the whole. Van Manen (2016) advised that a methodology grounded in such nuanced context cannot lose sight of the greater meaning and questions embedded in the "abiding concern." This sixth and final activity inspired me to engage with diffractive analysis. Explained further in the next chapter, diffractive analysis afforded me the opportunity to consider each super-ordinate theme through two perspectives. Through diffractive analysis, I discussed the greater meaning of each super-ordinate theme through at least two perspectives. As a result of writing through diffractive analysis, I found myself engaging with questions of uncertainty (Kuntz, 2019). Inspired by the data and diffractive analysis, each thematic chapter concludes with some of these reflective questions as I continue to think through the abiding concerns presented in this study.

Research Question

My research explored the lived spatial experience of five undergraduate college students. Informed by Massey's (2005) conceptualization of space and van Manen's (2016) phenomenological approach, this study sought to address the fixed and oversimplified dominant understanding of the collegiate environment. The following research question guides this study: *How do a group of undergraduate upperclassmen students who have lived on campus a minimum of one year understand the spaces and places related to their college education?*

Description of the Setting

I recruited participants from the University of Miami's Coral Gables campus (UM), my place of employment. An institution review board (IRB) articulation agreement exists between Florida International University and UM and no recruitment or data collection occurred prior to IRB approval. The site is a private, predominantly White, metropolitan institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The selection of this site was driven by my own professional experience with this institution type as well as the institution's geography and campus demographics. The university's Coral Gables campus is home to nearly all of the institution's undergraduate programs and is situated in a densely populated and urban area. The geographic boundaries of the campus are blended into a metropolitan setting which may or may not extend notions of engagement beyond the traditional campus setting.

The majority of students are not from the region, with 85% of enrollees coming from outside of south Florida (University of Miami, 2019). UM is a highly selective

private institution, with an annual undergraduate tuition just under \$50,000 (NCES, 2020). UM is highly sought after, likely requires relocation, and on-campus living because of the institution's first-year student live-on requirement.

Research Sample

I employed purposeful sampling to select participants. Creswell and Poth define purposeful sampling as the strategy in which “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (2018, p. 158). Since this is a phenomenological study, all participants must be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon in question and can articulate their lived experiences (van Manen, 2014). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that criterion sampling, a type of purposeful sampling strategy, is best utilized in phenomenological studies. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criteria of importance (Patton, 2015). Criterion sampling also serves as a quality assurance measure since the guidelines for participant selection are explicitly stated and mitigates the possibility of participants not familiar with the phenomenon in question (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell and Poth's (2018) considerations of purposeful sampling also informed the sampling criteria. First is the matter of site selection. As previously mentioned, I selected a private, predominantly white, metropolitan research institution. In order to be eligible for this study, all participants must have experienced the phenomenon of interest in relation to the selected site. In order to be eligible, a student needed to be a first-time, full-time undergraduate student at UM.

The second purposeful sampling consideration is in regard to identifying and articulating the selection criteria. I sought participants who were upperclassmen undergraduate students and resided in on-campus housing for at least one year, with two years residential experience preferred. I selected a minimum of one year residing on campus because of the divergence of living and enrollment options offered after the first year. Studying abroad, internships, and limited on-campus housing for upperclassmen mitigate the possibility of continued on-campus housing after the first year.

According to traditional student engagement logic, students with first-year residential experience have a shared starting point. In other words, they have a common “treatment” amongst them. I decided to retain on-campus living experience as a selection criterion in order to engage with this idea further. Moreover, participants with on-campus residential experience as a selection criterion afforded the opportunity to explore Massey’s (2005) notion of multiplicity of space. Massey argued strongly that the very real nature of space and place is subject to one’s own experience. To experience the single universal, such as experiencing on-campus living in similar ways, is a fallacy that discounts a person’s agency in experiencing space and place. Another criterion was contiguous enrollment and no disruption in studies caused by behavioral or academic reasons such as probation or suspension.

Creswell and Poth’s (2018) third consideration is sample size. I intended on selecting up to ten participants. I concluded data collection with five participants. Seidman (2013) recommends a sample size between three and ten for a phenomenological study. Smith et al. (2009) recommend between three and six

participants. Given the nature of phenomenological interviewing, it is best to limit the sample to this quantity so that efforts can focus on multiple interviews and depth of information (Smith et al., 2009). The fifth participant, Esther, was selected as a negative case. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to negative cases as participants whose experiences or viewpoints differ from the major range of cases. While diverse in their experiences and backgrounds, I found the first four participants to be moderately to strongly engaged in their collegiate experience. Esther has a strong family presence near campus and minimally engaged in traditional ways such as a campus job or student organization involvement. While her involvement experiences are distinctly different than the other participants, Esther reminded me that people can experience the same phenomenon but in different ways (Massey, 2005; van Manen 2016).

I ceased data collection when I considered there to be rich detail, robust information, and nothing decidedly new from additional interviews (Seidman, 2013). Given the previously discussed stance that space cannot fully be figured out, I considered it to be counterintuitive to cease data collection solely according to sufficiency and saturation. Sufficiency refers to numbers that reflect the range of participants that make up the site's population (Seidman, 2013). Within the context of this study, this would include diversity in identity, levels of campus engagement, as well as academic majors. Saturation is "the point in a study at which the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported" (Seidman, 2013, p. 58). The term "saturation" suggests a representational claim.

The primary concern of a phenomenological study is with a detailed account of individual experience, which is anything but exhaustive (Smith et al., 2009). This purpose of seeking detailed descriptions and articulating an experienced phenomenon suggests that one cannot reach a point of saturation or near-completeness. As Resnick and Wolff suggest, “to identify an entity is to intervene in its movement and to create momentary closure, an illusion of fixity” (2013, p. 43). The narratives provided by participants, coupled with my analyses, are entry points in a mutually engaged meaning-making processes that is constantly being reinvented. Beings and their existence are consistently in motion and never fully complete (Kuntz, 2019). Saturation then, at least in terms of this study, is defined as rich descriptions of experiences captured and interpreted at particular points in time with no finite boundaries or finality to participant narratives (Seidman, 2013).

Data Sources

Data for this study were collected from interviews and photographs submitted by participants. “As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language” (Seidman, 2013, p. 13). The purpose of the interviews was not to evaluate or test a hypothesis. Instead of seeking to hypothesize, the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding about the lived experience and the meaning generated through experience with collegiate spaces and places (Seidman, 2013; van Manen, 2016). Photographs not only elicit additional information from participants, but also offer a visual element to the thoughts, feelings, and experiences described

(Richard & Lahman, 2015). Analytic documentation, specifically my memos and annotations, also served as a data source (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020)

I included my own memos and annotations as data sources since I often found myself reflecting on my own academic and professional experience. Such efforts were indicative of my reflexivity involved in this study. These documents also served as the foundation of my data analysis process. As a former undergraduate, current administrator, and doctoral student I have my own history and experiences engaging with collegiate spaces. I attempted to be cognizant of my own biases and subjectivities during the interview phase of the study in order to minimize any influence on responses that it may have caused. Though mitigated, I do not think this was completely accomplished nor is possible for anyone to do since semi-structured interviews give way to mutual reactions and conversation. From a phenomenological perspective, my own reflexive engagement was bracketing in action. The idea of phenomenological bracketing refers to expanding one's own horizon of what is possible, including making your assumptions about truth vulnerable to the possibility of being partial or incorrect (van Manen, 2016).

The students who participated in this study shared approximately five hours each of stories and reflections as well as photographs of meaningful moments related to their collegiate experience. These interviews served as a contemplative exercise for both myself and the students who served as participants. We engaged in dialogue centered on identifying what stood out in college and articulating what generated the most meaning. It is apparent that the participants' commonalities are limited to the fact that they are enrolled at the same institution. Their accounts are unique, intimate, and complex. As a

steward of their stories, I acknowledge that the findings presented in this chapter are the results of not only their interpretations, but my own as well.

Data Collection Procedures

Recruitment & Consent

Recruitment and data collection began once I received IRB approval. I recruited participants by sending an IRB-approved email to colleagues at the research site requesting referrals for the study. The email (Appendix A) indicated the selection criteria, purpose of the study, and what was asked of participants. In this recruitment email I asked that the message be forwarded to students who met the criteria. I requested that potentially interested participants established first contact with me. I followed up with any referred student directly via email (Appendix B).

I arranged an intake meeting with each student. Intake meetings occurred in various on-campus locations such as a coffee shop, the student center, and my office. All students were offered the opportunity to select the meeting location, date, and time. The recruitment and intake meeting process occurred between December 2019 through early February 2020, all of which was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. I spent time getting to know the student, described my study and research interests, and reviewed the IRB approved informed consent form (Appendix C). The informed consent document included a description of what was asked of the participant.

I facilitated intake meetings with eight potentially interested students. One student was not eligible because of being a graduate student. Two withdrew after the intake meeting because of the time commitment. If a student agreed to participation, I asked and

recorded demographic information and gave a copy of the photo-elicitation protocol (Appendix D). Interviews were scheduled if a student agreed to participation and were arranged from four to ten days apart, with most being seven days apart. Seidman (2013) suggests that the passage of time in between interviews mitigates the possibility of distraction or disinterest and further distinguishes the purpose of each interview.

I had no prior relationship with the participants. Through introductory conversation they knew my role and responsibilities with the institution. In my opinion, I do not think participants were reserved about any topics related to the purview of my work or other areas of the institution. I learned more about the student experience and their general university perceptions than I have previously through contracted benchmarking surveys or other assessment strategies. The level of insight shared was unmatched to anything I have experienced. I gained the sense that there was a strong sense of honesty and trust in the interviewer-interviewee relationship. The open-endedness in questioning and responding enriched this study. I believe the authentic manner in which I engaged with the participants promulgated the willingness to participate with transparency. I also think the willingness to participate in an additional COVID-19 interview was due in part to my sincere engagement with participants.

Semi-Structured Interviews

As previously stated in the first chapter, I concluded data collection with 24 interviews. Four students participated in five interviews each, and another participated in four interviews. From these interviews and related analyses, my data consisted of 369 pages of transcripts, 38 memos, 478 annotations, 882 codes, and 60 photographs.

Interviews are the most suitable method for a phenomenological research design since “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2013, p. 9).

Capturing and describing both the phenomenon, as well as the subjective understanding of the experience through interviews directly aligns with the research question. I conducted two rounds of pilot interviews in order to refine the interview protocol, assess the degree of observer bias, and adapt my research procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The original interview protocol called for four interviews, three semi-structured and one photo-elicitation interview. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a fifth interview was added to further explore the spatial experiences of the participants. The fifth interview and its purpose are explained further in the COVID-19 semi-structured interview section. My semi-structured interview protocol for the first three phenomenological interviews was developed utilizing Seidman’s (2013) interview series (Appendix E).

The first interview focused on the participant’s life history. Its purpose was to learn as much about the participant in relation to the topic of study. This is important as context is crucial to understanding meaning behind the lived experience (Seidman, 2013). The purpose of the second interview was to explore “the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience in the topic area of the study” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). The second interview focused on their college experience. The third interview concentrated on the meaning-making associated with the experiences discussed in the

second interview. This third discussion was intended to be mostly a reflective exercise and address the intellectual and emotional connections with the experience.

All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed using Temi. I reviewed each transcript and edited for accuracy. Semi-structured interviews lasted anywhere from 38 minutes to one hour. I used the interview protocol with open-ended follow up questions to facilitate the conversation during each interview. I also asked follow up questions from the previous interview if I sought additional details or context to previously discussed content.

Photo Elicitation

The fourth interview was a photo elicitation interview⁷. Given the study's concern with spaces and places, photo elicitation interviews and photos provided visual and complementary data to the semi-structured interviews. Complementing interviews with photo elicitation strengthens the credibility and confirmability of this study while also serving as a tool which may prompt participants to share additional insights and perspective (Croghan et al., 2008; Harper, 2002; Torre & Murphy, 2015).

I am cognizant that an exercise that attempts to freeze a place in time through a photograph appears to run contrary to the framework and methodology of this study. Massey (2005) warned that maps and photographs can serve to limit imaginations of space. However, Croghan et al. (2008) argued that photo elicitation methods should be

⁷ Richard & Lahman (2015) define photo-elicitation interviews as the utilization of participant-generated photographs in an interview setting. The photographs not only serve as a visual data source, but also serve a tool to generate additional information from the participant. The authors argue that this practice is grounded in reflexivity, which aligns with hermeneutic phenomenology.

less concerned with visual representation and focus on interpretations and meaning-making of what is captured in the photograph. Photo elicitation interviews are designed to be an open-ended way for the researcher and participant to explore subjective meaning (Croghan et al., 2008). In line with phenomenology, the photographs do not refer to end point. Rather, this exercise is the starting point for the reconstruction of lived experience. While the participants' photographs certainly serve as data sources, the richest contributions from utilizing photo-elicitation came from the conversations they inspired. I witnessed first-hand how photographs can serve as tools for generating reflective dialogue on meaning-making (Richard & Lahman, 2005).

Patton (2002) argued that photo elicitation calls attention to that which cannot be observed. Researchers interested in describing participants' thoughts, feelings, and intentions may find photo elicitation as a means to not only garner additional information, but offer a visual dimension to the deeply experienced (Richard & Lahman, 2015; Patton, 2002). Studies that utilize photo elicitation interviews tend to result in more concrete information, relieves the stress of being questioned, and provides richer descriptions than words-only interviews (Collier, 1957; Samuels, 2004). Schaeffer and Carlsson (2014) as well as Bennet (2014) utilized photo elicitation in their respective phenomenological studies on space and place. Schaeffer and Carlsson (2014) argued that photo elicitation creates visual data and participant-provided descriptions that speak to Heidegger's (1962) notion of dwelling and the ways that space appears to an individual.

During the intake meeting I explained the photography portion of the study and provided participants with a printed copy of the photo elicitation guidelines (Appendix

D). I asked participants to submit the photos at least two days prior to the photo elicitation interview. With the participants' consent, I also followed up via email with a digital copy of the photo submission protocol and a link to a Dropbox folder in which they were asked to submit at least ten photos. The Dropbox folders are password protected. The prompt for the photo submission exercise was: "Moments and places that have influenced my college experience." I asked participants not to submit photos of people's faces or other details that would make the subjects of the photographs identifiable.

We reviewed printed copies of the photographs during the photo elicitation interview, which lasted between 40 minutes to one hour. The photos themselves served as the interview prompt (Torre & Murphy, 2015). Compared to the phenomenological interviews, photo elicitation interviews were less structured, yet just as rich in detail. I detected an eagerness among all participants to share the stories and insights related to the photographs. One participant commented that "this was the easiest interview, since we are talking about the photos and not really me" (Devon, fourth interview). This statement suggests that although the photographs and commentary provided by participants are deeply personal, the participant views the photos rather than the self as the subject of conversation (Frith & Harcourt, 2007; Samuels, 2004).

COVID-19 Semi-Structured Interview

I completed the first four interviews with each participant prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. For a brief period of time, I believed my data collection process to be complete. However, through my data analysis and reflective writing, which was

occurring in tandem with the spread of COVID-19, I concluded that it would be a negligent act if I did not attempt to re-engage with participants and discuss their collegiate experience during the pandemic. Based on previous interviews, the students' experiences were either embedded or held in relation to physical places such as the campus. It was during this time in which I was pondering an amendment to my study that UM extended spring break one week and announced that the remainder of the semester would continue virtually. The campus would close at the conclusion of the break and students would not be able to return and gather their belongings. I as an administrator, doctoral candidate, and father would need to simultaneously work remotely, continue writing, and facilitate home schooling.

I was curious and concerned about the participants' experiences and how this sudden shift to remote learning and a banishment from the campus could potentially influence their experiences and meaning ascribed to college. I found these institutional actions and their related outcomes to directly relate to my study's topic and research question. Collegiate spaces and places were suddenly disrupted. I strongly believed that additional inquiry was warranted, if not necessary. The shift from a physically lived place-based college experience to a coerced virtual one was worth continued discussion, analysis, and reflection. Additionally, I felt an ethical responsibility to connect with participants. They volunteered substantial amounts of time and shared very personal stories. I considered myself to have an ethical commitment to at least reach out and offer an opportunity to discuss their experience.

It seemed that as students, despite the displacement they experienced they were expected to continue engaging with the curricular and co-curricular. The collective pushback to this expectation was immediate. On the national scale, petitions and lawsuits ensued demanding refunds for tuition and student fees (Kerr, 2020). Institutions expected instruction and the collegiate experience to continue. Students and their families appeared to have deemed this as unreasonable. These tensions garnered national media coverage and incited a debate as to whether or not the quality of a collegiate experience can be matched and sustained in an online environment (Lieber, 2020).

Part of the debate questioned if continued remote instruction warranted the same tuition and fees charged to students. In an op-ed article for The New York Times, Brown University's president Christina Paxson addressed this issue, recognizing the inability to replicate the in-person experience, and utilized this as a call for an in-person fall semester despite the insurmountable and unpredictable challenges that lay ahead. "All that makes in-person education so valuable: the fierce intellectual debates that just aren't the same on Zoom, the research opportunities in university laboratories and libraries and the personal interactions among students with different perspectives and life experiences" (Paxson, 2020).

I must distinguish between online learning and the sudden shift to remote instruction caused by COVID-19. This study, in its origins and adjustments caused by the pandemic, does not engage with literature or inquiry about online learning in higher education. This is not the study's purpose. Though the participants in this study were ultimately engaged in online learning, it was caused by circumstances other than choice.

The participants were previously engaged through an in-person experience at a residential college. Disruption, rather than choice, caused their shift and potentially affected their ability to engage in college. It is through thinking about this disruption that I decided to re-engage with participants and explore how they were adjusting and engaging with college.

I amended the IRB protocol to include a fifth interview with participants. Upon gaining approval from the IRB, I emailed the study's participants requesting an additional interview to discuss their collegiate experience during COVID-19. Four out of the five students agreed to participation. Similar to the previous semi-structured interviews, I scheduled a one-hour meeting and utilized an interview protocol (Appendix F) to guide the discussion. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded with the participants' consent.

Data Analysis

As I read through transcripts and reflected on the participants' words and photographs, I became increasingly aware of the robust and meaningful experiences the participants shared about identity, mental health and wellness, social class, and other critical topics related to student development literature. While many of these elements are present in the results, the potential for continuing to interpret and articulate the students' stories rests well beyond the themes, excerpts, and photographs presented in this study. The quotations and themes described in the following chapters are privileged in that through my own coding, memoing, and subsumption process I identified them as being most relevant to the study's purpose and research question. Theme identification occurred

through three rounds of coding, iterative memoing and annotating, and reflecting on my own positionality to this study's topic and my own experiences related to the phenomenon. The super-ordinate and sub-themes represent the analytical synthesis of 369 pages of transcripts, 38 memos, 478 annotations, 882 codes, and 60 photographs.

I utilized Smith et al.'s (2009) interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as my framework for data analysis. IPA is concerned with the careful examination of human experience with a particular interest in how someone comes to know their own experience (van Manen, 2016). There is a great deal of reflexivity on the part of the participant and the researcher involved in IPA (Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 2016). The time and efforts I invested in memoing are certainly indicative of the reflexivity involved in phenomenological research. I find that strong parallels exist between Massey's notions of space and IPA's emphasis on idiography. Idiography characterizes experience as uniquely embodied, situated, and perspectival (Smith et al., 2009). IPA as an analytical approach is amenable to the highly particular and subjective understandings of space outlined in the literature review.

I utilized NVivo to annotate and code data, as well as create and store memos. I followed the six steps in the IPA process (Smith et al., 2009). The first step of IPA is to read the transcripts. Besides checking for accuracy this is a critical step since moving directly into noting and cataloguing extracts the participant from analysis and places emphasis on reduction and synopsis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith et al., 2009). There is a need to garner a general sense of the person and their experience prior to continued analysis. I read the transcripts as a whole story, prior to coding. Doing this afforded me

the opportunity to not focus solely on chunks of text and therefore balance the parts from the whole (van Manen, 2016). After editing for accuracy, I read each transcript thoroughly without coding or writing. As van Manen (2016) advised, I wanted to get a sense of the whole story prior to detailed analysis.

The next step in IPA is annotation and memoing. While there are many ways to conduct this step, I did so by writing segment memos, descriptive notes, and conceptual memos. Segment memos capture ideas that come from reading particular phrases in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If I thought of an idea I'd like to read about or explore further, I wrote a memo which captured my reactions as well as ideas related to what prompted the memo. My descriptive notes were fairly straightforward and captured the key words or explanations from participants. I also drafted conceptual memos, which are more interpretive and reflect thoughts beyond what was explicitly stated by the participants (Smith et al., 2009). I found these notes and memos to serve as critical data sources through analysis.

Steps three through four in Smith et al.'s (2009) IPA are completed together on a singular participant's data before moving to the next participant. The overarching goal within these steps is to focus on each participant before proceeding to any comparative analyses. The third step in the analytic process is to identify codes from the transcripts and notes. Coding refers to aggregating the text and visual data into small categories of information and assigning a label to that code (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I utilized NVivo to accomplish this step. For the third time, I read each transcript. Along the way I coded words or phrases that may be of use during the next phase of analysis. The main task in

this part of analysis is to produce a concise series of important codes that reflect key concepts from the data (Smith et al., 2009). I utilized Saldaña's (2016) descriptive and In Vivo coding procedures during this phase. Descriptive coding utilizes labels to summarize words or short phrases whereas In Vivo coding uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language.

Within this third step in IPA, I engaged in three coding cycles. The first cycle was conducted with each interview by re-reading the transcript and coding words and chunks of text that stood out to me. Codes such as "social life" and "giving space" were frequent. I then wrote a first-cycle coding memo for each interview to summarize the major themes I detected. During this first coding cycle I focused on themes based on frequency by counting and grouping codes. Identity, social pressures, and performative stress were notable themes at this point. The first coding cycle was fairly microscopic and treated each interview as a stand-alone text. At this point I was not explicitly engaging with cross-interview or cross-case coding.

The second cycle was a coding effort across all five interviews for each participant. The previously identified first cycle codes also served as chunks of text eligible for coding in the second cycle. This was my first step towards subsumption, or "bringing together a series of related themes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 97). Having read and coded all four or five interviews, I kept the broader themes and memos in mind as I engaged in the second coding cycle. For example, "being Black" or "culture" were notable and frequent codes across all four of Ashley's interviews. Codes started to stand

out especially since at this point, I was familiar with the broader content and issues discussed with participants.

The third cycle of coding, which was not originally intended, came later on in the analytical process. Data analysis is highly iterative (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2009; Smith et al, 2009). Though Smith et al.'s IPA process is outlined in six steps, they are not linear. I certainly experienced this and found myself engaged in a constant state of back-and-forth between all phases of IPA, especially with coding and subsumption.

According to Smith et al. (2009), once themes have been identified, the next step is to draw connections within each case and engage in subsumption. Subsumption is the grouping of related themes in order to identify super-ordinate themes (Smith et al., 2009). Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend coding themes to a final group of about five to six themes. Subsumption at this point occurred mostly through the second cycle of coding and drawing connections among codes within each case in order to identify themes. I started to consolidate similar codes such as “adulthood” and “growing up.” I did not stray from participant input. After the fourth interview, which at the time I presumed to be the last interview, I engaged in member checking with participants. I discussed with each participant the themes I identified at that point and invited their feedback. Besides serving as an opportunity to provide participants with input, member checking is also a data validation strategy (Miles et al., 2020).

The fifth step in IPA is to repeat steps three and four for each of the remaining participants. In other words, I coded and thematized across all interviews for one participant before moving on to the next participant. The sixth and final step involves

looking for super-ordinate themes across cases or participants. Smith et al. (2009) note that thematic patterns that derive from this phase in analysis can either be a common thread through multiple cases, unique to the circumstances of one participant, or even inferred from absent themes and discussions. As mentioned, the analytical steps in IPA are not purely linear and usually require re-reading or revisiting previously coded sections. This was certainly true for my data analysis process.

After two completed coding cycles as well as memo and annotation generation for each participant, I started to analyze data across cases. It was during this sixth step of IPA that I sensed a disparity between my memoing efforts and coding. Through writing I found myself engaged in analysis and reflection. On the contrary, I considered coding to be more of a counting and grouping effort. Counting and grouping are common practices in coding (Saldaña, 2016). While I did just what I intended to do, I did not consider my coding efforts to be grounded in phenomenological analysis. Many codes were simply irrelevant to the purpose of the study. For example, a group of passages coded under “cleaning” offered little to address the study’s research question. I found myself working with a highly cluttered virtual desk and needed to reorganize by continued coding.

Upon reflecting on this, and writing a memo, I decided to engage in a third cycle of coding. Initially, during the first two coding cycles, I coded for general passages and terms that stood out to me. Coding for what I found interesting was too broad a guideline and did not necessarily align with the research question. Through my writing I drafted three important guidelines that informed my third coding cycle. First, I reminded myself that I selected a phenomenological methodology. As a study of lived experience, I

proceeded in this third coding cycle by identifying passages that privileged existing, being, and sensing especially in relation to space and place. Codes such as “imposter syndrome,” “finding my space,” or “escaping campus” reflect this.

My second coding guideline was identifying passages that related to space or engagement. My third guideline was to be exclusive. If it did not meet the first two criteria, it would not be coded. During the first two coding cycles I followed Richards and Morse’s (2013) stance of “if it moves, code it” (p.162). This is how I ended up with a cluttered virtual desk. My third coding cycle was a shift towards a more exclusive coding philosophy. “Only the most salient portions of the corpus related to the research questions merit examination” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 25).

I conducted a third coding cycle for all interviews in all cases, including the fifth round of interviews. It was at this point that I resumed subsumption and analyzed data across cases in order to identify themes. I utilized Ryan and Bernard’s definition of a theme, which is a “conceptual linking of expressions between texts and other mediums” (2003, p. 88). Theme generation is dependent on specific contexts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). There is no prescriptive process to identifying themes as there is a great deal of analysis and revision involved (Seidman, 2013). I grouped codes and my written data into themes based on commonalities. I then turned back to the literature in order to identify cross-sections of theory with data (Mazzei, 2014). The super-ordinate themes and their sub-themes presented in this study are the result of an iterative and reflective process that drew from participants’ experiences and photographs, my own reflective writing, three coding cycles, and related literature.

Data Considerations (issues of validity, reliability, & ethics)

In order to emphasize the paradigmatic distinction between quantitative research and this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, I adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) characteristics of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba posited that credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are terms which more accurately gauge the integrity and trustworthiness of a qualitative study. To operationalize these terms, they proposed prolonged engagement in the field, the triangulation of data, and the auditing of the research process.

The three aforementioned validation strategies consider the researcher lens, participant lens, and reader's lens. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that it is insufficient to simply garner and describe the perspectives and experiences of participants. The authors recommend that researchers engage in at least two data collection techniques to ensure trustworthiness. This occurred through repeated and extensive interviews with each participant, including semi-structured and photo elicitation interview methods. In addition to checking for accuracy in my data collection and analysis, I corroborated evidence through the triangulation of data through multiple sources. Triangulation was achieved through the utilization of interviews, photographs, and a diffractive analysis of data with theory and research.

Utilizing multiple data sources, such as peer-reviewed literature and engagement with different data collection strategies, supports findings but also supports researcher credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The third characteristic of trustworthiness is auditing the research process. Auditing the research process occurred through a detailed

description of the methodology and methods. Incorporating a detailed methodological description increases confirmability and confidence in the observations reported and the interpretations inferred (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Situatedness was also incorporated in order to support trustworthiness (van Manen, 2016). This is an interpretive phenomenological study that engages with a philosophical understanding of space and its relationship with student engagement. I recognize, as Lather (1991) did, that a study such as this one is an open narrative with situatedness and partiality rather than a closed narrative with a tight argument structure. As stated by Geertz, “Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete” (1973, p. 29). Wolcott’s (1990) understanding of valid qualitative research adds to Lather’s understanding. His interpretation of valid qualitative research is in the ability to identify critical elements and write plausible interpretations for them.

I consulted with participants to ensure themes and my interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and reflections. Not only does this serve to ensure accuracy, but also supports the growing sense that participants should be involved in more than just the interview phase (Creswell & Poth, 2018). And lastly, I presented the research design, findings, and analysis through a thick, rich description (Geertz, 1973). Doing so “allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). Geertz suggested that analysis is the sorting out of signification. In order to move beyond the automatized routine of data collection and analysis, he reminds us that “a good interpretation of

anything—a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation” (1973, p. 18).

Introduction of Participants

I find it prudent to introduce each participant prior to sharing their stories and photographs. Doing so not only contextualizes some of their insights, but also honors their individuality and experiences. Table 1 lists the pseudonyms as well as enrollment and demographic information of each participant at the time of data collection. Gender identity as well as racial and ethnic identity are self-identified by participants.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age	Class Year	Hometown	Major	Gender Identity	Racial & Ethnic Identity
Ashley	20	Senior	Miami, FL	Music theater	Woman	Black/Bahamian-American
Andrew	21	Senior	Bedford, MA	Health Science: Pre-physical therapy	Man	White
Devon	21	Senior	Montgomery, AL	Mathematics	Man	Bi-Racial/Black & Indian
Maria	22	Senior	Parkland, FL	Psychology	Woman	White/Middle Eastern
Esther	21	Junior	Port St. Lucie, FL	Mathematics	Woman	Black/Haitian

Ashley

Ashley is a 21-year-old female from Miami, Florida. She is a senior majoring in music theater with aspirations of performing on Broadway. Ashley’s professional resume includes starring roles in student-run and professional productions. As a student in a conservatory-based program, her schedule and commitments are highly scheduled and do

not leave much room for campus-based engagement. Despite her demanding schedule, she is involved in service to her local community:

I play two instruments, guitar and piano. I'm a songwriter. I am the CEO of a nonprofit music therapy foundation. It's a website to provide lullabies and book stories for parents who aren't comfortable doing it with their children or for children who don't have parents who can do it. I am also writing a musical. I believe that mental health is not talked about a lot in Black culture, especially for our young Black boys. So, it's about that and it follows the journey of a woman who meets different senses and figures herself out through these different senses. (Ashley, first interview, December 20, 2019)

She is proud of her work ethic and her eagerness to take on as many theater roles as possible. "I worked lights and costumes until 11:00 pm my first year. It was early mornings and long nights. It's called paying your dues. People want to be famous, but don't want to work for it."

Despite her interest in the subject and her best efforts, she dropped her psychology minor because of course scheduling conflicts that could not be resolved over three years. She is passionate about music therapy as well as youth arts education. Inspired by her own experiences receiving care and benefits from music therapy, she is using her talents to give back to children and families who can benefit. She does this through her non-profit music therapy corporation, of which she founded and serves as CEO. Another way she blends her interests in music theater and psychology is through a play she is writing. Despite her frustrations to pursue a psychology minor, Ashley found ways to continue her engagement with issues of mental health. The university is notably absent in those endeavors to be engaged with issues of mental health.

Andrew

Andrew is a 21-year-old senior majoring in health science, on the pre-physical therapy track. He lived on campus his first year, which is the institutional requirement. Though a member of a fraternity, he is hardly engaged with the fraternity any longer because of what he considers to be a conflict between fraternal obligations and his desire to have choice on how he spends his time. He recently accepted an offer to attend graduate school in Atlanta for a doctorate in physical therapy. Andrew described himself “as a curious and adventurous individual.” He is passionate about reading and utilizes books to blend his interests in economics, public health, history, and sports. He does not think the college curriculum does well in blending his interests and therefore must do so on his own through reading and travel.

In high school he was introduced to physical therapy by his guidance counselor, who suggested that it would suit his interests. He shadowed a clinic owned by a family friend before coming to college. He continued to shadow at this clinic during semester breaks. He did not receive any formal physical therapy training or observational opportunities during his college experience. According to Andrew, shadowing and seeking professional exposure has been up to him to accomplish.

Despite his pre-enrollment established path of physical therapy Andrew said he is spontaneous. He commented that “his inclination to say ‘yes’ and engage with people and experiences that are unfamiliar to him has been the source of his most meaningful moments in college.” He credits this style of sudden decision-making to his desire for “something different.” Having grown up in a military family, he is used to and seeks

constant change. Andrew lived in six different states growing up, from Hawaii to Massachusetts. The campus, as a place, was a formative first experience for Andrew:

It was like walking onto an amusement park. You drive into that main entrance and you have the palm trees on the sides of the road, it feels like you're entering some sort of grand place and you're walking around the center of campus with the lake and the new buildings. It was beautiful. The campus sealed the deal for me. (Andrew, first interview)

The university's campus was the "something different" he was looking for in his college search. The campus itself persuaded and finalized his enrollment decision.

Devon

Devon identifies as a bi-racial Jamaican immigrant from Montgomery, Alabama. He is half Black, half Indian. His most formative experiences in college are related to his faith journey as a Catholic. His most meaningful moments in college are almost always related to faith and fellowship. He considers himself fortunate to have a random roommate quite different than himself during his freshman year. His freshman year roommate is an atheist. The two spent many nights debating faith and religion over Domino's pizza. Memories he called "disorienting and a struggle," yet helped him figure out who he is and develop a close relationship with someone he would have otherwise never met.

A mathematics and pre-medicine major, Devon's aspirations of being a physician were bolstered by the COVID-19 pandemic. He is eager to join the front lines of the medical profession in solving health problems through research and patient care. If his history is any indicator, he will excel in school and work. Devon attended a top ten high school in the country. He applied to 18 competitive universities and was accepted to 16:

We always have honors day and they recognize students and how much scholarship money they received. I don't know if it was like a competitive thing. What does it matter if you have over \$1 million in scholarship offers because you're not getting the entire \$1 million! They did a news story. They came to my school. They put me in the library with my mom and they put me on camera and then I was doing something so stupid like pointing at papers on a desk with my mom and posing. 'Devon won over a million dollars in scholarship money for all the schools he applied to'. So stupid. (Devon, first interview)

He has a litany of awards and fellowships to his name. He tends to brush off these accomplishments. Devon wishes to be defined by his commitment to school and fellowship with others, not his achievements.

Maria

Maria, a first-generation college student, is a senior majoring in psychology. She identifies as Lebanese, white, and straight. She spoke at length as to how her family and culture influence her greatly often to the point of dissonance. This is especially the case as she continues to figure out her role as a woman within her family and society. Though she calls Parkland, Florida home she was born and raised in Trinidad until she was eight years-old. She goes back to Trinidad often and speaks fondly about her experiences there. She finds her time in Trinidad to be "casual moments free from pressure and being judged."

Maria described herself as a casual college student. She always dressed for interviews in the traditional school spirit t-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. A stark contrast to her relatives who fly to Miami from Trinidad in order to buy the latest fashions at Saks Fifth Avenue. Her involvement and campus experiences closely resemble the traditional typology of an engaged college student. Four years living on campus, leadership

positions in homecoming and orientation, and an on-campus job suggest she may be experiencing college the right way according to student engagement theory, at least in terms of involvement with high-impact practices and campus engagement. However, Maria's experience reminds us that campus involvement does not make one immune from challenges. For Maria, involvement has meant places of safety and acceptance embedded within spaces of high expectations and possible rejection.

While I did not intend on utilizing photographs in my introduction of participants, I present Figure 1 as part of my introduction of Maria. Her photograph and related narrative reflect a deep sense of how she thinks of herself well as what being involved has meant for her.

Figure 1

Maria's photograph of the campus drag show



Maria and I met to discuss her photo-elicitation interview on February 14, 2020. The first photograph she shared was from a campus drag show one year prior during her junior year in college, which marked the anniversary of a shooting tragedy at her high school alma mater. To her, the drag show presented a place of escape in which she was loved and welcomed. She found this to be a safe place where she can take her mind off of

the trauma she was reminded of on this date. Maria was able to blend in. There was no expectation of her. For Maria, involvement on campus appears to represent safety and comfort. Getting to this point has been a journey. Maria applied to the university through the common application and the encouragement of her family. She was deferred for spring enrollment. This experience fueled her self-doubt, an issue she discussed during all five interviews:

I didn't think I was going to get in. I felt weird about not being accepted for the fall. Am I not good enough for the fall? Is that not strange? I had a pretty negative experience prior to coming here. I hated Miami. I didn't want to be so close to home. (Maria, first interview)

Maria's story represents a contrast between socially produced expectations of a space such as the university, and what one experiences within a place. Throughout the first four interviews, Maria spoke of doubts imposed by herself and others as to whether or not she belonged or met the expectations of the university. The campus, however, was a place that signaled just the opposite. For Maria, it appears that acceptance and belonging came in the form of campus-based event attendance and involvement with student organizations and offices.

Esther

Esther is a junior in mathematics with a minor in dance. She is from Port St. Lucie and lived on campus all three years. Esther identifies as Black Haitian and heterosexual. I completed all four originally planned interviews with the other participants prior to meeting Esther. She is the last participant I met with and interviewed. The other participants in the study have robust campus involvement experiences. Esther represents

a negative case as she has sparse formal campus involvement roles and experiences, yet speaks of an equally enriching college experience. She is most engaged with her family and friends, whom she has known since childhood. Her perception of schooling was strongly influenced by her parents, who emphasized that at school one should “listen twice, speak once.” A self-described talkative person, she was expected to be silent in school. School, according to her father, “was for learning and not socializing”:

When I was in class I didn’t talk to anybody. Yes, I congregated with my friends at the lunch table. But as soon as class was in session, I was not with other people. I wasn’t trying to get in trouble because my parents were always like listen twice, talk once. They did not want to get phone calls from the school that I was talking. They would tell me that they send me to school for one reason, and one reason only and that’s to learn. But now that I’m in college I have more freedom and I’m encouraged to have discussions and answer questions out loud in class. I was so shocked that my math class was in a conference room and we talked the entire hour. It was encouraging to learn the course material that way. (Esther, second interview)

Esther grew up believing that “education is a passive experience.” For her, proper engagement required silence and not being noticed.

Her transition to college, especially at the beginning, was “immense with stress and anxiety” as she tried to adjust to an independent life, navigate institutional rules, and learn to use her voice in her education. With sparse involvement in high school and strict notions of passive involvement, Esther did not start college with the assumption that on-campus involvement may be to her benefit. It went against the rules she knew. This suggests that a certain level of social capital is required in order for a student to understand engagement and its merits. Esther was previously under the impression that active involvement in one’s learning was not acceptable. A passionate dancer, it was not

until her junior year that she started finding opportunities to incorporate dance with college through electives and a student organization. To her disappointment and dismay this was significantly disrupted because of COVID-19.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed the study's methodology and steps used for data collection and analysis. Van Manen's (2016) *Researching Lived Experience* served as a foundational methodological text that informed my understanding and approach towards phenomenological research. I placed this text in conversation with Doreen Massey's (2005) *For Space*. I provided a description of the philosophical and methodological tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology. I also discussed an adjustment to the research protocol made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research site, selection criteria, and data considerations were also addressed. Lastly, I introduced the study's participants.

Chapter 4: Diffractive Readings

My initial coding efforts aligned with traditional qualitative analysis procedures concerned with sameness and categorization of data (Saldaña, 2016). During my early stages of analysis, I followed Saldaña's recommendations for grouping codes based on similarities in content. Through these coding exercises I focused almost exclusively on chunks of text and photographs. I sensed a kind of separation between the passages I selected for coding and the highly contextual narratives shared during the data collection process. Coding is, by its very nature, a reductive process. While coding was certainly instrumental in organizing concepts, detecting patterns, and identifying themes, I wanted to avoid essentializing. As previously discussed, a characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology is not to essentialize through thematic reduction, but rather seek the essence of lived experience (van Manen, 2016).

To me, focusing on codes alone would reduce participants who I came to know and respect to extracted objects cut off from meaning (Kuntz, 2015). While coding is a useful tool in generating meaning and interpreting data, given the framework and methodology of this study, I considered it prudent to supplement coding with another analytical method (Saldaña, 2016). In an effort to offer a study grounded in more than the presentation of coding analysis, I researched other analytical methods that may be compatible with the study's purpose and methodology. This led me to select and engage with two analytical practices.

The first method of analysis I employed was interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which includes subsumption (Smith et al., 2009). I utilized IPA

particularly during the third coding cycle discussed in the previous chapter. With the study's question and problem in mind, I arranged and rearranged codes until I noted major themes between and among each case (Smith et al., 2009). NVivo afforded me the tools to group and organize codes, analyze the chunks of text that comprised those codes, and regroup until I identified four super-ordinate themes that most accurately described the data in relation to the study's purpose. I provide an overview of each super-ordinate theme, and their respective sub-themes, at the end of this chapter.

Coding lays the foundation for themes (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña stated that through the act of identifying and grouping codes, a researcher generally identifies what content is most prevalent or noticeably absent in order to generate themes. Coding data with the primary goal of thematizing data in mind "is thinkable and doable only in a Cartesian ontological realism that assumes data exist out there somewhere in the real world to be found" (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). I recalled van Manen's sixth phenomenological activity, which is to balance the study by considering the parts and the whole. Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) scholarship on diffractive analysis offered similar sentiments:

Coding takes us back to what is known, not only to the experience of our participants but also to our own experience as well; it also disallows a repetition that results in the production of the new, a production of different knowledge. A focus on the macro produced by the codes might cause us to miss the texture, the contradictions, the tensions...A focus on the macros...locks us into a more territorialized place of fixed, recognizable meaning. (p. 12)

During my early coding cycles, I certainly limited my focus to the macros as my initial engagement with coding and recoding focused on finding ways to reproduce what was

said by participants. Through continued analysis and engagement with literature such as Jackson and Mazzei's, I proceeded with coding and subsumption in order to identify super-ordinate and sub-themes that focused on more than just the macros.

I initially understood coding and thematizing data to be a fairly linear process. I presumed I would move from transcribing to coding to theme generation. Smith et al. (2012) and Saldaña (2016) offered step-by-step approaches to analyze data and reach conclusions. I grew increasingly uneasy about this process because I found analysis to be anything but linear. My frequent and highly iterative engagement with transcripts, codes, literature, and themes gave me the sense that analysis is distinctly rhizomatic and non-linear. I sought another method of qualitative data analysis that would afford me the opportunity to articulate findings that reflected my understanding of analysis as rhizomatic⁸.

I turned back to qualitative methodological literature in order to search for analytical methods that better aligned with my desire for presenting a study that integrates data, literature, and discussion. I gravitated towards diffractive analysis and chose to incorporate this method into my study. Diffractive analysis moves beyond presenting relationships between codes and themes by integrating literature and question-generation in the discussion. I incorporated diffractive analysis into this study by

⁸ Introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), rhizomatic techniques such as in writing and research, are intended to lead one away from centering on single meanings. Using the imagery of a tree's roots, rhizomatic learning is an experience which affords a person to shape and interweave meaning and knowledge in ways with no explicit center. In a methodological context, rhizomatic analysis enables non-linear ways of thinking and affords opportunities to make linkages between data and texts. Ideas generated through analysis are roots themselves and can produce new meanings and new ideas.

discussing the super-ordinate and sub-themes in relation to at least two selected texts. This is explained further and illustrated in the “Illustration of Diffractive Discussion” section later in this chapter.

Mazzei (2014) argued for diffractive analysis as a research practice that counters reductive thought through coding: “There is more to data analysis than a reduction of research narratives to a series of thematic groupings that do little to produce different thought” (p. 742). Similar to Mazzei, van Manen treated themes as a means to expand thought through discussing essences, rather than essentializing. Van Manen (2016) described a theme as “the sense we are able to make of something” (p. 88). I found that sense-making through the thematization process is an invaluable exercise in the research process. Identifying themes was highly iterative as I constantly re-engaged with the data, codes, memos, and themes.

As the researcher, I found themes as a gateway for continued knowledge and inquiry. Van Manen (2016) posited that a theme is the openness to something and the process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure. He argued that the theme is not the conclusion but rather the gateway to continued inquiry. This notion, that themes are a source of openness and insightful invention, led me to identify a harmonious relationship between hermeneutic phenomenology and diffractive analysis.

As previously stated, I utilized IPA as my first analytical practice. Diffractive analysis is the second analytical practice I employed. Framing each super-ordinate theme and their respective sub-themes with a diffractive reading also afforded me the opportunity to be more interpretive and inventive. I did not want to present my themes as

fixed. This is another rationale for diffraction. The themes discussed in this study are the result of both time and text choices. It is highly likely that my continued engagement with the data will cause me to reconsider my theme and coding choices. Moreover, selecting other texts for diffractive discussions would also reorient the discussion towards other applications or considerations. I found it exciting to think about the many ways in which the data can be presented and thematized.

Overview of Diffractive Analysis

Diffractive analysis, by definition, “is the methodological practice of reading insights through one another” (Barad, 2007, p. 25). Data, in my case a theme and its related data, are read and presented in relation to selected texts. (Mazzei, 2014; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Within the context of diffractive analysis, a text is a book or scholarly work. In addition to presenting a theme in relation to texts, diffractive analysis also encourages question-generation. “The diffractive process of data analysis is a reading of data with theoretical concepts (and/or multiple theoretical concepts) and produces an emergent and unpredictable series of readings as data and makes themselves intelligible to one another” (Mazzei, 2014, p. 73). Each super-ordinate theme is not only framed by texts, but also accompanied by questions. In line with hermeneutic phenomenology, these questions are intended to continue inquiry and expand thought (van Manen, 2016).

As previously mentioned, I did not want to simply move from coding to a presentation of findings. I found such actions to be quite linear and did not accurately represent how deeply I was involved in iterative analysis. St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) described diffractive analysis as rhizomatic, rather than linear. Diffraction “takes a

rhizomatic form and leads the analyst in different directions, keeping analysis and knowledge production on the move by plugging data into theory into data as they constitute each other” (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 717).

Rationale for Using Diffractive Analysis

I am drawn to diffractive analysis because of similarities in my epistemological approach as well as the freedom afforded in incorporating texts into the analysis.

Additionally, this rhizomatic approach encourages question generation as a meaningful aspect of analysis. Diffractive analysis affords me the opportunity to draw on insights from student development theories, human ecology theories, environmental psychology theories, critical theories, and post-structuralist theories in order to engage with the material and discursive elements of knowledge production (Barad, 2007). Drawing from different perspectives and fields of knowledge is important to this study because it aligns with the notion that researching lived experience is a matter of investigating all related modalities and aspects (van Manen, 2016). Similar to Massey’s (2005) description of space, experiences and knowledge are not actually bound by fixed conceptual categories (van Manen, 2016). Both van Manen and Massey argued that both method and space are far from discreetly arranged and in fact highly relational with their respective structures and relations.

Diffraction affords the opportunity to think through the data in relation to selected texts. “It is the plugging in, of reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory, of entering the assemblage, of making the new connectives” (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743). In describing diffraction, Mazzei uses the metaphor of an ocean wave crashing into an

obstruction and the manner in which the wave spreads. That is to say, diffraction recognizes multiple potential outcomes and interpretations of the data. Each diffractive outcome generates questions and analyses specific to the data and selected texts.

To a certain extent, my study is about describing multiple perspectives, lived experiences, and outcomes. Diffractive analysis is a tool I used to further ground the ways in which lived experience and data exist in spaces. Each thematic chapter discusses the essences of how students experienced particular aspects of their engagement. Through my discussion I argue that the students' experiences are highly rhizomatic and do not abide by the linear logic of student learning outcomes. I add to this argument by presenting texts that offer different ways to consider each theme.

As opposed to traditional coding processes, diffractive readings are fairly playful, subjective, and open-ended. Diffractive readings are also informed by a holistic reading of the data as well as social and political contexts. This is a method that is far from the post-positivist researcher's role as the silent observer. Diffractive readings, as well as hermeneutic phenomenology, emphasize an explicit recognition of my role as decision-maker (Mazzei, 2014; van Manen, 2016). My choices are explicitly stated and I used the first-person narrative in this study. I also listed the interview number at the end of block quotes from participant interviews in order to situate the discussion and analysis. These decisions to make my role in this study as well as the timing of the interview excerpts more explicit and situated are significantly different than the traditions of my previous studies and professional trainings.

The possibility of multiple outcomes is a significant factor in diffractive analysis. Diffraction suggests multiplicitous directions and outcomes. There is variance in the potentiality of interpretations, similar to hermeneutic phenomenology. I do not assume my presentation of the data and selected texts to be privileged from other potential interpretations. They are only privileged in the sense that the themes, data, and texts are matters of my own choosing. Another researcher or another reading of the data would likely result in a different analytical outcome and text selection. St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) stated that “language is contaminated by meaning, exploding with meaning deferred.” With this definition of language in mind, my coding choices and theme generation are also diffractive as I do not assume them to be the only exclusively logical presentation of data. There is a great deal of subjectivity employed in diffractive analysis.

Decision-making and subjectivity are not matters exclusive to diffractive analysis. The entire analytical process, including coding, is the summation of informed subjective choices that “are always in a process of becoming as theories interlink, intensify, and increase territory (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). I found that the difference with diffractive analysis is the explicit ownership of decisions, interpretation, and other outcomes of analysis. Through diffractive analysis, I present data and claims that are devoid of fixity as other plausible interpretations or themes may be generated (Kuntz, 2015). As Kuntz suggested, data are subject to continual re-invention.

Rather than attempting to achieve a zeroing effect, my goal through diffractive analysis was to incorporate data, texts, and questions in order to provide richer readings of the data (Mazzei, 2014). Such a goal and approach were wonderfully articulated by

Kuntz (2019) when he stated “we should not strive to generate projects, activities, or texts that contain their own answers—they should, instead, take part in the process of generation, activating potential” (p. 67).

Overview of Thematic Chapters

My first coding cycle and early attempts of subsumption were simply informed by chunks of text I found interesting. As discussed in chapter three, this was too loose of a rubric and required continued engagement with data through a much more intentional approach. Ultimately, for this study I identified four super-ordinate themes and nine sub-themes. Diffractive analysis creates an inseparability of data, literature, and discussion. It seemed unnatural to separate a description of themes from a discussion of the content, as often happens in traditional dissertations in the fourth and fifth chapters. Therefore, each theme and their respective sub-themes are presented in their own respective chapters.

Each thematic chapter presents excerpts from conversations with participants, photographs, and my engagement with the data. Throughout each chapter I used Doreen Massey’s *For Space* (2005), peer-reviewed literature, and other selected texts to facilitate discussion and analysis. Reading texts through, with, and in relation to each other and the data produces continued inquiry (Mazzei, 2014). Each chapter concludes with analytical diffractive readings in which I engage with the theme through two selected texts. With each theme comes the articulation of questions inspired by a reading of the data with the two selected texts. Reading data through literature poses questions intended to continue inquiry and analysis (Mazzei, 2014).

Text Selection

Text selection required analysis and reflection (Mazzei, 2014). With an abundance of possible texts to choose from, I needed to establish parameters to guide my choices. I limited myself to two texts for discussing each super-ordinate theme. Other texts and peer-reviewed literature were utilized in responding to participants' excerpts and photographs. While at first the selection of two texts for each super-ordinate theme may seem to be an arbitrary number, my rationale is twofold. First, I recalled one of van Manen's (2016) phenomenological activities to remain focused on the data and topic of research. I did not want to stray too far from the corpus of discussion. Second, there is a comparative element posed by selecting two texts for each theme. This was an intentional act as I wished to call attention to the ways in which the themes can be understood.

I did not select a text until a first draft of the thematic chapter was completed. After the chapter was initially drafted, I read and re-read the chapter and related memos in order to identify the perspectives I wanted to explore further. I wrote a memo and a list of questions in order to guide by choice. With these questions and memos in mind, I selected a text that I thought can continue the discussion presented in each chapter. My focus remained on the study and data, and I was intentional to not turn these sections into book reviews or critiques of the author's work. After engaging with the first text, I then sought a second that can provide a different perspective on the issues and questions concerned with each chapter's super-ordinate and sub-themes. Reading data in relation to at least two texts was an enlightening experience that advanced the ways in which I can continue inquiry and consider implications for practice.

It is important to note that I did not limit myself to texts that focus specifically on higher education or college students. However, each selected text examines the human condition, structures, and society and can speak to the lived experience described by the participants. These texts add to the philosophical discussions and critical analyses I consider to be hardly present in student engagement literature. I call for the increased use of these and similar texts on research that examines the student experience and embody this call with engagement with such texts in my study. I thought I was familiar with the texts I selected. However, my re-engagement with them as part of my analytical process yielded different interpretations and questions. Reading can also be diffractive.

One example of such a text is Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldua's text is primarily concerned with the Mestiza and Chicana experience. However, she speaks of the existence of borders, dualities, advocacy, and the inseparability of one's identity. All of which are critical issues in the student experience. Questions inspired by such a reading may address the barriers encountered by students or challenging the violence imposed by certain institutional practices.

Illustration of Diffractive Discussion

I present an example of diffractive discussion in order to help the reader better understand this general approach. I will illustrate with two excerpts from a participant. These are chunks of text I coded early in my analytical process. Eventually I chose not to use this passage in one of the thematic chapters though its use certainly elicits diffractive analysis in action. Maria, a very involved senior majoring in psychology, and I were engaged in a reflective discussion on what she presumed college to be versus what she

came to know. I return to Maria's involvement experiences in the next chapter. For her, the act of engagement through involvement was not only unknown to her, but also somewhat repulsive.

This particular story of Maria's challenged my assumption of what I believed a student to know about involvement when entering college. Maria's experience suggests there is simply no shared baseline of knowledge on involvement possessed by students. Yet student affairs practice presumes this to be so with the profession-wide baseline that involvement on campus is inherently good. As an administrator I was trained to know that engagement in college is good for the student and it is critical that a student start their involvement and engagement within the first six weeks of college (Abes et al, 2019; Mayhew et al., 2016). I asked Maria what she anticipated college would be like:

I didn't really know you could get involved like this in college. I didn't think that could be me. I remember coming into orientation and seeing these poor people [students] on the stage and giving us a welcome speech. I was like, 'why'? Why do people want to do that? And then fast forward two years later and I'm doing the same thing on the stage. In high school I wasn't engaged. I was just kind of a student floating in a mass of students. I thought it would be the same here. But it hasn't been. (Maria, second interview)

Clearly, at the time of her orientation, Maria did not understand involvement as inherently good. Maria did not buy into the involvement narrative, at least not initially. Through my conversations with Maria, I was enabled to know differently that the litany of programs and services directed towards new students may bear little reward if there is no knowledge or desire on the student's part to engage in such efforts.

Alexander Astin's (1993) *What Matters in College* suggests that exposure, in both length of time and intensity, increases the likelihood of persistence and involvement.

With a traditional understanding of time and exposure, the orientation program did not work. At that moment, orientation served to push Maria away, not bring her in. Astin's I-E-O model frames exposure to programs and services such as orientation as treatments. During my analysis of this discussion with Maria I was left wondering what her post-orientation survey would have said about her experience. In a variable-laden world, orientation offered little to Maria. But, now in her senior year, it appears that orientation worked incredibly well for Maria and served as her greatest source of engagement.

Through a spatial, rather than variable-based treatment lens, orientation worked well and was a success. Maria's later experiences during orientation suggests that exposure alone within a fixed time and place provides an impartial account of the outcomes potentially gained through interacting with institutional practices. As previously discussed, space and place are constantly being negotiated by students. Maria's negotiation with the spaces and places associated with her orientation experience extended well beyond the formal program during her first year. A standard program evaluation survey would not accurately capture the meaning orientation generated for Maria.

Reading this excerpt in relation to Astin's I-E-O model left me with these questions:

- What assumptions of time and space are enacted when implementing first-year student programs?
- How are students' attitudes towards engagement reflected in literature and practice?

Setha Low's (2017) *Spatializing Culture* speaks to cognition and emotion in one's ability to sense the affective climate of space. I selected this text because Maria spoke about her emotions in relation to orientation when I asked her what she anticipated from college. Low introduced ways in which emotive elements influence the relationship between a person and space. Emotive space allows us to think differently about a college program such as freshman orientation since Low would suggest such as experience is not a treatment, but an exchange between a person, space, and society. Emotionality influences the outcomes of engaging with events and places (Low, 2017). The emotionality discussed by Maria would appear to support Low's suggestion:

I was so anti being here. When I first came, I was a mess. I wanted to leave so bad. I wanted to leave and never come back. I hated it here. Having my parents so close was good, but they wouldn't let me come home. There were like 'no, you're not coming home. You will stay because if you come home you are not gonna want to leave.' I'm glad for that. Now I am. But back then, I wasn't happy.
(Maria, first interview)

Maria affirmed that to experience space is to experience emotion (Low, 2017). Maria's emotion of trepidation to the previously discussed orientation leaders' speech was likely embedded in her resentment she was experiencing at the time. The enthusiastic orientation leaders she observed on stage did not resonate with her and thus likely altered the outcome of her engagement with the particular event.

In the student affairs traditional sense, it is unlikely that Maria's outcome from this orientation session was aligned with the institution's desired outcome. However, over time orientation worked remarkably well. Maria recalled what she felt, not what she learned through her orientation program. Sentience, or the emotional climate of space,

cannot be ignored (Low, 2017). Rather than a treatment, orientation was a place she negotiated over her undergraduate experience (Holland et al., 1998).

Reading this excerpt in relation to *Spatializing Culture* left me with these questions:

- How is sentience represented in Astin's I-E-O model?
- What are the mediums of emotive transmission between institution and student?

Presentation of Themes

The three super-ordinate themes and their respective sub-themes are listed in Table 2 and numbered 1-3. I selected three super-ordinate themes through the process of subsumption. They represent the most salient findings that resonated with me as determined by analysis of the data. The sub-themes are directly related to the super-ordinate theme, but speak to specific aspects of the theme's lived experience. The title for each super-ordinate theme is inspired by Doreen Massey's *For Space* (2005). The sub-themes, which are in quotation marks, honor the participants' experiences by using their words to describe the sub-theme. The table also indicates each theme's chapter number.

Table 2*Super-ordinate and Sub-themes*

Chapter	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-themes
Chapter 5	1. Geography of Borderlessness	a. “If I don’t talk to my mom, she’d kill me.” b. “I get that being Black is in, but...”
Chapter 6	2. The Synchrony House	a. “I’m gonna do it all alone.” b. “I need that lighthouse.” c. “Getting into the groove of finding my curl pattern.”
Chapter 7	3. Ordering Space	a. “The pink slip hasn’t existed in 30 years.” b. “Hand gestures and filler assignments.”

Chapter 5: Geography of Borderlessness

This super-ordinate theme, geography of borderlessness, is concerned with social identities in relation to space and place. Specifically, how the lived college experiences of the participants of color informed a student's sense of engagement and the meaning that ensued. While most experiences described in this chapter are in regard to being a student of color, aspects of gender, socioeconomic status, and nationality were also discussed with participants and throughout this chapter. Out of the study's five participants, four self-identified as people of color. These students are Maria, Ashley, Devon, and Esther. Andrew, the fifth participant, identified as a white man⁹. By the accounts of the participants of color, their experiences seemed different than what is perceived to be normal in college. The participants' identities, especially their gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality appeared to have provided a perspectival lens. Theirs is a positionality that gives a sense of occupying spaces and places that seem off-center or even deviant from the spatialized norms of college.

Before proceeding, I considered it prudent to explicitly state my own identities and experiences in relation to this super-ordinate theme. I am a white, Hispanic, heterosexual man who is the child of Cuban immigrants. Much of the students' narratives resonated greatly with me. In the first chapter I shared a personal narrative about my ambivalence to living on campus during my first year. Growing up in Westchester,

⁹ Most of this theme was developed from the discussions and photographs with Maria, Esther, Devon, and Ashley. All four of these participants shared experiences and insights related to their respective identities. Andrew did not explicitly engage in identity-based discussions, which speaks to the importance of the unsaid.

Miami provided me with a spatial luxury of shared cultures and representation with the places I experienced. My world was strongly influenced by Latin American and Caribbean cultures. Prior to college, I considered there to be great symmetry between my identities and the spaces I experienced. My initial experiences in the residence hall abruptly ended what I knew as “normal.” I spent a great deal of my time in the university’s “Casita,” or Center for Hispanic and Latino Cultures, and other places that positioned me in familiar cultural and behavioral enclaves (Patton, 2010).

The participants’ identities and experiences are certainly much different than my own. I do not claim a shared experience among us, but rather recognize that much of this theme resonates greatly with my own experiences. This super-ordinate theme is concerned about negotiating perceived borders. Massey (2005) described the geography of borderlessness as the invitation to move about freely, while at the same negotiating covered-over borders. As I will discuss, borders are a frequently used and powerful tool of gatedness and keeping people out. At the same time, borders may have positive attributes. Students such as myself during my first year, may seek and produce their own borders in order to find familiar spaces and places. Creating one’s own borders may be a way to negotiate spaces when one’s own identities and meaning seem “off.” Borders can satiate the longing for “as if” spaces where identity and social experiences feel aligned (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007).

In this chapter, my concern is more about agency over producing borders than the borders themselves. Much like my previous argument for recognizing and enabling a student’s agency in their own engagement, this chapter’s findings support that agency in

producing borders may also be formidable in spatializing identities in relation to space and place. For example, Esther actively sought borders on her first day on campus:

It was such a long day [of orientation]. I was doing all these activities like ice breakers, meeting other people, making connections. Then the second day I went to another orientation. I was so tired. The next day, my roommate moved in but I couldn't be there because of more orientation programs. I started coming in and out of activities. I would say I'll be gone for five seconds but leave for two hours. They were like 'if you miss out, that's on you.' I just didn't have time to relax. But with that [missing sessions] I got really close to this Bahamian girl. We started hanging out and going to each other's rooms almost every single day. (Esther, second interview)

Esther conveyed excitement to meet another Caribbean woman of color in her community. She chose to skip out from orientation and focus on her new friendship. Her choices in this example suggest a student generating their own borders. In this case, a border from orientation, which is a notably traditional institutional practice focused on student engagement. Instead, Esther pursued a more selective approach and fostered a relationship which in part started because of similar identities and cultural backgrounds.

The issue of borders was a major theme throughout Ashley's interviews. Similar to Esther, she skipped out on more traditional avenues of student involvement because she sought out identity-based shared enclaves (Magolda, 2000):

My freshman year was very strange. I know this was self-inflicted. I did this to myself with my roommate. I didn't really try to get to know any of the girls on our floor because we had a closed-door policy. Everyone else had their doors open and you would hear them screaming. I didn't get to know my RA until I moved out. We also didn't show up to orientation or floor meetings. I should've gone my freshman year, but it was very, I don't know. I don't know if I thought I was too cool or if because we were the only Black people on the floor. We hung out more in Perry hall. And it's because they had more Black girls on one floor. So we hung out there. We didn't want to step on people's feet and push our way into belonging when we had places we could belong ourselves. (Ashley, second interview)

Ashley's sense of "pushing our way into belonging" may be a behavior associated with negotiating borders. As Ashley described, she was quite selective in where she experienced places and with whom she shared them. In her example, I think she demonstrated agency, albeit "strange" and "self-inflicted," when perceived as counter to institutional norms of engagement. Examples of possibly more traditional behaviors, which she alluded to, would have included encouraging students to maintain open doors on the floor and actively getting to know people of other backgrounds.

I wanted to know more about her fairly selective approach to navigating collegiate places and the borders she constructed. Ashley shared the following when I asked her "What did you assume college would be like:"

My grandma, my mother, and both my aunts are graduates from historically Black colleges. I always knew about college and that's what I was doing. It wasn't pushed, but it was an expectation. But it seemed that I was set up with boundaries because of my identity and that I couldn't break those walls. It's like a ceiling and I couldn't go higher. My mom didn't let that happen to her. She was like, that's not going to happen to you when you get started [in college].

I remember when my mom finally let me watch *A Different World*, which was the spinoff of the Cosby Show. I was watching it and remember going 'that's what I want!' I still watch reruns to this day. And it really made me think that as a Black woman, I can do that. I can be a doctor, I could do it. I just want to go to college, meet people, fall in love. It was just such a thing. And I was like, that's what I want. (Ashley, first interview)

Ashley may have produced comparative boundaries prior to enrollment. Unlike those she mentioned such as her mother, she enrolled at a predominantly white institution and with that came strong boundary-laded impressions, such as the inability to "break through walls," possibly because of her identity. Breaking through walls and the previously

aforementioned “pushing our way into belonging” suggests that she may be negotiating spaces not intended for someone like her.

Those boundaries did not appear to exist when Ashley dreamed of a Black college experience like the kind depicted in *A Different World*. Perhaps her more selective approach to people and places, such as spending time in Perry Hall, was an effort to produce spaces that somewhat resembled *A Different World*’s Hillman College.

Difference in identity, it seems, may be a difference in space (Low, 2007; Urrieta, 2007).

Differences were also noted in what was deemed normal by participants. This notion of a spatialized sense of normal, grounded in whiteness, and one’s own culturally spatialized interpretations of space was pervasive in interviews with participants of color.

Participants appeared to have been engaged in an ongoing meaning-making process of negotiating their identities in relation to what they considered normal in college (Urrieta, 2007).

Experiences related to behaviors commonly associated with college such as studying, student employment, family relations, drinking, and physical appearance were often attributed to one’s identities or compared to the perceived “white normal” (Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2007; Wechsler & Kuo, 2003). For example, Devon described a fascination with the ways his white and American peers engaged in alcohol consumption.

There’s peer pressure. And that’s a problem on any college campus. America is a society with a drinking culture. In the Caribbean, and I know Hispanic culture too, and even in Europe, drinking alcohol is normal. I mean very normal. Like, growing up and going to family functions I was exposed to alcohol at a very young age. Of course, not drinking, but it was present. So, you know, in America,

and I kind of had a sense this would be the case coming into college, but actually what I experienced and observed. Wow. Students take drinking like way, way overboard. It's a drinking culture. Especially on campus.

It's not good. Maybe they come from strict parents and then, you know, they're free in college. And they just go wild and don't know their limits. I've heard people say 'how can you have fun and not be drunk?' Like drinking and fun are equated. If you're struggling to find a friend group, you're definitely going to feel the pressure and engage in those behaviors. (Devon, second interview)

Devon perceived binge drinking to be somewhat normal campus drinking behavior. His last sentence suggests that drinking may be a major pathway to friendships (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). His own tendencies related to drinking were different than the perceived collegiate normal since they were informed by his Caribbean culture. He equated the American treatment of alcohol consumption to ingrained in the campus culture. In regard to alcohol consumption, what he considered "normal" changed during college.

Normalcy, peer norms, averages, and other applications of the term point to commonly accepted and desired ways of being. Normalized ways of being are what Massey (2005) described as spatialized practices of the single universal. In fact, the potency of understanding what "normal" is in regard to alcohol consumption drives social norms practices (Borsari & Carey, 2001; Perkins & Rice, 2005). Within the context of student development and engagement, cataloguing students as normal, and in turn utilizing such cataloguing efforts to establish preferred or best practices, contributes to the problematic comparative world described by participants (Abes et al., 2019). Devon's previous culturally-informed understanding of alcohol is normal, so long as he is not on campus where he perceives American-style binge drinking as defining the norm.

Devon's negotiation of alcohol consumption reminded me of Holland et al.'s (1998) description of figured worlds. Interestingly and somewhat unprompted, Devon brought up his perceptions of drinking following a conversation with his atheist roommate. Devon stated "If he [roommate] doesn't believe in God, what else don't people believe in? It made me question other stances I have." Devon appeared to be making sense of drinking in relation to his collegiate experiences and his identities. As stated by Urrieta (2007), "people 'figure' who they are through the activities and in relation to the social types that populate these figured worlds and in social relationships with the people who perform these worlds" (p. 108). The process of figuring worlds, as exemplified by Devon's negotiation of alcohol in college, reminded me of the performative elements of both identities and engagement (Butler, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Pfeifle, 2014). Tilapaugh (2019) argued that the emphasis of behaviors in normalized ways in college is a damaging mindset. Negotiating identities in accordance to a spatialized single universal positions meaning making and identity development as comparative processes.

Normalizing behaviors such as binge drinking or through traditional ideals of on-campus involvement can be damaging and foreclose possibilities when a student senses they occupy abnormal or culturally different spaces (Massey, 2005). Devon shared that he "felt out of place because of my faith." This may also have been informed by his culturally influenced understanding of alcohol in relation to the perceived collegiate normal. Maria, a highly engaged student, shared similar sentiments and described the dissonance she continues to experience between her family and her campus involvement.

While Devon discussed alcohol, Maria described campus involvement as an issue between her identities and collegiate expectations. In the fourth chapter I shared that Maria challenged institutionally spatialized and taken-for-granted assumptions that campus involvement is inherently good:

There's a lot of competition within the Lebanese community in Trinidad. As part of the Syrian-Lebanese community, you're expected to be a certain way, dress a certain way. Just be wealthy. An ideal family would be like three or more kids. You would also marry another Arab. Everything has to be unnecessarily fancy. Like clothes from Saks. Just overpriced and showing your wealth. I don't even know how to articulate this dynamic. It's so strange. And everyone just gossips about each other within the family. Its standard expectations.

I don't really need extraordinary clothes. Why am I going to waste my money on clothes when I can buy food or something that makes sense? That's what I always get from her [Maria's aunt]. I even get it from going to school. Like, studying psychology is going to get me nowhere. I should do something that gives me a job. What's my plan post-college? It's constant and it doesn't stop.

My parents are really supportive. They've supported every decision. But my relatives are like 'why are you doing that? Why are you working for free? Why are you not getting paid?' I don't know what they want me to do. It's very different. (Maria, first interview)

Maria experienced a great deal of discord by navigating both family and collegiate spaces as she tried to make sense of her campus involvement and academic choices. Her relatives criticized her dedication to her campus activities and an academic major "which will get me nowhere." Maria's family considered involvement on campus with student organizations and leadership positions as "unpaid labor."

I was quite stunned by her relatives' perception of involvement on campus as "unpaid labor." This is a significant contrast to institutionally spatialized assumptions of student engagement, which presumes a great deal of social capital and class standing to

afford the time and costs associated with the “unpaid labor” of campus involvement (Abes et al., 2019). While Maria seems to have overcome their criticism and remain involved on campus, it is constantly on her mind as these kinds of conversations with family are inseparable from her co-curricular experiences. As evidenced by Maria, identities and engagement are inseparable. Maria’s experience reflects Tilapaugh’s (2019) challenge to the normative assumptions of student engagement. There must be transformed conversations about engagement research and practice. Simply defining engagement with the institution as “good” and directing seemingly endless resources towards very specific practices, such as those dubbed high-impact, ignores experiences such as Maria’s.

Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009) as well as Tilapaugh (2019) argued that traditional campus involvement practices may be heteronormative and tools of integration rather than praxis¹⁰. With such a treatment, campus involvement appears borderless in which all are welcomed. Student affairs practices grounded in social norms, vectors, and phases suggests laws of averages and an ordered fashion to the student experience. This may leave students of color as more likely to encounter discord between their identities and what they consider to be a normal college experience.

The centrality of norms-based involvement and even predictive practices may be an ordering of space based on privilege, not difference. Such kinds of efforts serve to spatialize in the majority’s favor (Massey, 2005). “So long as inequality is read in terms

¹⁰ Wolf-Wendel et al. and Tilapaugh utilize Friere’s definition of praxis as action directed towards transforming structures. Through praxis, those who are oppressed gain critical awareness in their struggles for liberation.

of stages of advance and backwardness not only are alternative stories disallowed but also the fact of the production of poverty and polarization” (p. 84). The dominant student affairs understanding of student engagement creates Massey’s depiction of spaces of progress and backwardness, with the traditionally-defined student positioned favorably.

Practices that favorably position students based on privileged identities supports the idea that spaces are not immune from material practices of power (Massey, 2005). Though certain institutional practices such as those that promote campus involvement may signal borderlessness, they are not truly borderless, no matter what is officially stated. As previously stated, the spatial is always political (Massey, 2005). Political practices reflect Lefebvre’s (1991) representations of space from his spatial triad. Representations of space are often actualized by establishing a gold standard within a particular space. Massey exemplified this argument through globalization and gentrification. The student experience framed according to engagement-based gold standards may be no different.

The establishment of a gold standard, and institutional attempts to impose that standard, reinforces power and blinds the reality of contemporaneity (Massey, 2005). Contemporaneity, or the existence of infinite spatial realities, is mostly ignored in favor of inevitability (Massey, 2005). Institutional practices, such as predictive practices of involvement analytics, are ones that push for a gold standard and strive for the inevitability of a desired outcome. It is an attempt to fix space rather than support multiple outcomes. Maria, Ashley, Devon, and Esther are each high-achieving and engaged students in their own ways. Their achievements and ways of engagement appear

to exist in relation to spaces that favor gold standards. This appeared to be particularly true for the aforementioned participants of color, who experienced a clash between what they considered to be normal college experiences and their own lived experiences, culture, and values. As Esther described, “I just keep comparing myself. I put in so much work to get here and keep on putting my best foot forward. I don’t know. It kinda just puts more pressure on myself.”

In regard to student engagement, gold standards that stress the importance of engagement in institutionally traditional ways (such as high impact practices) was defined by students whose identities and socioeconomic backgrounds fit the dominant culture (Collins, 2000; Mayhew et al., 2016; Tillapaugh, 2019). The desire to be associated with the collegiate gold standard is quite compelling. The social and economic opportunities that appear to lie on the other side of the graduation stage may have affixed the gold standard of engagement as “the normal way” to experiencing college (Sacks, 2007). However, recent research suggests that historically marginalized students, such as persons of color or those from other nations, are rejecting traditional notions of engagement (Nicolazzo, 2016; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Stewart, 2017; Tillapaugh, 2019). Family commitments, language barriers, and the need to work are examples of spatialized realities that interplay with one’s desire and ability to be engaged in educationally meaningful ways.

Making sense of alcohol in relation to nationality and negotiating campus involvement as “unpaid labor” suggests that students are figuring out engagement and experiencing college in relation to their class, culture, and other identities (Harper &

Quaye, 2010; Urrieta, 2007). The participants appeared to be experiencing a geography of borderlessness. Again, a geography of borderlessness suggests an invitation for universal participation while not accounting for covered-up borders. This borderless and hospitable invitation includes covered-up borders which produces comparative spaces of identities in relation to perceived normality. Students are left to make sense of their college experiences and how such a phenomenon exists in relation to one's own identities and lived experience (Massey, 2005; Urrieta, 2007)

Derrida's (2001) conceptualization of "hospitality" is quite fitting in framing a geography of borderlessness. As a reminder, a geography of borderlessness spatializes welcoming and inviting conditions. Despite this, geographies of borderlessness are typically accompanied by unspoken, yet deeply sensed borders. According to Derrida, "unconditional hospitality" means letting others in without question. It is the kind of message often touted in college recruitment materials and other rituals of the university (Armstrong & Lumsden, 2000; Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013; Magolda, 2000).

Andrew spoke of this when experiencing the campus for the first time:

Coming in from the west side of Boston to here I was like, this is different. Miami [the city] is not like anywhere else in America. I had never visited anywhere else like this. I love the cultural diversity down here and everything. I thought that was awesome. I came into college thinking I was going to learn Spanish. Uh, that hasn't worked out so well. I love everything about the diversity. (Andrew, first interview)

Andrew expressed excitement in the possibility of going to school in a culturally diverse environment. I considered Andrew's framing of cultural diversity as having an "unconditional hospitality" mindset. The campus and its surround area appeared as an

inviting space of learning throwntogetherness where all are welcomed and treated as friends (Pippert et al., 2013).

However, as Derrida (2001) warned, unconditional hospitality is dangerous. Such an appeal is divorced from political reality (Massey, 2005). Consider, for example the highly expensive and selective practices of UM. Boundaries, whether social or economic, cannot be completely dissolved. This includes spaces of unconditional hospitality.

Derrida (2001) also argued that hospitality alone is an insufficient attempt at openness and any effort to offer unconditional hospitality should be met with criticism. Esther offered an observation that speaks to such criticism:

The university wants you to be a well-rounded individual. Just have many different interests and carry out those interests. And also to know the place and time when to be charismatic and when to be really quiet and reserved. Like that diversity aspect. Even though the university talks about being diverse, it's more like in language. I'm not saying the university isn't, like, well. I can't tell you how many times I go to a different place and it's just like the same type of people. Usually white people that are here. Though they do seem to have open minds. (Esther, third interview)

A geography of borderlessness starts with unconditional hospitality. Esther sensed spatialized practices which framed the university as diverse. But, according to her, it's "usually white people here" and one needs to know their place and time. There appears to be a difference between Esther's envisioned hospitality and what she experienced.

The promise of harmony and imaginations of globally inclusive spaces are appealing, even for those who have been historically marginalized (Massey, 2005; Pippert et al., 2013). Despite the appeal, Derrida (2001) warned that unconditional hospitality does not work. This can be noted through the absence of representation

previously observed by Esther, coupled with her sense that one should know their time and place to act in certain ways. In a geography of borderlessness, those in power or who possess capital are able to move about freely in borderless spaces (Massey, 2005). Or, to use Esther's framing, may not need to be preoccupied with considering the time and place of their behaviors.

As discussed by Ashley's selective approach in her college transition, or Esther's observation on the lack of peers of color, representation (or the lack thereof) can serve as a border. Given the institutional setting, educational selectivity and costs of enrollment may also be particularly palpable borders. Ashley, Maria, Devon, and Esther entered the institution through the doors of unconditional hospitality and over time found themselves navigating a geography of borderlessness. Stated another way, these students described experiences in which they had to negotiate covered-up borders in the collegiate spaces and places they encountered. The contextual nature of place and space interacts with at least one aspect of identity and produces spaces in which borders are non-existent in some arenas and as visible as steel bars in others (Massey, 2005; Urrieta, 2007).

If I don't talk to my mom, she'd kill me

This sub-theme describes the participants' experiences negotiating their identities in relation to collegiate spaces and places. Students described cultural and other identity-informed perspectives that contributed to a sense that they were connected to spaces not necessarily designed for them. With this in mind, being engaged would seem to be a matter more complicated than time dedicated to educationally purposeful activities. As previously discussed, to assume that space is a valueless void is itself a value claim

(Massey, 2005). I consider such a void-oriented claim to be reflective of traditional understandings of student engagement. Engagement is much more than a matter of time and affiliation with particular institutional practices. A student's identities may influence a student's understanding and abilities to be engaged, as suggested by Tillapaugh's (2019) discussion of social identities in relation to persistence and student engagement. He stated "there are interlocking power dynamics that institutionally benefit or penalize students based on their multiple social identities that can often affect one's resilience" (p. 195). In this sub-theme, I describe the values, backgrounds, and understandings participants spatialized in conjunction with their efforts to be engaged in college.

Devon, for example, is highly engaged in his studies and other academic experiences. This follows similar engagement from high school. It appears to surprise people that he is engaged. Devon is a biracial immigrant from Alabama. He speaks favorably of his experiences growing up, which he observed tends to surprise people.

A lot of my friends weren't as diverse until I got to high school. But I didn't ever really have a problem making friends or anything like that. But identity wise, it was hard. Sometimes it was hard because I grew up in a Caribbean household. You know, in Montgomery. And the state of Alabama is predominantly white southern. So a lot of times it was hard to connect with people. I found a lot of my identity in my schoolwork...people say like 'you know, you've come far!' And a lot of times people associate that with struggle or trauma. I never really experienced any traumatic event. I guess when we moved at first, financially. (Devon, first interview)

Devon is keenly aware of his Caribbean and immigrant identities. He ruminated on several cultural comparisons between himself and his white peers. The cultural comparisons he made challenge the traditional treatment of student engagement as existing in a valueless void. With a valueless aspatial assumption of engagement, Devon

would simply be an engaged student. However, as a highly involved immigrant, his engagement and academic success are often met with an assumption that “he came so far.”

Devon frequently used the term “cultural things.” I came to understand his usage of the term to refer to his identities in comparison to whiteness. Food, for example, is a “cultural thing.” He spoke fondly of dishes such as oxtail and jerk chicken, and then described those meals as “cultural things since that’s not really what my white American friends eat.” Food is not trivial to Devon. He frequents Caribbean restaurants and a grocery store in another county so he can enjoy his favorite foods and maintain a connection with his home and culture.

Another “cultural thing” he noted was the occurrence of the aforementioned surprised reaction he often receives when speaking of his fondness for growing up in Alabama or his academic accolades. I considered this particular “cultural thing” of his academic success to be grounded in the supposition that a gifted student of color such as himself would have likely experienced hardship. Or, as another example, that he may be a curious case because he enjoyed such levels of comfort and safety in his schooling in the south. Devon is a highly engaged student and also actively seeks to get off campus, two ideas that may seem contrary to one another according to the spectrum of presumed engagement habits.

Getting a car was important for Devon. This afforded him the freedom to maintain cultural connections and a sense of the familiar. With a car, he visited his sister on weekends, who is enrolled at a nearby institution. They both would go together to “find

familiar places that bring comfort.” These experiences were apparently meaningful to Devon and likely other peers who cannot find “cultural things” on or near campus. At first glance, leaving campus runs counter to the practice of student engagement (Tinto, 1988). However, the campus borders did not provide Devon what he sought in terms of cultural engagement and shared identity so he chose to go elsewhere.

Another “cultural thing” for Devon was maintaining a close relationship with family. Family is central to Devon. It is not just the relationships with his parents and sister that matter to Devon, but the comfort of home and culture experienced by remaining in frequent contact with his parents and sister:

I always wanted to live in Miami. The master plan for everybody is to move to Florida. We have a lot of family here. I am really thankful that my family is so close, you know. We have a really strong bond. My roommates, for example, they grew up here. I live with four white guys. I’ve been living with them for so long. I never see them talking to their parents. Or their siblings. Or anything like that. Whereas me, like if I wouldn’t talk to my mom for a week, she’d kill me! There is no way that would ever happen. (Devon, first interview)

Devon provided this response when I asked him “How has your culture influenced your college experience?” His response about experiencing college was grounded in a family relations comparison to his white roommates. Unprompted, he framed college relative to his family and how this familial “cultural thing” is different than his white roommates. Four years later and Devon demonstrates no sign of “integration” in the Tintonian sense (Tinto, 1988). His ability to succeed academically and socially would appear to not be mutually exclusive with maintaining close family ties. Devon’s values and identities were front and center to his understanding of college, which may affirm space as anything other than a valueless void.

I asked Devon to expand upon this idea of “cultural things” further and recount an experience that reflects his learning of such a term and its meaning. His response was grounded in observing his parents as they acclimated to life in the United States. A notable theme I detected in this conversation was the notion of hard work. Hard work, like being close with family or enjoying comfort foods, is also a “cultural thing” for Devon:

I never realized how hard my dad worked. Not just in America, but in Jamaica to get us to the point we are at now. He had to work hard to get us in a position to move to America. I definitely think this is a cultural thing. In the Caribbean, people work hard. Especially in terms of academics and opportunities to come up here and study. Hard work is ingrained in you. (Devon, first interview)

Work ethic seemed integral to Devon and his family’s identities. Hard work as a cultural trait may suggest that for a person of color or an immigrant such as Devon, college is meant to be a space created for the meritocratic application of such dedicated work ethic.

In analyzing Devon’s commentary of family and hard work as “cultural things,” I grew curious if his engagement, which is evidenced by countless institutional accolades, is at least in part driven by the framing of college as a proving ground of one’s work ethic and the pursuit of meritocratic opportunities (Sacks, 2007). I think Devon sensed a synergy between hard work and the ability to climb the social ladder promised by achievement in higher education (Sacks, 2007). His parents move to the United States so he can get an education. In turn, he may have a sense of obligation to carry on the family work ethic and capitalize on future opportunities. Traditionally, engagement is understood as energies garnered towards educationally meaningful activities (Kuh, 2009b). I remain curious how such a treatment of engagement exists in relation to

Devon's understanding of schooling as places to apply hard work in the pursuit of future opportunities. There may be economic as well as developmental and other intrinsic motives for being engaged with the university.

Work ethic or a sense of productivity seems to be engrained in Devon's cultural and immigrant identities. He is not alone in expressing a relationship between culture and work ethic. I considered this, at least in part, to be a class-informed cultural value (Sacks, 2007; Wright, 2005). I asked Esther "How do you perform your cultural identity?" Her response was also rooted in the notion of hard work:

Esther: Haitians are known for being really hard workers. They are desensitized as well. They are not the type of people to take BS and they get whatever they need to get done. Whatever they need, they make it a priority for themselves to get it. They are also the type of people to help you too. Even if nothing is guaranteed in return. Sometimes this can be bad and bite them in the butt later on. Morally, this is what God has put us on earth to do. Like, calling my parents every day. That's another moral instilled in me. Being a good person and pulling my own weight. Those are our morals that stick out. (Esther, second interview)

This discussion of hard work and calling parents was very similar to Devon's. Esther provided this response as a follow up question to her mentioning that she acts according to her Haitian ideals. Esther and I were talking about experiences in college. Calling mom and working hard were important aspects of college for Devon and Esther.

Esther shared another story that suggests her identities informed her understanding of how to perform in educational settings. While hard work was clearly important to her, so too was the expectation of being practically invisible while in school. In the following example, Esther discussed an example of hard work in relation to her education:

I remember one time I got a C in fifth grade for language arts. I went home and cried. My dad told me it wasn't the end of the world. My dad called the teacher. They said I had to do better and work harder. If I just work harder, I'll be fine. I got better. (Esther, first interview)

Hard work may seem noble and meritocratic, however for Esther this notion existed in conjunction with her parents' "listen twice, speak once" mantra. For Devon, hard work meant competing for numerous scholarships, awards, and other accolades. These behaviors are spatialized practices of hard work demonstrated by these individuals. These stories, on how Devon and Esther understood and applied their values of hard work, reflect how values transpire in particular ways.

Hard work as a "cultural thing" and distinct marker of one's own culture in relation to collegiate spaces may suggest that the onus of labor is placed on the student and only the student. Success in academics may be perceived as resting solely on the student's shoulders. The solution to challenges seems to be to "work harder," as expected by Esther's father. A willingness to seek resources or support from the institution was notably absent in Devon's and Esther's stories. There may be a cultural and class-based contradiction between student and institution in capitalizing on the resources and support available to students.

Hard work seems to be a noble value that aligns with the meritocratic promise of higher education (Liu, 2011). Hard work is the supposed passport through economic open borders as described by Massey (2005). Applying oneself through hard work also appears to be the invitation to partake in Derrida's unconditional hospitality. But, as previously discussed, efforts to be engaged with college are spatialized in ways influenced by a

person's identities (Massey, 2005; Urrieta, 2007). I detected that students such as Esther are motivated to be engaged, but may encounter confusion on how to apply their efforts (Berger, 2000). The willingness to partake in a meaningful educational experience is evidently present in Devon and Esther, but so too are covered-up borders which may position individual assumptions of engagement as differently understood than the institution's.

In a geography of borderlessness, there is a spectrum of borderlessness and borders (Massey, 2005). On one end is the openness of Derrida's unconditional hospitality grounded in values such as work ethic and meritocracy. Devon and Esther both conveyed a sense of hard work that would thrive in spaces of meritocracy. On the other side of this geography, exists barriers to negotiated symmetry between one's identities and institutional spaces. Lacking social capital to know how to act and speak in class, which Esther experienced, may serve as an example of this side of the bordered spectrum. Experiencing space embedded within this spectrum of borders and borderlessness may generate the sense felt by students that their experiences are different or not the average, simply because of who they are. Another aspect of a geography of borderlessness discussed by the participants of color was representation. Representation, or the lack thereof, in space and place can be potent in spatializing one's sense of belonging and positionality (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Loo & Rolison, 1986).

Ashley experienced a transition to a lack of representation in a disorienting manner. As a local student, she did not anticipate the significant changes in spatialized representation when transitioning as a student:

I got here and I was around people who didn't truly understand the culture of Miami and how historic it can be. And vibrant and diverse. They [immigrants] bring their cultures and they kind of mesh with the people born and raised here. When I got here [UM] it was a big culture shock. Not because I wasn't around that many Black people or I wasn't around Hispanic people. But because culturally things are different. I got here and people talk different. Spend money in different ways that I don't understand. And because I lived on campus instead of home, it was my first time being away. I felt like a different person. I was trying to be something I wasn't during my freshman year. I had identity issues between these different worlds, which I'm fine now. (Ashley, first interview)

Ashley described her first experience, in her own hometown, where there was an absence of people with whom she observed shared identities. She credited a lack of representation as contributing to some identity issues and trying to be someone else. Ashley and her fellow participants of color are enrolled in a predominantly white institution. For Ashley, even though the campus was in her own hometown, it was a starkly different kind of place which made her feel like a different person. Ashley and her fellow participants of color noted that encounters on campus within places predominantly occupied by those with their shared identities were relatively rare.

While I do not posit a formula for the production of space and place, identity-based representation is one area in which a kind of cause and effect became apparent (Cureton, 2003; Strange & Banning, 2001). Ashley described negative outcomes associated to her transition to spaces in which "things are culturally different." On the contrary, much meaning was generated when encountering places with significant representation in identity, either through the presence of people, visual artifacts, or the curriculum.

The strong presence of identities within places likely created rare moments of normalcy, excitement, and support. Ashley gravitated to these places. By experiencing shared artifacts and materiality, it appeared that a student and their identities becomes normalized in these moments and not necessarily held in comparison to other identities (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007). Ashley found the campus Starbucks to be such a place:

I wanted college to be like *A Different World*. College is like being in a community room with other people that live in the dorms or eating together in the dining hall. I know everyone who works at the dining hall, like the cooks and stuff. I know each person there and every person that works at Starbucks. I'm taking my graduation pictures there. (Ashley, second interview)

I was curious why the student union Starbucks was so meaningful to her and why she planned on taking graduation photos there:

When you're in situations you can't control, you still make the best of them. There were times when I had no money and I would go to Starbucks to do homework. I still have yet to see the library. I've never been inside the one here. Um, it just makes me anxious so I'm not doing that. So I would do homework at Starbucks. During finals of my sophomore year I was working and I was there all day and she [a barista] came over and she was like, 'Ashley, are you going to eat?' I was like, 'no, it's fine'. And she looked at me, she was like, 'but you haven't eaten. We've been watching you. When are you going to eat?' And I was like, 'Oh no, I can't afford it'. I'm sitting there and she comes in with two sandwiches toasted and my favorite chai tea latte, which is what I get every time I'm there. And she was like, 'if you need something and you don't have it, we got you'. And that's, I was like, okay, this is family.

Ashley spoke of the women at Starbucks and the dining hall with much zest and appreciation for them. She noted that "these places are staffed mostly by Black women," an identity shared by Ashley. In addition to finding comfort in a place where there was representation, I also considered this to be a meaningful experience in regard to economic

identity. I previously cited Ashley's observation that on and near campus "people spend money in different ways." Her story at Starbucks also may indicate alleviated pressure from a preponderance of students from affluent families.

Spatial realities communicate culture and meaning (Low, 2017). According to Low, infrastructures and the built environment are socially influenced and produced. The presence of people, symbols, artifacts, and rules give space meaning and the culture ascribed to it. Spatialized artifacts, which also reflect lived practices from Lefebvre's triad have potent influences on behavior and identity (Low, 2017; Tuan, 1977). By receiving such intimate attention within a particular place occupied by others with a shared identity and who supported her, Ashley found support and comfort. The campus Starbucks may represent a borderless place for Ashley within a campus comprised of borders.

Low (2017) ascribed a constructed sense of security and inclusion when one is engaged in "people like us" enclaves. Similar to Ashley, Esther experienced this feeling in another manner. Esther's account of representation came in the form of the curriculum and art:

During Black history month classes are more Black-oriented. They have us go to the museum or go to the tunnel of oppression. I went with my roommate to this art museum exhibit with my French class. I went with her because there's only two [Black] people in my class, myself included. We got a tour from these ladies with photographs of different tribes in Africa. She also did a trip to Haiti and we saw some of those [photographs] too.

And then I went to the library arts center and they had a whole art collection about how southern food was changed or influenced by Africans. The exhibit also had things that showed how much things cost back in the day. There were restaurant pieces and recipe books too. (Esther, second interview)

Esther's reminiscing of engaging with artifacts and symbols related to Black history and culture, which was delimited by a designated month, exemplifies the kind of habitual off-centeredness experienced by the participants of color.

The privilege embedded in the curriculum required Esther to wait until Black history month to be formally engaged with Black history. Esther's example suggests that other elements of academic engagement, at least those dubbed as more general, were artifacts of scholarship and curricular instruction produced by whiteness (Bird & Erdoes, 2016). Whether through the presence of people, artifacts, or instruction both Esther and Ashley found meaning when their identities seemed centered or present. They sensed the safety and recognition that comes with such privilege.

Existing in space where one's identity is perceived as centered or may itself be the gold standard may create a heightened sense of visibility and presence. Or, to use Esther's words "*la vérité c'est que je t'entends*" (Figure 2). This is French for "the truth is I can hear you." Esther came across this street sign while walking at a mall near campus. The sign was part of a multi-lingual street art exhibit with different phrases in quotation bubbles. Esther could not recall what the other signs stated. Esther was drawn to this sign "due to the language and what it expressed." Esther is Haitian and speaks French, "a language I haven't been able to practice in college." She admits that because of a lack of practice, she has "lost confidence in speaking French." However, this sign seemed to boost her confidence. She felt seen and heard. Esther reacted to this sign with excitement since it was a cultural artifact hardly seen in her collegiate experience. The sign instilled a

sense of recognition. It is the kind of recognition experienced by Ashley in Starbucks or when Maria received validation from her parents for her involvement on campus, in spite of her other relatives' criticism. These are centering experiences that may serve to empower and generate meaning. The truth as suggested by the street sign, is that when one's space is sensed as centered space, one is heard.

Figure 2

Esther's photograph of a street sign near campus



I get that being Black is in, but...

Politics often question the being-together of people (Massey, 2005). Privilege and power create invisible, yet deeply sensed borders that communicate places of belonging or exclusion (Johnson, 2017; Massey, 2005). Prejudiced politics in action induce the

“here” and “there” in spaces and the desire to establish a socially produced harmony between place and people. It is a sorting game played in conceptualizing who goes where. Redlining is likely the most prolific geographic example of challenging the being-together of people. This particular sub-theme articulates the redlining experienced and described by participants.

Whereas the previous sub-theme described lived experiences felt as off-center or held in comparison to dominant culture and identities, this sub-theme addresses spatialized practices that seemed intent to deter the being-together supposedly promised by Derrida’s unconditional hospitality. This sub-theme also describes the enclaves and supportive peers that provide meaningful support in navigating identity-generated borders. Within this sub-theme are stories of denial as well as accounts from thriving in enclaves of support. Ashley described the importance of representation and its apparent scarcity at the university:

You’re not always accepted with the white culture here at this university. And if you aren’t accepted in the black culture, well that’s just going to mess with your mental health. That’s kind of why I think representation is key. It’s so important. Whether it’s being Black, Hispanic, gay or not gay, seeing someone who may have experienced life the way you have is so important...I wish we had more diversity. And not just Black people. A lot of our advertising does. It was a culture shock for me. I wanted to be around people of color. And I’m not. (Ashley, second interview)

This excerpt was part of Ashley’s discussion on seeking institutional resources. Ashley lamented that increased representation would support her mental health. In fact, Ashley shared that because she did not find representation in campus-based mental health resources, she found counseling support “from my mom and her sorority friends. I also found a podcast called ‘Therapy for Black girls.’”

The participants of color described experiencing moments of exclusion and inclusion, as well as facing challenges based on preconceived notions on where one “should” belong. Thrown-togetherness is oftentimes unsettling given hegemonic presuppositions of purified spaces and places (Massey, 2005). Borrowing from Heidegger’s notion of “thrownness,” Massey described thrown-togetherness as the multiple existences of people and their identities (and politics) being “thrown” in shared spaces. The idealized notion of thrown-togetherness, where people share and thrive together in a harmonious fashion, suggests one way that postsecondary institutions convey Derrida’s unconditional hospitality. However, it became apparent through discussions with participants that thrown-togetherness at times exists in conflict with attempts to purify spaces and places.

The participants appeared to encounter spatial juxtapositions. Some meaningful experiences occurred within spaces of openness and co-existence. These moments appeared to have occurred in the thrown-togetherness described by Massey. An example of such an occurrence would be Esther’s feeling supported and mentored by a randomly assigned advisor and her recent involvement in the minority women in medicine club. To Esther, those experiences and relationships “afforded me with opportunities.” Other moments, however, seemed imposed by superstructures of privilege and preservation. These experiences gave cold and harsh sentiments of exclusion. Such moments appeared to have been really hurtful and signaled that one may be “out of place.”

I start with the most sudden and dramatic space of exclusion experienced by participants. COVID-19 imposed harsh barriers against the kinds of spaces and places

participants desired to engage with. I first presumed the pandemic to be a series of extenuating circumstances that did not warrant consideration as I believed it to have little to do with students, their identities, or their engagement. Still, the power dynamic between institution and student cannot be ignored. With no say in the matter, all students were cast away from the campus and other in-person relational and physical elements of the college experience the participants came to know. Disruption occurred while students were engaged in intellectual, social, and financial ways.

Students were left with no choice but to perform according to the revised institutional expectations. Andrew described this experience as a “punch in the stomach.” Frustrated, Devon “couldn’t make decisions because I didn’t know what was going on.” Borders were imposed between students and all elements of the campus, including people. Andrew reflected on the sudden inability to share experiences and the “stripping away” effects he was negotiating:

For me, the most important thing [about the college experience] has been the people I’ve met along the way. The experiences that you share together that’s something you just can’t do virtually. That is a limit to technology. You can’t, unless you have an already established group. But even then, you can’t share experiences. You can’t share them to the extent you can in-person. You also can’t create new experiences. If I didn’t have my [in-person] college experience I would’ve never gone to Rome for example. I would’ve never met the people I met there. And I’m really good friends with a lot of them and was able to share experiences with them.

That’s been completely stripped away by being online. Those kinds of experiences are the biggest part why kids come in for college. Everyone knows it’s more economic and more cost effective to do like two years at a community college and like two years at another college, like transfer somewhere. But there’s still this draw, even though there’s an economic incentive for students to go to a two-year college. That’s because of the experiences like along the way and the people you meet by just being physically in college. (Andrew, fifth interview)

Andrew argued that the main reason to engage in a four-year institution the way he has is because of the in-person experience. To him, the ability to generate new experiences and connect with people depends on physical interactions with the institution and its people.

Andrew described a kind of situatedness that is now lost. Through remote instruction, the ability to create new experiences or connect with others is “stripped away.” He did, however, exhibit a kind of agency. I recognize the following story required a certain level of financial capital. Andrew demonstrated agency by creating a renewed engagement with the campus. After a brief time back home, Andrew was able to relocate to Miami and jogged through campus almost daily. Running through the campus is the highlight of Andrew’s day:

I really like my runs. It gets me out of the house and it’s an acceptable activity right now. I’ve always used runs as a kind of destresser. Running through the campus gives me a lot of nostalgia. You kind of just see everything and the reasons I came to Miami. But it also shows me how much seniors are missing. I’ve thought about this a lot. (Andrew, fifth interview)

Though in a different manner, Andrew continued to be engaged with the college campus. His desire to remain in contact with the campus, speaks to the relationship of place and meaning-making. Andrew’s narrative suggests that students can redefine how they experience places. This was a luxury not afforded to most students such as the three participants that lived on campus and had no choice but to relocate.

At the surface, the effects of COVID-19 on the student experience may seem universally applied. However, the institutional response to the pandemic exposed how unequal students’ lives really are (Casey, 2020). Any feelings of equality and a shared

experience induced by throwntogetherness dissipated through the exile from campus. While the revised syllabus and continued instruction signaled a continuation of the college experience, the disparities in students' backgrounds were exacerbated without the treatment of throwntogetherness and the campus as perceived equalizer (Casey, 2020). The social class divide was on full display (Casselman, Cohen, & Hsu, 2020). With remote learning came the construction of new identity and class-based borders.

Andrew described the kind of misinformation and bureaucracy experienced by students as “a dumpster fire of just nonsense everywhere.” Devon experienced this in a way he could not have predicted just weeks prior to the outbreak. Devon was employed by a campus office. What started as a randomly matched job assignment from the student employment office resulted in a place of mentorship and support by those that work in that office. He gained valuable mentorship from his “work moms.”

Devon was engaged with a place that was particularly meaningful for him. He learned job skills and fostered relationships with mentors and friends. Besides the meaningful moments and relationships gained through this position, Devon depended on this job to pay for expenses:

There are some ways that the University's communication was great. And I've seen some of that. But another thing I had to do was adjust with work. I'm not able to work anymore. I was put out of my job on campus. I wasn't getting paid. I emailed the student employment office. And then I did it again. They got back to me saying that an announcement was going to be made soon. Two and a half weeks went by and nothing had been said. That's when I decided to apply for unemployment. I had hoped for some sort of communication sooner. (Devon, fifth interview)

Devon was contractually obligated to his lease and continued to generate living expenses such as gas and food. He was suddenly cut off from a place he found meaningful as well as the compensation he earned through his labor. Suddenly, he was institutionally politicized as a disposable employee. His efforts to gain clarity on his status as an employee yielded no response. Eventually he did receive compensation for the hours he would have worked had the institution remain open. Devon's experience was a displacement of place as well as a displacement of compensation. Initially unrecognized as an employee by the institution, this was an economically imposed border that generated frustration and stress amidst continued expectations for remaining academically engaged.

Devon's job loss and struggle to get information reminded me of Lefebvre's (1991) argument of space as partially produced through the illusion of transparency. Through the illusion of transparency, space feels luminous and one feels enabled to have free reign in their choices and actions. This illusion paints space as harmonious, transparent, and somewhat innocent. The kind of pre-COVID work environment Devon described appeared to contain elements of the illusion of transparency. But, as described by Lefebvre, one senses entrapment when the illusion is revealed. Feeling stuck and anxious, Devon was understandably more concerned in seeking clarity on his employment and subsidizing his expenses than attempting to figure out his revised curriculum and co-curricular commitments.

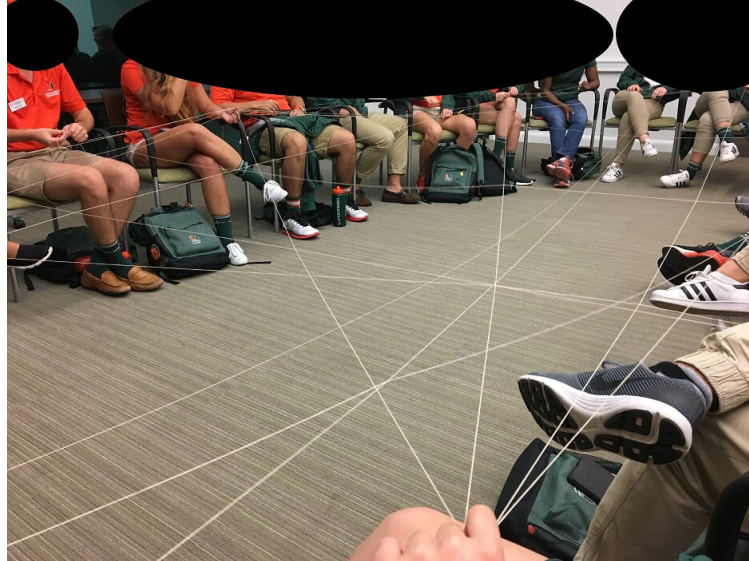
Maria had the good fortune to continue her student employment remotely. This is an outcome much different than Devon's, which speaks to the subjectivation students

may be exposed to in their relationship with the institution. There are certainly varying degrees of agency and subjectivation. Andrew made changes in order to continue experiencing the place of the campus. Maria did not have that luxury. Maria, who was fully remote, considered her student position to be her only continued forum for engagement with the institution. She helped a campus department with connecting students to resources offered virtually. Maria also met regularly with her supervisor and mentor through Zoom. She described her continued employment as “purposeful because there was something to work towards.” On the contrary, classes were “the least way out of all that” that she was engaged after the shift to remote instruction. She also described a dearth in social connections with peers.

Feeling confined to her room in her parents’ house, Maria remained mildly connected with peers through two group chats and Animal Crossing, an online game. A senior, she found herself passing the time “sitting on the couch and waiting for my diploma in the mail.” A stark contrast from a student who gravitated towards campus places designed for students to interact, such as the student center. Though the student center building may have been designed for the throwntogetherness for students, her presence in such a place was once questioned by a peer (Figure 3). This experience may represent an attempt at purifying space and place during a time when Maria was feeling proud and successful.

Figure 3

Maria's Photograph of an Orientation Meeting



This photograph was from an orientation debrief activity where student leaders were reflecting and offering praise to others. Maria was particularly proud of what she had accomplished in her leadership role:

I think everything I've done while here has been so far out of my comfort zone that I have grown so much from every experience. Like when I was a leader with orientation. During our last day of orientation when we had a huge debrief after the week with everyone, one of my fellow leaders wanted to say something [about me]. The leader was like 'I remember when I saw you walk in the room. When I first saw you I was like, why did they hire her?' That was backhanded. (Maria, fourth interview)

Politicized impressions of space and place are certainly not only institutionally driven, but also by those who feel privileged in their positions and identities (Massey, 2005).

This story hurt Maria and did not help her ongoing sense of self-doubt. Her pride in what she accomplished was met with a publicly-stated backhanded comment simply based on

someone else's first impression of her. Similar to her experience through deferred enrollment, she questioned her own presence and whether or not she belonged in a particular place.

During a gathering in which peers were recognizing each other, a compliment towards Maria was prefaced with a doubt for simply being present. It was a somewhat hurtful moment which cast doubt as to whether she fulfilled her role as a leader. Maria's presence seemed questioned. In turn, she must prove herself to her peers and that she warrants existence in this shared space. Maria commented that her peer "now understood" why she was there. A privilege she was initially denied by simply being present. This sense, that one must prove oneself to take up a particular place, exemplifies a covered-over border.

I followed up to this story and asked Maria why she held two rounds of string in this photograph.

I think it was from one of the orientation leaders from when I was a freshman. She remembered that I wanted to leave [the university] and now I want to do nothing more than be here. I took a picture of this moment because again, I'm just not the most confident person in the world. To sit here and hear people say nice things about me is really nice. I just didn't think I would get any compliments, so I took a picture of this moment because it was just astounding. I thought it was beautiful. (Maria, fourth interview)

Maria, through her own self-doubt and the previous moment in which her presence was questioned, appeared to have encountered identity-generated attempts of exclusion throughout her college experience. As described by Maria in the previous excerpt regarding the backhanded comment, all it took was a first impression from another peer to question her presence. Efforts of exclusion are common tools in fixing place and space

(Massey, 2005). Most recently, Maria turned down an appealing and competitive job offer because of family pressure. Maria described a cultural clash between becoming a full-time working woman and the expectations of a young Arab female. Exacerbated by the conditions of COVID-19, she found herself unable to look past the present borders imposed on her:

I don't know what to do. I feel like there was a sense of purpose that was lost. I feel so lost right now. What are the next steps? I don't even know because there aren't even any steps. I have no clue. (Maria, fifth interview)

Cultural determinism may have influenced Maria's spatial pathways and in turn served as a moment of foreclosure (Low, 2017; Massey, 2005). Maria's words, that "there aren't even any steps" strongly reflect the sentiments associated with foreclosure. Moments such as these can disrupt a person's ability to be engaged and cause harm. Maria was offered a really exciting job opportunity. Because of family and cultural pressures, she disappointingly turned the offer down.

According to Lefebvre (1991), where there are harmonious interactions between a place, a time, and a person's expenditure of energy, there is a sense of intrinsic and social rhythm. Student involvement and engagement models tend to depict an idealized rhythm where there are developmental gains throughout a four-year continuum. With such an assumption, engagement appears to be institution-centric and at times devoid of the goings-on of a student's affairs (Abes et al., 2019). Considering Maria, her ability to be engaged in the midst of rejecting a coveted job offer and adapting to COVID-19 are certainly influential in her abilities to be meaningfully involved with her education. With these experiences in mind, engagement may certainly be more than a measure of time

spent with educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2009b). In space, there appear to be elements and politics that influence a student's rhythm.

When a participant's rhythm was disrupted, a champion of some sort was almost always discussed by students. Participants credited advisors, relatives, or friends as critical to persisting through encounters of demarcation or landscaped enclosures. Maria, who previously shared an initial strong resentment to being at UM, praised a professor for changing her stance:

I was not excited to come here [to the university]. But after a couple of weeks I began meeting with a professor just to talk about transitioning. Her helping me through it was probably the biggest asset I had during my first semester. Her and the girls on my floor. I met her [the professor] at orientation. She gave a talk to all the parents. My parents actually emailed her and asked to check in on me. Cause they were really concerned since I just was not in a good place.

She gave me advice on transitioning, how she's seen this [transition] process go, and how it takes time. Like it doesn't happen overnight. She just helped me out. And then on one of the weekends the girls on my floor invited me to go get lunch in the dining hall. I couldn't believe people were inviting me! (Maria, second interview)

The connections Maria made with floormates and a professor-turned-mentor exemplify the kind of relationships that Astin (1997) outlined as critical to student persistence. "In the higher education literature, mentoring relationships are associated with a wide array of educational outcomes ranging from vocational discernment to academic success, all of which are easily positioned under the umbrella categories of psychosocial or career mentoring processes" (Campbell et al., 2012, p. 596). The previously described stories of subjectivation to institutional and identity-related spatialization, such as questioning Maria's involvement in a leadership position, were derailments in their engagement

journey. Based on their accounts, they found support and encouragement from mentors, which in turn created more supportive spaces and inviting places (Griffin et al., 2010).

Mentors and supportive peers are often held as positively influencing a student's college outcomes such as persistence or their effects on inter- or intrapersonal development (Campbell et al., 2012). Space, being a sphere of relations, may require the presence of such champions and mentors in order to tip the geography of borderlessness in the student's favor (Massey, 2005). The champions seem to be locals. Locals are "of the place" whose presence often goes unquestioned (Massey, 2005). In speaking of the politics of place, Massey described locals as the influencers in determining belongingness. Through interactions with hospitable locals, Maria came to feel welcomed and a sense of belonging. She was embraced by some locals and in turn may have sensed belonging in collegiate space and place. Mentors and champions may have a more potent role than that of mentor-mentee. They may be the political players in reconstituting space in defense of throwntogetherness and belongingness (Massey, 2005).

The shift to oneself becoming a local and garnering the sense of belonging may be potent and memorable. The Tintonian (1988) interpretation of this phenomenon is dubbed as "integration." Integration conjures a sense of departure from one space and entry into another. Post-structural understandings of space and place challenge such a mutually exclusive conceptualization (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). The phenomenon of becoming a local may be more about centering than integration. Localizing experiences, such as the sensations experiences with Esther and Ashley when observing

representation, suggests a likelihood of students negotiating spaces of belonging and centeredness (Massey, 2005).

Similar to Esther and Ashley's encounters with representation, Devon shared an account that contributed to him feeling like a local. Devon was recruited to the university through a scholarship program for students of color. Like Maria, he described meaningful encounters with peers and mentors that signaled acceptance and inspired feelings of being a local. These encounters may move the student from the perceived fringes of collegiate space such as those described in the previous sub-theme, to the very center. As a result, their space seems to become negotiated in a manner which produces a perceived compatibility with collegiate expectations and one's identities. In other words, their own experience may become perceived as the gold standard. The previously described inclination to compare oneself to culturally dominant forms of existing in space may in turn become diminished when feeling that one's experience and identity is centered rather than existing on the fringes. For Devon, it started at a Carrabba's:

When I came in everything just happened so fast. I came in, and then the day I moved in I had a welcome dinner. We went to Carrabba's. And you know, it's funny. Every time me and my scholarship friends reconnect, we always go eat at Carrabba's. We always go back to that dinner. To that first feeling and connection we had with each other. I came into a place where I didn't know anybody.

And then I met Danny. I love Danny. He's my scholarship advisor. I mean, I could go on and on about how much Danny helped me through all this. You know, like with my college career. I talked to him about my major decision. I was still undeclared and he connected me with another student. He was also a scholarship student. He had graduated already. He graduated with a major in math. So Danny connected me with this guy and then I emailed him. He kind of told me the professors to stay away from. I mean we really didn't talk about math that much.

I have an academic advisor. But we don't really discuss what I should do. By the time I go to my academic advising appointment, you know, it's just like to say 'these are the classes I'm taking and blah, blah, blah'. It's really Danny that I talk to about my decisions and stuff. I actually had a lot of trouble registering for some classes and he helped me. (Devon, second interview)

With Devon's enrollment in the scholarship program came camaraderie and mentorship.

The peers in this program are also students of color.

Connecting with a mathematics graduate was meaningful for Devon. Not necessarily for the knowledge on navigating the bureaucracies of the mathematics department and curriculum, but more so for the familiarity with another local with a similar background and interests. To constantly compare oneself to what is deemed as normal or normalizing incurs spatial borders (Massey, 2005). Devon found one way to normalize space itself. Through the scholarship program and a caring advisor, he positioned himself in a normalized community and place.

According to Magolda, "normalizing communities privilege certain individuals, activities, roles, and relationships and portray themselves as normal" (2000, p. 38). This is troubling when one does not identify with the normalized community, such as Ashley's on-campus experience (outside of Starbucks) which she previously described. However, experiences such as Devon's involvement in a scholarship program or Esther's encounter with a curriculum centered in Black history and culture suggest that it is possible for a student to reconceptualize spaces perceived as normal. Accounts such as these are promising and affirm two elements of Massey's description of space. First, space is socially constructed (Lefebvre, 1991; Low, 2016; Massey, 2005). Second, the true nature of space is that of contemporaneous realities rather than immutable spatial existences.

Massey argued that space produces multiple forms of normalization. However, through politics and imposed borders, centering multiple ways of existing in space is often ignored in order to privilege spatialized gold standards.

In Ashley's experience, a community in which she and her identities are normalized exists within particular places, such as the previously mentioned campus Starbucks or the campus multicultural student center (Figure 4). When she steps outside of places with representation, she seems to transition from a being a local to existing in spaces organized by identity-driven and class-based politics (Massey, 2005).

Figure 4

Ashley's Photograph of Multicultural Student Center Leaders



This is the only picture I could use of the multicultural student center. It's from the new office. It's so hard to see that's the new office. Do you remember the old office? The previous space had holes in the wall. I didn't know what it would feel like to have a better space. But now that I do know, it's kind of as if what the space [previously] stood for didn't matter as much. So when we got the new space, which was maybe my end of sophomore year, more people got to use the office because there was space. We had a balcony to do homework. It was also amazing to see the director move up and be promoted. It's like we were all reaching new heights. That's my second home. I love that place.

I'm a part of that office because I wanted to become a mentor. I remember my mentors when I was a freshman. Later on my mentor became my roommate my junior year. Mentoring through here means the world to me because I felt like I belonged right here. I go there for everything. It's also just representation. Here you see successful black women in different places of their lives who all have helped me mentally and physically. It's a safe space. You go in there to debrief, to breathe, to find a way to be whole again. The university takes parts of you away because every professor thinks they're the most important professor. It's great to be around people that are like you, and like you. (Ashley, fourth interview)

I think Ashley captured the spirit of feeling like a local when she exclaimed "I didn't know what it would feel like to have a better space." Ashley also spoke about the politics involved in campus cultural centers (Patton, 2010). While campus centers such as these provide students of color with support and aid with retention, the allocation of space and resources can be notably underwhelming (Hefner, 2002).

Ashley's assessment of the previous multicultural student office is not wrong. Ashley witnessed the transition to a larger and new place for students such as her. With this came a self-described sense of accomplishment and prosperity. She drew parallels between her own sense of accomplishment and that of the multicultural student office's new facilities. This speaks of the inseparability of space, place, and identities (Low, 2007; Urrieta, 2007). Ashley became involved in a peer leadership program designed for students of color. With the demands of a conservatory curriculum, her involvement experience in traditional mediums such as with student organizations is sparse. She pushed herself to serve in a leadership role with this office, partially because it is likely where she felt most comfortable. Her most fond memories associated with this place are unstructured moments of fellowship, "such as simply doing homework or chatting with peers" within this student center. The ability to simply "be" may require engagement with

places in which one's own existence and identity seems normalized (Massey, 2005: Patton, 2010).

Ashley's gravitation towards the multicultural student center appears to be grounded in the ability to gather with others who share similar experiences and identities. Such tendencies, to gather with fellow locals, creates a sense of familiarity and comfort with space (Low, 2007; Massey, 2005). Moreover, there may be a natural inclination in these places to discuss identity-related issues through programming and casual conversation (Patton, 2010). Within these places, identity and culture are not used as political tools for keeping particular identities out or on the fringes of space (Massey, 2005). Success and the achievement of one's goals are not likely questioned solely on the premise of identity. For Ashley, the multicultural student center or the campus Starbucks may be retreats from such bordered environments where throwntogetherness may be questioned. For Devon, it was the Catholic student center. Ashley described these comfortable places as where "kickbacks" occur. Moments of just kicking back and relaxing. Outside of these places, like Maria's example with orientation, Ashley was more susceptible to the questioning of her presence. A stark example is that of her experiences as Audrey II, a gender-bending carnivorous plant (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Ashley's image from Little Shop of Horrors



Ashley performed as Audrey II in two productions. In the first, a professional production, she thrived spending a summer in New York being the first woman to play a carnivorous plant. Through her summer experience, she described a boost in confidence as well as the possibility to perform beyond what is expected of her:

In the theater world there is this thing called summer stock where different theaters around the country only open during the summer. It's usually because a lot of tourists come during this time. It was my first time. I had to go to New York for the weekend. I was very fortunate to be wanted by more than one theater. And then this theater, I don't know what spoke to me. It was probably the contract. I asked for a company car and a peanut-free home and they're like 'Yeah, whatever you need! What else? Tell us!' It was in a small town in Chatham, New York.

And then I, gender bended for the first time. I was supposed to play the plant in Little Shop of Horrors, which is usually a man. So it was my first time giving, being given the room to, to be the first of something, which is an, it's my dream to be a trailblazer. So being the first, not only the first Black woman, but the first woman to ever play this part, and then literally months later you see different women playing the plant. And it's because I got raving reviews on it and they changed keys. It was just, it was the most spectacular experience. And I also was able to workshop children's theater and I was a part of three new musicals, but I only performed one new musical in front of kids. And now that music is being recorded and I'm going to be on the album later on. And it was just, it was just a beautiful experience. And, and being introduced to different things in the field

that I thought I knew, like I thought I understood this field, but there are so many different aspects to it. (Ashley, fourth interview)

Ashley educated me how in the world of theater, one's body type, race, and vocal range limits one's opportunities. Ashley's foray as Audrey II the carnivorous plant led her to believe that she does not need to be "defined by these parameters." Her second venture in Little Shop of Horrors was not the same. In Chatham, she broke a barrier, learned skills, mentored youth, and felt fulfilled. When she returned to campus the following fall, she was cast to perform again in the same role in a school production. This time, her experience was bound by bureaucratic and racial issues which consequently took a toll on her mental health.

Through her summer professional role, Ashley was a trailblazer who was able to gender-bend, innovate, and also give back to the community. Through this experience, Ashley "made connections and also helped prepare for New York City." Her second casting in this role for a campus production, was also meaningful, though perhaps for the wrong reasons:

They expect all these things from us. And then they don't take into consideration our health. I didn't get any breaks. I was all over the place. And also, there had been a lot of baggage because when I got the role it, it like made a lot of people in our department upset. There was a lot of, uh, race issues that we had about it because they're just there. It, I think I'm quoting this correctly, she, oh, a girl in the class under me said, 'well I get that being Black is in, but why are we changing?' Yeah, why are we changing roles for them? She said that to my face and I say, well, maybe it's just because you're not that talented and they need to go somewhere else. I hadn't even gotten the role yet.

That was before I got it. I wasn't even considered for the callbacks. I wasn't on the little shop of horrors callback list. I was called back for every other show but little shop and then the cast list came out and I got the lead of it. All hell went loose. It was, it went from people having issues with it being a black woman. Um, there

was fat shaming. It was the first I've ever experienced something so bad. And then it hit me how little these people are and how in this world, in this industry that I'm diving, diving into with literally no harness, I'm diving into it. I have to have thick skin. I've never experienced a reason to have thick skin until the end of my junior year when this cast came out. (Ashley, third interview)

While I have not seen this play, Ashley described that the role is that of a carnivorous plant and is performed almost entirely in costume. Kickbacks cannot happen when one's presence, even when dressed as a plant, is questioned and there are attempts to purify one's space.

Ashley's experience occurred during auditioning. She had not yet been cast for the role. There appears to be no other motive but race and body type in this attempt to purify space. In an ethnographic study of a neighborhood in Philadelphia, Low (2017) pointed out that the Black Americans did not visit a park in the center of the area's neighborhood. According to the participants, the park had nothing to do for or with Black culture or history. There was a felt sense that such a place was not designed for them. It was for the tourists. "Most people go to look at their own people" (p. 85). Low's ethnography resonated with me because I drew parallels between the park and the play. Perhaps to those who attempted to draw borders on Ashley's potential, they too presumed "most people go to look at their own people."

Within the context of the school production, Ashley felt that a particular place was not built or intended for her. She apparently thrived in places that were, such as the multicultural student center or in Chatham. Her space was normalized in such moments and places. Through a community enclave and place such as the cultural center, Ashley was able to garner support and affection to counter the racist experience she had during

the audition. Tuan (1977) described such spaces that aid navigation through turbulence as cardinal points. Cardinal points provide direction, serve as homes, and propel movement through space. Through a spatial lens, student engagement may be mapped according to bordered environments and cardinal points.

Coming off the high that was the summer performances in Chatham, Ashley did not anticipate such a racially charged encounter during the auditioning process. With borders being usually unexpected and covered-over, there is usually an inclination to hold back in anticipation of such experiences (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Although bordered moments may not be sensed until they occur, Ashley noted that she knew experiences such as this “were bound to happen.” Esther, too, described going through college with a certain level of restraint. Since mostly engaging in an English-only environment, she became embarrassed and hesitant to speak French. She did, however, on one occasion feel completely unrestricted in expressing herself and her identities (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Esther's Photograph from Carnival



Esther engaged in a full expression of her cultural identity and femininity through a celebration organized in the community:

Oh my God this is my favorite day. We had gone to carnival here and this was my first time ever going to carnival. Carnival is big in Haiti and big in Caribbean countries. I've never been able to fly out and go experience it. Some of my family members do but not everyone because it's dangerous. My mom says that at carnival people who have issues with you catch you and do whatever they want to you. So she's like, yeah you can't go [to Haiti]. It's three days of partying in the streets. The first day is more voodoo related and it's kind of scary because they have masks and they're doing the parade.

So we went with our friends and we were trying to come up with our costumes because you can't just go to carnival in a shirt and jeans. I guess you can. But it's

more fun when you're in the attire that they have. One of my American friends is just like, 'oh yeah they just go there to be naked.' And I'm just like, no. There's so much more to carnival.

You get your huge beautiful colorful feathers and then you this bralette type thing that's dazzled and then you've got these super tiny bikini bottoms that are structured to hold your feathers up too. You're just dancing and drinking and being around all these other people. It's a huge party and it goes on the entire day. How do people not get tired? People start off in heels and then as the day wears on you just change into shoes. The best times are always found when friends and family are gathered around. (Esther, fourth interview)

Esther expressed a kind of freedom of expression she had not previously been afforded within collegiate spaces. I previously discussed the culturally comparative nature of space and place perceived by the participants of color. I noticed how in this particular example, Esther frankly did not care if she was perceived by her American friend as “going to be naked.” Instances of this kind of unrestricted expression seemed far and few in between while on the campus. They were limited to places designated for such kinds of expression and “kickbacks.”

Maria, Devon, Esther, and Ashley transitioned to the institution with spatialized elements of Derrida's unconditional hospitality. There was a lack of representation, comparisons to “cultural things,” and the questioning of throwntogetherness that informed students' sense of engagement and presence within collegiate spaces and places. Through their own persistence and meaning ascribed to their experiences, along with the support of mentors and champions, these students navigated a geography of borderlessness built on material practices of power (Massey, 2005). Those in the dominant sphere tend to move about easily in this borderless world. Those on the fringes cannot since the borders remain imposed. Despite these challenges of negotiating

ongoing otherness, the participants described particular meaningful moments of contemporaneous normalization in which their space and identities seemed centered. Developing these ideas further, through practice and inquiry, is essential if the collegiate goal of throwntogetherness is to be advanced.

Diffraction Discussion

The politically-charged social and relational aspects of space creates ordering arrangements known as representations (Massey, 2005). Student affairs practices built upon aspatial college outcomes typologies and high-impact dogma may likely do the same. With logics of spatial voids in mind, students involved with the campus and institution may be simply be understood as engaged. Those who are not involved with the campus or high-impact practices may be considered at-risk or deficient. There is a market of software platforms and other vendors that engage in these practices. This binary gold standard of engagement exists within a geography of borderlessness that fails to recognize a student who may wish to be involved, but may be conflicted because of political issues that prevent or complicate engagement. Referring to Tuan (1977), the entire campus may not necessarily be a cardinal point for all students. The ability to engage with the campus and its structures may be advanced by mapping the geography of borderlessness. When a student of color attempts to be engaged, such as simply performing as a carnivorous plant, and is met with efforts of purification there is more to the involvement puzzle than whether or not a student is simply involved with a campus activity.

Rethinking College Student Development Theory Using Critical Frameworks

Abes et al. (2019) examined the evolution of student development theories and presented critical¹¹ and poststructural theories related to student development, involvement, and practice. The authors built upon previous research that critiques the hegemonic and problematic assumptions that inform student engagement research and practice (Tillapaugh, 2019). A student's identities and their engagement are perpetual processes negotiated in relation to space and place (Resnick & Wolff, 2013; Urrieta, 2007). It is not possible to "construct an individual identity separate from external influences" such as those related to being involved in educationally purposeful ways (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 12).

Collins (2015) defined intersectionality as "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocal constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2). Thought of spatially, the intersectionality of a person's identities exists in relation to the amorphic nature of a geography of borderlessness. Encountering perceived free spaces of kickbacks and bordered spaces of exclusion may depend on Lefebvre's (1991) notion of rhythm during that moment in time. The individual student's energies presented, coupled with the politics and presupposed purity of space, present students with combinations of free passes or barricades to engagement.

¹¹ The authors utilize "critical theory" as an umbrella term developed through the Frankfurt School in the 1920s. Abes et al. caution against treating this term as universal grammar of revolutionary thought.

Abes et al. (2019) called for centering marginalized groups through studying relationships of identity and power in higher education institutions. According to the authors, doing so may disrupt unexamined exclusive social powers. In other words, critical analyses of engagement may disrupt campus-centric assumptions based on “traditional student” gold standards:

Social power legitimizes sets of knowledge while isolating others, such as when models based on experiences of individuals targeted by systems of inequality (e.g. Black identity theories) are positioned as caveats to the main, overarching body of knowledge on so-called universal development” (p. 29).

So-called universal development may create so-called universal student space, a notion that reminds me of the fallacy of unconditional hospitality. Despite the premise of unconditional hospitality, “not all students can show up authentically in institutional spaces” (Lange & Stewart, 2019, p. 231). The ability to engage and develop appears dependent on contextual influences (Jones & Abes, 2013). The lived experiences of Maria, Esther, Devon, and Ashley reflect this. There were certain spatial conditions that appeared to be necessary in order to show up authentically. These spatial conditions included representation through people, the curriculum, and artifacts as well as fostering relationships with locals such as mentors.

In order to feel and be engaged, a student must navigate psychological, demographic, and spatial elements (Strange & Banning, 2001). The ability to be engaged exists in relation to spaces and places. More specifically, within a geography of borderlessness. The wholesome notion of engaging occurring in harmony with unconditional hospitality is somewhat illusive and noted by the participants of color

(Lefebvre, 1991). A geography of borderlessness is an intangible, yet deeply felt and sensed, interplay of free space and imposed borders navigated by students. The practices, inquiry, and policies that frame engagement are often bound by a geography of borderlessness. The stories and photographs shared in this chapter are reminders that engagement does not occur in an aspatial valueless vacuum. Institution-centered involvement and the pursuit of it has become the gold standard of engagement. This gold standard appears to be a timeless value believed to exist beyond space (Marine, 2019). The spaces and places in which engagement occurs warrants as much, if not more, attention than the study of the outcomes of engagement itself.

Reading this chapter in relation to Abes et al. (2019) left me with these questions:

- What institutional practices support the centering of underserved students' collegiate spaces?
- How does incorporating understandings of space and place change assumptions of student engagement research and practice?

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza

Throughout my research, discussions with participants, and related analysis on the geography of borderlessness, I consistently gravitated towards Anzaldúa's seminal text. This is by no means a text about higher education, college students, or being engaged in college. *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999) is Anzaldúa's semi-autobiographical work and examination of race, gender, identity, and colonialism. Anzaldúa suggested that "the borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within" (p. 101).

My analysis through this text demonstrates the creativity afforded through diffraction. Diffraction also occurs in re-engaging with previously read texts, such as this. Prior to this study I did not consider a relationship between *Borderlands/La Frontera* and the research topic. While not explicitly about higher education, this is a text about borders of the geographic and social kind. There is, however, precedent of using this text within education research (de los Ríos, 2013).

Anzaldúa analyzed space and time in a manner that speaks directly to the experiences of the participants. According to Anzaldúa, space is controlled by culture. In *The Homeland, Atlán*, she unravels the colonial history of the Southwest region and imagines space and time existing in multiplicitous ways. According to Anzaldúa (and Massey), to do this would center one's space. This echoes Massey's articulation of contemporaneous spatial realities. In centered space, identity as well as history and traditions would not be subject to narrowly defined spatial tyranny. There would be no "otro lao" or other side. The participants' narratives in the first sub-theme in this chapter are examples of living in "el otro lao." To feel centered, one may need to fit in, assimilate, or integrate as outlined by Tinto (1988). To Anzaldúa, risking affiliation with "the other side," and not being a local, is to risk displacement or existing on the fringes of space. "What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other" (p. 41).

Anzaldúa described living life in the borderlands as living at risk of enclosure, shutting down, and being caught between the different worlds she inhabited. In the borderlands, "we do not engage fully. We do not make full use of our faculties. We

abnegate” (p. 43). There are many similarities between refraining from engaging in Anzaldúa’s borderlands and refraining from engaging in college due in part to the challenges imposed by a geography of borderlessness. Like Massey, Anzaldúa called for a tolerance for ambiguity. A tolerance for ambiguity extends numerous possibilities of existing in space. It is clear that the student experience, at least for those who do not identify with dominant groups or with the campus “gold standard,” may exist within borderlands.

Reading this chapter in relation to *Borderlands/La Frontera* left me with these questions:

- Through what institutional policies and practices are borders to engagement constructed?
- What are the political implications for addressing the covered-up borders that exist within the geography of borderlessness?

Chapter Summary

This chapter described and analyzed the experiences of four participants of color navigating a geography of borderlessness. Space, place, and identities are strongly connected and simultaneously negotiated together (Low, 2007; Urrieta, 2007). Through the promise of unconditional hospitality, students are enticed to partake in what appears to be an endlessly welcoming space. Despite the spatialized practices of this promise, as Derrida warned, such spaces are not immune from the politics of power and privilege. In the first sub-theme, I argued that when a gold standard in identity and also the collegiate experience is established, students sense an experience that is “off-center” and constantly held in comparison to perceived gold standards. The gold standard is normalized whereas

the student sensing their spaces as fringe, is not. The second sub-theme described the developmental potency of sensing centeredness in space and place. I also discussed the meaning behind potent moments of attempted purity of space as well as how they were countered by connections with champions and mentors I call “locals.”

I selected *Rethinking College Student Development Theory* as my first diffractive text. This text critiques dominant assumptions that influence the inquiry and practices related to the college student experience. Like Abes et al. (2019) I framed engagement as inseparable to a student’s identities. Moreover, I articulated the need to embed future discussions on engagement as existing within space and place. Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* is the second diffractive text and like Massey, articulated the borders imposed by favoring politically dominant cultures, histories, and ways of being. Through the *new Mestiza*, Anzaldúa envisioned space that can exist as multiplicitous. In other words, space in which a person and their identities as centered and not compared to gold standards or subject to the limitations cast through the geography of borderlessness.

Borders influence behavior. Some are egregious attempts to purify space, which in turn may cause retraction and a motivation to withhold energy as described by Anzaldúa. Some borders give the sense that one is either not welcomed or is present in a space not constructed for them. Other borders induce synchrony. Synchrony suggests timeless perceptions and behaviors. Herein lies the next chapter’s purpose. While collegiate spaces and places are constructed through myriad factors, synchrony is certainly distinguishable and is the subject of the next super-ordinate theme.

Chapter 6: The Synchrony House

Through my analysis, I subsumed patterns of conversations with participants regarding perceptions of what experiencing college should be like. It seemed that the participants, as well as myself, constantly negotiated with the question of “is there a right way to ‘college’?” Such a question reflects the problem this study addresses. I am concerned with what appears to be aspatial idealized ways of being, particularly in regard to student engagement. In the first chapter I argued that there is a profession-wide seemingly monolithic understanding of how a four-year residential campus should be experienced. Living on campus and being involved with the campus is a kind of timeless assumption of engagement that appears to persist despite changing demographics and institutional practices. As Mayhew et al. (2015) posited, student demographics and behavioral tendencies in relation to engagement have certainly changed over the past three decades. For some reason, the participants’ perceptions of what a college experience should be like, have not. From both the literature as well as interviews with students I noticed pervasive perceptions that the practices associated with being engaged appear as timeless and devoid implications from politics, identities, and change.

This super-ordinate theme is about perceiving synchrony. Synchrony is the a-temporal treatment of space (Massey, 2005). Through perceived synchrony, “space is rendered as the sphere of stasis and fixity” (p. 38). In other words, behaviors, relations, or practices are perceived to simply exist “as-is” and seem resistant to change. Perceiving and treating space as a-temporal and fixed may limit imaginations of possibilities, such as what collegiate engagement can be like. Consider, for example, Ashley’s previous

discussion on dreaming of college as portrayed in *A Different World*. Yet through her experience, she developed perceptions of synchrony that favored whiteness and bureaucracy. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Maria and other participants perceived synchrony in regard to what defines fun and a good time in college. In my own first-year experience discussed in the first chapter I sensed synchrony in the residence halls. I perceived living on campus to be the supposed ideal setting of living and learning. I perceived it, but that was not my experience. Such discord left me, and also participants as described in their own words, as feeling left out, uncertain, or questioning the value of one's own experiences.

A major problem with synchrony is that it creates spatial closure (Massey, 2005). A student, perceiving a particular way of experiencing college that remains constant over time, has to negotiate where they stand in comparison to such perceptions. There are also institutional implications associated with synchrony. Synchrony produces the fallacy of apolitical space (Massey, 2005). As previously discussed, the fundamentals of student engagement literature are built on first-time, full-time college students from predominantly white institutions (Tillapaugh, 2019). Treating engagement as synchronous, or a-temporal and apolitical, carries on assumptions and practices that in many cases favor privileged demographics (Abes et al., 2019).

In order to conceptualize space and time in synchronous ways, policies and structures are constructed as desired by its political agents (Lefebvre, 1991). For example, high impact practices or predictive analytics may serve as potential tools of synchrony which favor the a-temporal “traditional” student who may often benefit from

practices of prediction. In synchrony, “space cannot be the sphere of the possibility of real heterogeneity. The totally interconnected configuration assumes a homogeneous temporality and is a prerequisite for any proposition of a singular universal” (Massey, 2005, p. 40). The lived experience of the study’s participants suggests that they generate perceptions of synchrony. Each participant discussed their own experiences, identities, and dreams in relation to college. Each story was unique. That uniqueness appears to exist in a fairly exhausting state of comparison to perceptions of synchrony in college.

As previously stated, this super-ordinate theme is about perceiving synchrony, or the existence of impressions on how college should be experienced according to seemingly timeless and apolitical ideals. Pressures experienced by the participants appear to be the spatialized mechanisms which influenced behaviors, attitudes, and assumptions. Based on my findings, I suggest a process of perception, pressure, and sense-making associated with synchrony. Spatial practices, or the habitual patterns and places associated with a particular social activity (such as going to college), inform perceptions of what is and is not preferentially imaginable (Lefebvre, 1991). While Massey (2005) would certainly argue that ultimately there is no such thing as synchrony, she also recognized that there is no doubt that cultural and political forces inform perceptions and attitudes. The development of synchronous perceptions, such as what engagement should be like in college, induces pressure. In this chapter, each sub-theme describes a different kind of pressure and how it relates to synchrony.

I noted three kinds of ways pressures relate to perceptions of synchrony. The first is the perception of performing to perfection. Getting good grades, not making mistakes,

and achieving the next best opportunity was a constant source of stress, even at the expense of one's own well-being. There seemed to be perceptions that perfect performance came through the art of avoiding mistakes and engaging with the self as a secondary goal (Sacks, 2007). With synchrony in mind, academic performance may be a kind of closed system built on a binary of satisfactory or unsatisfactory performance. This kind of performative pressure is discussed in the first sub-theme.

The second kind of pressure is one that induces the feeling of suffocation and a detriment to one's own well-being. Simply stated, a pressure to not be well and the removal of one's agency of subjectivity. There appeared to be a desire for escapism from college spaces and places. I consider this sub-theme to be indicative of the students' desire to escape perceptions of synchrony. Growth and well-being were oftentimes deemed by the participants to be incompatible with college. Even moments of leisure were constantly held in relation to college and the campus and hence an expressed desire to get out of any institutionally affiliated spaces or places. This second sub-theme may challenge the profession-wide push for immersive collegiate experiences. Based on discussions with participants, I detected a sense that in order to be whole, one must exist within as well as outside of collegiate spaces of synchrony.

The third sub-theme is about synchrony in social spaces and places. Students discussed seemingly timeless aspects of collegiate social experiences such as the revelry of collegiate athletics and tailgating, consuming alcohol, and even brunch. Leisure, spending money, going out, and even one's hobbies may be subject to critique from peers. More than just a matter of social synchrony, this sub-theme also speaks to

implications of social capital as “people who live similar lifestyles because of their common level of access to capital develop a shared worldview as a result of common experiences and interaction” (Berger, 2000, p. 99). The participants navigated experiences in which they held their own capital and interests in comparison with the perceived norms of the institution (the gold standard). It was apparent to me that dissonance and self-doubt may occur when throwntogetherness positions different worldviews and backgrounds within the same space.

The purpose of this super-ordinate theme is to address the problems associated with perceiving timeless synchrony. An outcome of synchrony is closure, and figuring out where one is positioned according to closed space. Synchrony creates perceived binaries such as fitting in or not or considering oneself to be a good student or not (Massey, 2005). Living a particular lifestyle, or at least appearing to live a particular lifestyle may be as collegiate as the curriculum itself, a problem which warrants further inquiry and administrative attention. The student participants described collegiate experiences where one’s spatialized assumptions and practices were often held in comparison. I consider pressures such as these to be a mechanism of synchrony. With this study’s phenomenological orientation in mind, experience is not a-temporal nor does it exist in binary spaces of synchrony (Massey, 2005; van Manen, 2015).

I’m Gonna Do It All Alone

The sub-theme of “I’m gonna do it all alone” is about perceptions of academic synchrony. Specifically, how one’s academic performance is held in comparison to spatialized ideals of collegiate performance. I detected amongst participants angst and

pressure to catch up or get ahead. Both notions appear to suggest a dichotomy of performance as students appeared concerned with competing with an amorphous and a-temporal ideal of college performance. Esther introduced me to the concept of “forty-down,” as in forty-down in a game of basketball. In other words, you are really behind. Esther described feeling behind in high school and in her transition to college:

High school high-key killed me. Just like being forty-down [behind] with all this work all the time. Even during the summer, we were always having to do something for our diploma and get our IB diplomas and graduate with that in our back pocket.

And now I’m putting more effort forward. My study habits in high school were, um, I wouldn’t make it in college with that. I have to be studying every day for these classes. I just can’t expect to get it in the night before and ace the exam. That’s just how it works here. Coming out of high school as a straight A student and then going to college and not being a straight A student was a shock. I think freshman year I was overwhelmed with being alone and not being home. It’s just a different environment. I was taking a lot of classes and a lot of them were STEM based. Even though my major is in STEM, but I just didn’t put in enough time to study.

I self-sabotaged freshman year. Because it’s different with someone’s help. It touches you. But I self-sabotaged and didn’t get help. And when you do that it’s on you. Like during sophomore year I came back and did really well. I was in the library all the time and had a group to study with and help me. They are the best especially with STEM stuff. (Esther, second interview)

This excerpt highlighted the seemingly never-ending pressure of getting ahead (Sacks, 2007). Pressures abound in the pursuit of the next best thing, such as an IB diploma, followed by success in STEM classes, then college graduation, and medical school. There is always something that requires preparation, and there is little perceived grace to fall behind or make mistakes as Esther identified she did during her first year.

I asked Esther to describe a time she felt pressure. She brought up her origin story on why she wants to be a physician:

My mom and dad had a falling out recently. And yes, it made me very happy that they weren't literally in each other's faces all the time. But it put my mom in a position to put more pressure on my sister and I. She'd [Esther's mother] would be like 'you girls need to show your dad that you don't need him and you'll be successful with or without him.' I'm going to be successful. In my family, success is being a lawyer, doctor, or engineer. We came to find out my sister doesn't want to be a doctor. My mom was so shocked. She was mad at my sister for a week. (Esther, third interview)

Esther experiences a great deal of family pressure to become a doctor or other professional she described. I was alarmed how her bestowed-upon and pressurized professional goal was affiliated with her parents' separation. Esther's professional goal, and her determination to not be "forty-down," reminded me of *homo oeconomicus*. She described the constant state of being behind and such a pressure exists alongside familial expectations to be a physician.

Brown posited that *homo oeconomicus* appreciates positioning oneself for the market and the future. "*Homo oeconomicus* takes its shape as human capital seeking to strengthen its competitive positioning and appreciate its value, rather than as a figure of exchange or interest" (Brown, 2015, p. 33). *Homo oeconomicus* is about getting ahead in a closed market. Somewhat similar, Massey (2005) described synchrony as a closed system. I drew parallels between *homo oeconomicus* and the desire to get ahead based on synchrony and perceived closed spaces. For Esther, the future involved the binary of being a physician while negotiating the feeling of being "forty-down."

Whether towards a professional goal or during one's college transition, it appeared that concerns with performance may cause complicate the collegiate transition experience. When this happens, energies towards simply "making it" may at times supersede a student's attention given to the a-temporal developmental outcomes previously described by Mayhew et al. (2016). Andrew expressed such a transition to college:

You have all this anxiety. Good anxiety. You're new and you're excited and ready to get started, meet people. And then classes start. I remember taking my bio class. It was about a 200-kid lecture. I sat probably in the middle. I remember him starting the lecture and I'm just like, wow, I don't know what's going on. This stuff was in-depth. Which went on the first exam I took. Wow. That was a brutal exam. I literally walked out of it. I felt like my brain exploded.

I studied. Well, in high school I didn't really have to study that much. I could get away with going to class and paying attention and then just maybe looking over the material the night before and be fine. That's what I did here. My notes probably weren't the best when I first started college. They definitely weren't the best. I do hand-written notes now. For that exam I just re-read the notes and class lecture slides. I got a 55 on it. The course average was a 57 so it curved up and I was fine. It curved up to a B-minus. It was shocking since in high school I never got a B. The entire first year was just tough as far as figuring out what works. (Andrew, second interview)

Both Esther and Andrew had to adjust to schooling in very particular ways. For Andrew, there was a lack of academic preparation in knowing what success meant in the collegiate classroom. His experience reminded me of Esther, who previously shared that she did not know it was acceptable to speak in class. There are systemic class-based practices grounded on assumptions, such as even knowing how to study and prepare for an exam, that promote academic synchrony (Sacks, 2007).

Experiences such as Andrew's occurred in perceived synchronous space that rewards performance and affords little room for mistakes (Sacks, 2007). I previously referred to synchronous space as well as *homo oeconomicus* as premised on closure. Time as a measure of synchrony may be a notable element of closure. The four-year clock Andrew and the other participants are operating under may inform their perceptions of synchrony. Time as an undergraduate student may be a kind of synchronous closed market. When a B-minus is a shock and anything less than that is seen as damage to one's chances to premier graduate programs and medical schools, the developmental value of learning through mistakes appears lost. Similarly, Maria felt behind since her first day of college since her enrollment was deferred one semester.

I recalled Devon, who has a history of academic accolades to his name. Devon previously stated that "I found my identity in my schoolwork." He was aware of the kind of pressurized synchrony associated with school performance. I previously recounted his experience receiving media attention from being awarded a collective one million dollars in scholarships, attention he dubbed as "so stupid." Devon shared experiences that reflect perceptions of academic synchrony, especially during times of crisis. This can be frustrating, especially considering the time and consideration he took in selecting his major:

Math is my thing. I love math and always knew you can go deeper into mathematics. It was going to be a challenge and I wanted to challenge myself. I took the first required math class, linear algebra. I didn't have to take calculus because I had gotten credit from AP testing. I did really well in the class so I decided to stick with the major. But I didn't select a major until I'd taken that first math class. (Devon, second interview)

His initial experiences with collegiate mathematics do not necessarily point to the nature of synchrony or performing in perceived closed spaces or closed markets. Devon developed a fairly clear academic pathway which aligned with his interest and talents.

During the following year, his sophomore year academic experiences induced a sense of pressure to perform at practically perfect levels, no matter what. During his sophomore year, Devon experienced Hurricane Irma:

My sophomore year fall semester was the worst semester of college by far. Irma happened. We were in school for two weeks, and then Irma came. I remember looking for a bus ticket to Orlando because my uncle lives there and I was going to stay with him. I picked up everything, including my PlayStation 4, Thank God! The bus ride was horrible. Everyone was trying to get out.

That entire semester was hell. I was taking 18 credits. Those were very hard classes. Abstract math, multivariate calculus, lab, and two others. It wasn't the courses, but the schedule. Some teachers decided to pack in tests and exams. So, with the difficulty of the courses and the schedule, it threw everything off completely. Like some of my professors at the end of the semester, like my organic chemistry two professor, added on a test. I don't know how much more they could have done. I know every faculty member sets their syllabus at the beginning of the year. But a natural disaster like Irma messes everything up. It was tough. It was just really tough. (Devon, second interview)

Despite a natural disaster, which displaced Devon out of Miami and sleeping on a couch at a relative's home, the curricular agenda felt accelerated in order to account for demonstrations of performance. This appears to be a pattern. Both Hurricane Irma and COVID-19 were significant and disruptive events. Yet the perceived need to perform at levels greater than one can muster carried on even if Devon had to do so while evacuated from his home. Within the context of this study, in times of crisis the institution seemed to engage in what felt as a doubling-down effort on documenting academic performance.

This may have come at the expense of students' well-being and the ability to engage in critical thought and reflection.

Devon's major choice came from his own interest in the subject. That may have been an asset to him and helped him sustain academic engagement during times of crisis. Maria made her academic major choice based on perceived market probabilities and preserving options in her future:

My major is psychology. I picked it because I don't know what I want to do with my life and it's something that can be applied so broadly. I was undeclared and then I switched to exercise physiology and then I was like, that makes no sense because it's so specific. I wanted to do something that I really could apply later on and even now, so I chose psychology, which I do think has worked out to my benefit. (Maria, second interview)

Maria enjoys the generalizability that comes from her chosen major. Through four years of undergraduate studies, she continued to be challenged by her major choice since her family wished she "would choose a major that would actually give me a job." If synchrony is understood as existing in closed space, as is *homo oeconomicus*, then Maria's relatives appear to be spatializing such assumptions since they perceive a psychology major as not giving her a competitive edge.

On the contrary to her relatives, Maria sees herself as well-positioned in the market through a generally applicable academic major. Openness to what is possible appears to be an asset for Maria. She found satisfaction in her major and is proud of her choice. Some of her relatives think otherwise and appear disappointed (Brown, 2015):

I call my mom to complain about this whole situation. Like 'you don't have a plan after graduation'. They don't treat me the same way they treat my cousins. I'm treated in a completely different way. Like I'm not up to standard. My mom will tell me it doesn't matter. But it's obviously frustrating to constantly get it every

time I see my family every two to three months. There's not much nice to say. What am I going to do? I don't know what I want to do with my career so I might as well make academic-based decisions. (Maria, first interview)

I revisited this story at the next interview and asked Maria to share a time she felt “free from pressures from her academics and her family.” She shared the following:

When I came home with a 4.0. It was a semester that I took a math class and I understood things my friends didn't understand. I felt a higher level of engaged. That semester I also took a history of the beach class. We talked a lot about the Caribbean. I guess I realized I knew a little bit more than a standard American would know. I found myself actually contributing worthwhile information to these conversations. (Maria, second interview)

I found Maria's response to be significant for three reasons. First, among other things, it seemed that the semester's grade point average affirmed her engagement (Kuh et al., 2008). As mentioned, Maria experienced a kind of pressure from outside the institution through her relative's disappointment in her academic major choice. Her success and familiarity with the course content may have affirmed her choices as she negotiated the wishes of her family to pursue another major and career in what they likely perceived as a closed market. I continue to think about this and how one's grades affects a student's sense of engagement. Maria felt enabled with a 4.0 whereas Andrew was in shock with a B-. I remain curious how grading affects the ability to be engaged.

Second, Maria found herself contributing to others in the classroom. She appeared to have felt engaged because she was helping others learn. Maria commented that given her background and familiarity with the course content, she “can actually contribute worthwhile information to this [class] conversation.” And last, here was also some representation in the curriculum. Similar to Esther viewing Haitian art in the campus

library arts center, Maria found herself represented within the curriculum. The perceived synchrony Maria experienced from her family seemed to have been relieved in part through awareness of her own engagement and the confidence that ensued.

This experience did not occur during Maria's first year. Unlike her peers, Maria's enrollment was deferred one semester to the spring. During the first four interviews Maria spoke often of an ongoing sense of needing to "catch up" and fighting a constant sense of being behind. Maria perceived synchrony in time. Her temporal experiences existed in conjunction with perceptions of a-temporal notions of student engagement. The comparative four-year, fall-start norm created a benchmark that Maria had to grapple with. This is evidenced through the previously described self-doubt she started with and carried on throughout college, even questioning if she was welcomed in this space. The desire and pressure to keep up or even be ahead of peers creates entrepreneurial space (Brown, 2015).

Entrepreneurial space is generated through the pressure to perceive mistakes as threats to one's future, such as defining learning through grading, starting one semester behind, or attempting to separate the implications of a crisis on one's academic performance. In entrepreneurial space, one attempts to enhance one's future value as much as possible (Brown, 2015). Through entrepreneurial space, engagement may become market-based as well as a matter of cognitive enrichment. The kind of engagement described by Astin (1993) as well as Mayhew et al. (2016) exist within spaces where students may calculate the entrepreneurial costs and benefits of engagement with particular practices (Brown, 2015).

Ashley certainly engaged in these cost-benefit engagement analyses. Her decision to continue in the school's production of *Little Shop of Horrors*, despite the body-shaming and racial issues, was likely based on the sensed pressure to perform academically and enhance market viability. Within her academic program, she noted a concerning conflict between one's lived experience and synchrony:

It's all about them [the institution]. They don't care about anyone else. I like to say it's checking the box and paying your dues. We're a small family of very talented people with really big egos, so you have to have a sense of survival. The walls I have up in my theater department home is different than outside of theater. It's very competitive like with auditions. You're coming to a place where people are paying to train and want to be the best. They want to be seen at all times. So they would do anything they can to be seen. If that means stepping on people for them, then that's what it is. I've never been like that. That's how theater is. I had to start branching out of theater to find places I can call home.

It's so much more forgiving outside of theater. Because if you don't succeed in one area, you can find another area. My friends can change majors and I haven't because I had to audition for my major. At the same time, there are also people who are like, I'm trying to go to med school, I need to be an 80th percentile MCAT. They know how hard it is. (Ashley, second interview)

Ashley sensed that her collegiate space was not forgiving. According to her, she had to check boxes and give of herself to the institution and negotiate spaces and places with a "sense of survival." Following her comments, I asked Ashley to "describe the sources of the pressures she experienced, and how that pressure is communicated":

The university takes away from you piece by piece. Twenty minutes ago, I was on Blackboard and saw a class opened up. I went ahead and read the syllabus. The first thing I saw is that if you're one minute late, you're absent. That tells me the professor doesn't care about your mental health. Whether or not there were circumstances, where I'm coming from like if there's traffic. After two absences it's a grade letter drop. It means you don't have a warm or forgiving heart. You're not caring about my situation at all, which means I probably can't trust you as a teacher or professional. And that's the case for a lot of professors here. They think

it's their way or no way. 'I don't care how you do it. As long as you get my stuff done, we will be fine.'

We're in college. We're at a time in our lives where we are messing up because we are experiencing it [college]. In my opinion they need to be more open. To this day I still have a perfect attendance in theater. I cannot miss a day. I think mental health days are important. I have asthma. I just think those things should be taken into consideration, which they are not.

Ashley pointed out that she is living through a time and space in which "messaging" should be acceptable. Yet to her and her peers, it does not seem to be the case. Moreover, Ashley's discussion speaks to a presumed lack of agency. Her perception is that the ways faculty want things done cannot be changed, and therefore implying a-temporality. She claimed "it's their way or no way" and health "should be taken into consideration, which they are not." These suppositions that change is not feasible or one's own well-being is not accounted for reflects synchrony because spaces perceived as fixed and a-temporal project resistance to change and a greater concern with governance than lived experience (Massey, 2005).

Esther entered college believing the best way to learn is to be silent in the classroom. Andrew presumed reviewing notes the night before an exam is adequate preparation. Devon's grades slipped during the semester of a natural disaster. Each participant described mistakes within the context of perceived unchanging spaces. I reflected on how educational practices may be spatialized in ways that stigmatize a student's own experiences because of perceptions unchanging synchrony. Learning how to study or struggling to focus on an exam in the wake of a natural disaster are certainly temporal experiences that may come with mistakes, struggles, or stress. However in these

examples the participants conveyed a perception of unchanging institutional expectations of students. As Ashley alluded to, experiencing college, including being engaged may “be all about them [the institution].” Temporal experiences held in comparison to a-temporal synchrony may induce a sense of trying to compete with imagined and unrealistic expectations of oneself and others.

The pressures of academic synchrony and treating space and markets as closed suggests a kind of prestige-maximization. Through prestige-maximization, entities engage in behaviors to gain position in their markets (Alexander, 2001; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Prestige-maximization is a behavior inspired by and embedded within closed markets and entrepreneurial space. Prestige-maximization is about outspending or outpacing others in a closed market where worth is determined only in relation to others in that market (Alexander, 2001). With the sense of performance in a closed market being comparative in nature, mistakes or otherwise feeling “forty down” induce worry and a perceived loss in prestige-maximization. Andrew experienced this when he scored below a B-minus in his first exam. Maria feared loss of prestige-maximization in her deferred enrollment. Ashley remained in a performance that took a toll on her well-being. Given the sensed pressure to perform and position oneself for success beyond graduation, I grew curious about the resources utilized to either avoid mistakes, make meaning from them, or engage in prestige-maximization.

The discussion of institutional resources was notably absent from conversations with participants about navigating academic and social pressures. When asked about campus resources they were aware of during their first year, both Devon and Andrew

spoke of awareness of the counseling center, though noting they did not need their help. Ashley too directed the conversation to the counseling center when I asked this question. Though for Ashley, it was a lack of representation that caused her avoidance of the center's resources.

At first it appeared to me that there is a sparse awareness of the availability of institutional resources. However, through discussions with participants it became more evident that the pressure to perform induced a sense to do it on one's own with minimal intervention. I interpreted such a stance to be grounded in gendered discourse and the idea of rugged individualism. Ashley took on this approach and initially presumed she would not need mentors:

My mother would always say it takes a village to raise a child. This village has always been very important for me. When I got here [UM] I was like, I'm gonna do it all alone. I didn't reach out to any mentors at all. I was going to do it all by myself. I cut ties from previous mentors because I wanted to try this on my own. I was going to free myself from mentors in my newest chapter.

But then I accidentally walked into the multicultural affairs office and met someone. She became my mentor. Honestly, she is the reason why I kept doing community service and became involved with the campus. And then I met some professors in my program. (Ashley, first interview)

Ashley started college under the premonition that to succeed in college is to do it alone. Through her experiences, she learned otherwise. Ashley changed her perception on what it means to succeed in college. The openness and experiences associated with change implies temporal conceptualizations of space and time, as opposed to spatial and a-temporal conceptualizations. Synchrony is premised on a-temporal space. Here, Ashley allowed herself to change and thus likely break from perceived synchrony.

Ashley created an initial perception of prestige-maximization which required proving oneself on one's own efforts (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Maria shared a similar sentiment by initially resisting her parents' efforts to connect her with a potential faculty mentor who would ultimately change her stance towards being at the university. Similar to Ashley, Maria demonstrated a departure from perceiving synchrony. Eventually each participant developed awareness that they do not have to cope with experiencing college alone. Mentors and champions are instrumental to their success and wellness (Griffin et al., 2010). This pattern of stepping into collegiate spaces prepared to perform through pressure in an independent fashion, and then recognizing the support required to persist reflects Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector of moving from autonomy to interdependence.

Chickering and Reisser defined autonomy as "freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others" (1993, p. 117). Developing self-direction as well as independent problem-solving abilities is also part of moving through autonomy. Through time and experience, students move away from autonomy and generate an awareness of their interconnectedness with others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This autonomy to interdependence continuum exists within a closed market-oriented space premised on synchrony. Herein lies an example on the importance of recognizing and analyzing the collegiate experience through space and place. Through articulating the space in which engagement and the student experience occurs, nuances such as deeply sensed synchrony associated with the collegiate experience are revealed. Moving from autonomy to interdependence within synchronous and market-oriented

spaces induces pressures and angst since behaviors and thoughts may be influenced by the desire for prestige-maximization. In other words, there may be spatial and place-based factors that inform a student's sense of engagement that is more complicated than the kind of wholesome and holistic outcomes often conveyed through engagement models and practices of prediction.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that a students' desire for autonomy is inherent to their developmental journey. Another interpretation is that by acting as entrepreneurial subjects, students seek to maximize their market position and utilize minimal resources in doing so. It is an efficiency mindset that may create a basis for alienation, even from mentors (Brown, 2015). This pressure, to both perform according to synchronous standards as well as do so autonomously, is troubling. It pulls students away from the possibility of achieving two major outcomes of college. The first is an orientation towards critical learning and creative thinking (Astin, 1993). The second is fostering supportive relationships with faculty and mentors (Mayhew et al., 2016).

Andrew described an academic experience mostly grounded in preparing. I was reminded of Esther's sense of being "forty-down." To Andrew, college has mostly been about preparing. Andrew described a constant state of preparing such as for an exam, the week ahead, graduate school, or his career. He shared a photograph of the law school courtyard, which served as "a place that offered a rare contrast to ongoing concerns" with preparing (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Andrew's photograph of the law school courtyard



Andrew's experiences within this place gave him shelter from the usual pressures of coursework and his graduate school preparations. Here, he was "able to think about his mistakes and interests. It is a place of reflection." Through this place, Andrew demonstrated self-engagement. While to Andrew college was mostly about preparing for something, he also came to define college as including places of self-reflection.

Through this photograph and the related discussion, Andrew pointed out that engagement is also an intrinsic experience. Many of the related discussions with him and other participants centered on more performative and pressurized aspects of engagement, specifically engagement as a matter concerned with the institution. Andrew seemed to realize that engagement may also be considered a matter in which he himself is centered. He frequented the courtyard in order to "figure everything out as far as getting myself together." The courtyard may represent a place existing outside of synchrony. He first found this place during a lunch break early in his sophomore year. During his first time here, Andrew commented that he found himself "able to think and relax." Over two years

since that first experience, Andrew described coming here often by himself to seek peace, read, and reflect. He created a place for himself which broke from the pressures he and his peers described.

Andrew came a long way since his first B- inducing a mild sense of panic. I asked him what mistakes mean to him now, a senior recently admitted to his preferred graduate school:

How you learn from life is from making mistakes. It's the idea that people always say. Like failure isn't necessarily a bad thing as long as you can learn from it. I think it's part of the learning process to make mistakes, realize, and reflect. This is how you find out how you can do better. (Andrew, third interview)

Andrew came to know learning, and engagement with one's learning, as a change-oriented process. A process which helps one "find out how you can do better" suggests openness, the opposite of synchrony. To Andrew, the courtyard represented a place not naturally found through the institution's structures and practices. Through his time in this courtyard, Andrew remarked on the uniqueness of how he would be reflexively engaged with himself and his studies. Doing so helped him achieve "balance you can work with." Andrew described this courtyard in a manner which made me think of a reflective oasis indicative of Tuan's (1977) cardinal points. When at this particular geographic cardinal point, Andrew seemed to depart from perceived synchrony and thus enjoy a relief from pressure in order to reflect and process.

I Need that Lighthouse

Space is immersive, places such as a college campus are not. The participants were keenly aware of this and actively sought to engage with non-collegiate spaces and

places. I garnered the sense that this was deemed as a kind of essential practice in order to sustain one's well-being, motivation, and ability to remain engaged with the collegiate experience. This is a contrasted description to the kind of immersive experience perceived to be required in order to fulfill the outcomes of college (Lopez Turley & Wodtke, 2010). *In loco parentis*, living and learning initiatives, and encouraging students to remain on campus all point to immersion within collegiate spaces and places. Such institutional efforts are not without their merits as oftentimes students involved through these practices report higher levels of engagement, more frequent peer interactions, and an increased sense of safety (Mayhew et al., 2016). The desire expressed by the study's participants to exist within non-institutional spaces and places appears to be a co-requisite for being engaged.

Massey (2005) posited that governing agencies may attempt to persuade us that there is no alternative to a particular kind of space. One particular consequence of such spatialized assumptions may be that synchrony is the primary way to conceptualize space. The field of higher education, through inquiry and practice, may be guilty of this. Rather than describe a world that is or can be, arguments are constructed that the world that should be exists solely within the realm of a particular institution (Massey, 2005). Assuming college to be an immersive place-based experience such as the Tintonian notion of integration, and expanding the presence of the campus (even when not on campus) may be matters of synchrony. Given the nature and context of this study and sub-theme, I considered it prudent to reiterate that this discussion is in relation to a

residential college. I recognize there are many other kinds of postsecondary institutions that are not premised on the residential experience.

The nature of non-collegiate spaces and places have traditionally been described as distractive or impertinent to college. It is possible that the notion of synchrony may be extended to places as well as spaces. Through synchrony, a place such as a campus, and one's experiences with such a place would be perceived according to a-temporal spatialized assumptions. Depicting that there is no option to be engaged but on the campus suggests a kind of gentrifying effort that ignores the learning potential of the lived experiences outside of collegiate spaces and places.

Ashley described her need to continue to be involved off campus as essential, as evidenced through her non-profit corporation and her summer experience in Chatham. Through non-institutionally affiliated community involvement, she also found mentorship and inspiration:

I want to be on Broadway but I also want to write musicals. I plan on performing for six to ten years. And while I'm performing I'll write a bunch of plays and have a portfolio for Yale because that's where I want to go to grad school for playwriting. It's one of the best playwriting programs in the country. I learned that from Tarell Alvin McCraney. He was the screenwriter for the movie *Moonlight*. He went to my high school alma mater. I met him at the school when I was doing a reading of one of his plays. And then I've been talking to him recently about how to get into Yale. He was like, 'you have to work, you need a bigger resume, and you need somebody to pay for you to go to school.' Everyone was scared to talk to him. I was going to talk to him because I'm not one to lose out. So I spoke to him and we exchanged emails. (Ashley, first interview)

In this excerpt, Ashley described a list of tasks she would need to accomplish in order to get into graduate school, this reminded me of the previous sub-theme. For her, perceptions of synchrony require a very particular formula to be completed in order to get

into graduate school. At the same time, she stepped outside of an institutionally-administered place. In a moment in which she chose to give back to her high school alma mater, she seized an opportunity to reach out to a successful professional. A mentoring relationship followed, which was advanced with his recent appointment to a faculty position at Ashley's institution.

Similar to Ashley, Andrew gained valuable mentoring and experience through experiences outside of the institution. He credits nearly all of his interest and knowledge in physical therapy to experiences divorced from the institution. Following his initial introduction to physical therapy through his high school guidance counselor, Andrew continued to shadow at the clinic during school breaks:

I work directly with the patients to get a feel for everything. And then there are also some physical therapists I work with who had just graduated from Northeastern and getting ready to take the boards. By working with them I was able to kind of figure out what to expect and how their experience was and like what they liked, what they didn't like and how they managed their lives throughout the three years [in grad school].

There was this one therapist I worked with and she just had this like lifelong learner attitude. That's something I'm very interested in and I think will make me a better professional. She would work with me to help me lead patients through exercises. I couldn't touch the patients or anything because that's not part of the job description. But she would explain things to me the entire time. And then she would do things like share research articles and information. That was something that motivated me. I want to be that kind of person. (Andrew, first interview)

I asked Andrew if there were other opportunities through his formal collegiate schooling that also intersected research with exposure to the discipline. To his knowledge, there were not. He found moments such as his shadowing experiences to "expand my thinking on the subject matter discussed in class."

Andrew was able to generate meaning and apply his shadowing experiences from back home to his schooling. Within this context, space is a seamless whole. Seamless space is comprised of interconnected systems and messaging (Massey, 2005). Seamless spaces may very well be the arenas in which immersive collegiate experiences such as living and learning environments, service learning, internships, and other practical applications of learning exist. Seamlessness between the classroom and external experiences are certainly desirable and comprise several high-impact practices (Kuh, 2009; Mayhew et al., 2016).

While seamlessness is often celebrated and encouraged as it should be, dislocated space seems notably absent from engagement literature. For the purposes of this study, dislocation suggests a departure from collegiate spaces and places, even when it is temporary. Dislocation may be a psychological as well as physical separation from synchronous spaces and places. Following the Tintonian (1988) premise of integration, it would appear that acts against integration might threaten a students' persistence and abilities to engage within college. However, all five participants spoke otherwise and credited the ability to dislocate as a requirement to engage. To dislocate is to find sources of freedom separate from the dominant influences of space (Laclau, 1990; Massey, 2005). When one dislocates from particular spaces such as those associated with college, there may be a departure from the closed systems and time-oriented constraints that condition students to perform according to expectations generated by perceived synchrony (Massey, 2005). I argue that dislocation is not distraction. Rather it is rejuvenation and positioning oneself to exist in asynchronous space and time.

Andrew shared the following photograph (Figure 8) during the photo-elicitation interview. As a reminder, the prompt for the photo-elicitation interview was to share photographs that reflect meaningful moments in college. I was surprised that this was the first photograph Andrew presented and discussed. For Andrew, meaning partially came from the ability to escape and completely step outside the pressurized space of college:

This is one of my favorite places. It's in York, Maine. Every summer or every time I'm home I always make a trip up there. Whether it's with my family or my girlfriend the last time. There's something tranquil about this place. You kind of just sit. It's nice. You enjoy some lobster at the end of the day. This is actually my phone background.

It's my happy place. Whether I'm down or something, I'll think about it and it'll just make me happy. When I'm there I have no worries. It's always kind of nice to have that in the back of my mind. The first time I went there was summer after my freshman year. That's when I was introduced to it and it's kind of been an anchor.

My mom found it from talking to her friends back home. And then she told me about it. They have this nice little downtown and have awesome beaches. I just fell in love with it. I think it just has everything that makes me comfortable and happy. It's a very peaceful place and gets you away from the cities for a while. It's nice to get away and enjoy a simpler life. I kind of need that lighthouse. It balances my experiences here. (Andrew, fourth interview)

Figure 8

Andrew's photograph of a lighthouse



While arguably still negotiating collegiate spaces, Andrew found a place somewhat similar to the previously discussed courtyard which inspired self-reflection. Unlike the courtyard, which is on the college campus, Andrew experienced meaningful dislocation. Maria, too expressed this sentiment and found her trips back home to Trinidad serving as much-needed dislocated place:

My fondest memories are going up to the beach. You drive up the mountain, past a lookout location. Then you buy some local fruits like sugarcane. You take it down to the beach and eat it there along with some shark and bake sandwiches. It's a local food. It's bread with shark. (Maria, first interview)

To Maria, moments such as these are not necessarily an escape from college, but rather re-engagement with places she feels she is missing as a result of college. “Missing out” reflects the integrative binary suggested by Tinto and also by Massey. If, as Massey described, synchrony creates dichotomies, then a student such as Maria may feel a mutual exclusivity between home and the campus. Devon’s previous discussion of “cultural things” also suggests spatial dichotomies. Maria was likely aware that she is integrated within college. Through geography and her time, she is hardly occupying places with family and her home country. Going back provides Maria with opportunities to re-engage with spaces and places inaccessible to her while on campus. It is an example of personal and identity fulfillment through dislocation.

One may not need to travel too far in order to experience dislocated space. This is where the metropolitan setting of the institution became most present in discussions. Part of the reason I selected this research site was because of my curiosity on the experiences of students within a metropolitan area. Prior to interviews I presumed engagement with metropolitan places to serve the function of seamlessness and not dislocation. There are several institutionally-managed opportunities for students to partake in seamless space between instruction and the city. Local internship relationships, service-learning, and student employment are a few examples that facilitate the localized seamlessness Andrew experienced with his physical therapy clinic and classroom.

With the exception of Ashley, who is a local student and engaged through personal avenues as well as through her company, the city’s purpose within the students’ lived experience seemed to dislocate rather than promote symmetry. The institution’s

backdrop within a large metropolitan area seemed to disconnect and entertain rather than educate in the formal curricular sense. Devon described a meaningful experience and place when he disconnected from the campus (Figure 9):

Figure 9

Devon's photograph of the Wynwood Walls



This is my favorite place by far to go in Miami. There's so much you can do in Wynwood. I've probably been there five, six, or seven times. Every time I go to Wynwood there's something different. Whether it's the walls that are different, you can just sense the change. These are huge walls that have depictions of people and color. It's just art. And I'm not really an art person. Even on the sidewalks they have stamps and stuff.

One of my friends, freshman year, we were in the same lab class and we kind of spoke about exploring Miami. We were both like 'oh we've never been to Wynwood before.' We didn't want to Uber so we used public transportation. We went on the metro and got dropped off somewhere. And then we got lost for a bit trying to find the right bus to take us to Wynwood. That took a little bit but we finally found the right bus. And then we stayed all day and into the night. And then we came back on the bus in the evening time. That was an adventure. That was definitely an adventure.

This photo brings me back to the first time I went off campus. I tell people maybe you'll enjoy it. Maybe you won't. I certainly do. For me things like this are new experiences. Maybe not new experiences, but growth. I wasn't ever a spontaneous person. But because of things like these I started to become more spontaneous and explore. Do things. (Devon, fourth interview)

In this example, growth through exploration and spontaneity came in part from dislocation, not symmetry. Space bound by synchrony hardly affords opportunities to depart from highly particular expectations of time and performance (Massey, 2005). It seems that each participant was involved in their own respective pursuits of dislocation from institutional expectations of time and performance.

Institutional efforts to engage beyond the campus gates appear to be grounded in symmetry, which again are warranted in expanding opportunities for kinesthetic ways of learning (Kuh, 2009b; Mayhew et al., 2016). However, there seems to be a dearth in literature and practice that supports disjointed experiences. According to participant narratives, engaging in disjointed time and space promulgated their role in generating meaning and learning. Students appeared to have been left to devise disjointed space on their own. Disjointed experiences with places such as Devon's story affirm that generating meaning may come from engaging with both symmetrical and disjointed spaces.

COVID-19 appeared to have eliminated disjointed space and advanced perceptions of synchrony into places previously understood as disjointed from the institution. As a reminder, synchrony refers to the treatment of space as a-temporal and fixed (Massey, 2005). Involvement with college, such as with coursework or student organizations, seemed to have persisted in an a-temporal fashion despite occurring in a

time of unprecedented crisis. Esther previously described her home as a disjointed place usually reserved for vacation and family affairs. As a student during the pandemic, the ability to disconnect from collegiate space seemed lost. One's home or off-campus apartment suddenly became a place of symmetry and synchrony rather than disjointment. Maria, Andrew, Devon, and Esther each spoke to the desire for disjointed space by establishing a routine and structure while in quarantine. Interestingly, routines became practices of attempted disjointment and departing from synchrony. Maria, for example, described her adjustment to COVID-19 as "floating around:"

I'm still trying to get into a routine and figure everything out. I'm trying to relax and not stress because you can't control that I can't do anything. I'm just trying to create a normal routine. Like maybe cooking dinner, helping with things around the house, packing away all my stuff that's been lying around for five weeks. Once again, it feels pretty hard to just float around. (Maria, fifth interview)

I think the desire to establish a routine may have served as both a means for coping and also a way to establish room for the disjointing of space and time. When left without tightly closed structures and space, such as during COVID-19, time becomes the only way to create dividing lines (Nowotny, 2005). Andrew was engaged with time and routine as a way to negotiate disjointment:

I think I've finally adjusted a lot better now. I have a good routine now that helps me keep to a good day to day schedule. Things are better now I think because I set up a routine. I won't sleep past 10:00am for example. And then I have my coffee in the morning, unwind, and get to work. I have a good work schedule. I'm surprised how much work I still have. I'm not complaining because it's something to do. Once I got that routine, things have been more manageable. (Andrew, fifth interview)

Nowotny (2005) posited that during periods of uncertainty, time becomes the mechanism for creation and destruction. The participants appeared to have combatted perceptions of

expanded synchrony by resorting to structuring time in order to generate creativity and engage in “structuration” (Nowotny, 2005).

With synchrony, one may perceive that “everything has its time and place” (Nowotny, 2005, p. 20). The lighthouse, wandering around town, and trips to one’s home country represent experiences where time and place happened in the moment and were not necessarily perceived as existing in institutional synchrony. Delimitations in time and place may be the elements that afford the opportunity to disconnect and seek disjointed space. Now that they were living in symmetry through quarantine and online coursework, time became the sole source of structure in order to delimit what was collegiate and what was not. Despite the ways in which collegiate synchrony was advanced even during a pandemic, participants sought ways to engage in dislocation either through space, place, or time.

Getting into the Groove of Finding my Curl Pattern

Being subject to pressure is not necessarily the concern of the super-ordinate theme of synchrony. Rather, it is how the participants’ perceptions of synchrony informed their understanding of engagement. This particular sub-theme discusses synchrony in regard to the social aspects of college. Students experience social pressures in college (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2013). The pressures the participants experienced were spatialized mediums of synchrony. Maria, Esther, Devon, Ashley, and Andrew certainly affirmed this through their experiences. With synchrony being a-temporal, it appears that at least Devon knew of the social norms of college before getting started. Prior to experiencing the pressures associated with collegiate social life, students

appeared to have entered with much anticipation and excitement on the university's social scene. Devon's friends immediately equated his enrollment choice as bound by a remarkable social life:

I was just so attracted to this place. I call it divine intervention. I don't know. I started to convince myself that this is the decision I should make. I remember I told my friends one night at a party. I was like 'yeah, um, I think I'm going to Miami'. And they were like 'Miami! Do you know how much fun you're going to have?' of course I didn't go to Miami just to party and all that stuff. There was [scholarship] money and diversity. I knew about football success in the past. Miami football wasn't really good at that time when I decided to come. (Devon, first interview)

Prior to enrollment, Devon and his high school friends certainly knew that there was much to be experienced in terms of the local social life.

Football was one element that generated excitement, and also synchrony, with nearly all of the study's participants. While not any participant's reason for enrollment, the school's home games presented an unmatched social arena. Football, as described by Devon, is surrounded by the field of dreams:

Devon: Football (Figure 10). Wow. Like, that's it. Football and tailgating. Not like my high school. It was a magnet program and very small. So we didn't grow up watching high school Friday night lights. None of that stuff. I was really excited to come here to watch football games. These are some of the most fun times in college because of that stadium. Being at the stadium, the team playing there, the tailgating. You know, I've probably stepped on the 'field of dreams' once or twice. It's a very wild experience. Not experiencing it myself, but just observing everybody. And sometimes it's really disgusting especially if it were to rain. But I mean, it's Greek life, that's what they do there. (Devon, fourth interview)

Figure 10

Devon's Image of the Football Stadium



I asked Devon to expand on the field of dreams:

The field of dreams. It's this huge field behind the parking lots of the stadium. Blaring loud music. Flags of all the frats raised high. People dancing, drinking on somebody's truck. Tents. All that stuff. It's just a bunch of craziness. It's something you'd see on MTV spring break. Except it's not on a beach. It's a frat thing. And then when Game Day was here. That was crazy.

Devon enjoyed observing the revelry of tailgating and college football. The stadium and field of dreams represented a place that appears to ratify and normalize a dominant social culture (Magolda, 2000). On game days, Devon described a culture of Greek life, dancing on trucks, and binge drinking. As he stated, it is not so much about experiencing it himself, but the observations he makes that seemed to be fascinating. This may speak to the potency of developing perceptions. The activities Devon described were notably gendered rituals, with fraternities typically hosting the parties and in spatializing what has

arguably become a timeless and traditional pre-game tailgating experience at just about any large university with a football program.

The ways of the university, specifically dominant ways of experiencing social life, are transmitted through community events such as tailgating and football (Magolda, 2000). Maria, too, experienced and enjoyed football. In her stories, she oftentimes noted that her social experiences were somewhat different than the usual college experience since she is not a “party person.” With synchrony producing perceptions of dichotomous spaces, Maria found herself on what is probably the other side of the field of dreams. She described her collegiate experience as hardly experiencing pressure because she felt she had choices in how she engaged socially:

My experience was not the typical college social experience. I’m not a party person. I’m not a ‘let’s go out every day during syllabus week’ person. That’s not for me. I get my social fix by going to different events that are happening on campus. And just going off campus. Maybe I’ll go to dinner in some area, but I don’t get my social fix by drinking, drugs, and partying. (Maria, second interview)

Maria described her college social experience as atypical because she doesn’t get her “social fix by drinking, drugs, and partying.” In synchrony, there are binaries such as being “a party person” or not. I found Maria’s description on her social experience to be significant as it reflects Magolda’s description on the lasting impressions placed on students when they conceptualize what is “normal.” Normal typically becomes interpreted as “the ways of the university” (Magolda, 2000).

According to Maria, her experience may not be normal because she chose not to engage in what she perceived to be the dominant social ways of the university such as

tailgating at the field of dreams. Like Devon, she found much excitement in football (Figure 11).

Figure 11

Maria's Photograph of a Football Game



If it wasn't for homecoming I probably wouldn't have known about football stuff. How was I supposed to know? This is a picture from the first game I worked. I knew a friend who's a sport admin major. She asked me to come with her since she helped out at games. I thought it'd be fun and pretty cool to sit in air conditioning and watch football. Get free food and go to the club at the stadium, which nobody gets to do. I continued doing that for the next two years. It's with football recruits. We go to the gates, register them, gather their credentials, do lunch purchases, all that jazz.

I think it's also cool because a lot of times I feel like a lot of people on campus have very different experiences and this is such a different experience. Like people see me and think what I'm doing is cool. It's nice. (Maria, fourth interview)

Maria found a way to be engaged with a place in a somewhat non-normal way, at least as perceived by her. She also perceived football as a potential asynchronous space when she

stated that “people on campus have very different experiences.” This is a slight contrast to her previous synchronous observation as to whether she herself was a “party person” or not. Through the example of a college football game, Maria exemplifies the kind of multiplicity of space that exists but is hardly recognized by dominant social structures when synchrony is perceived (Massey, 2005). Maria lived through an engaging experience which provided her with social excitement and meaning. This was a series of experiences that occurred in an enclave held in comparison to what she perceived to be normal such as Devon’s description of the field of dreams (Magolda, 2000). Experiencing this binary sense of what is socially typical and atypical reflects synchrony in social spaces of college experienced by participants. The openness of multiple possibilities seems to be reduced to binaries based along a continuum of preferred ways of being.

Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) argued that student experiences during college are fundamentally shaped by the perceived structure of academic and social life. Sports, and the party culture such as the kind observed by Devon, were notably prominent places discussed by participants. These conversations reminded me of the party pathway.

Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) introduced the concept of “the party pathway:”

The party pathway is built around an implicit agreement between the university and students to demand little of each other...Building the social side of the party pathway involves creating big-time sports teams and facilities, as well as other “recreational” aspects of student life (for example, fitness and student centers). It means establishing ways of policing student revelry that protect life, property, and reputation without putting too much of a damper on student socializing. Most centrally, it requires solving the puzzle of how to systematically, and in large-scale fashion, generate “fun.” (p. 15)

Armstrong and Hamilton suggested that the student and institution interact in order to produce space for the party pathway. However, pathways insinuate freedom, mobility, and a somewhat unobstructed way forward. Discussions with participants revealed that the party pathway is negotiated and built by social pressures as well as constructed through financial and social capital. “The party pathway is provisioned to support the affluent and socially oriented” (p. 15). It is what I describe as the tyranny of brunch (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Ashley's Image of Brunch



Brunch, as a performance and not just a meal, was brought up by three participants. All discussed in the context of going out and what the brunch experience is supposed to be like. What is certainly more than just a meal, the performance of brunch or other social experiences are bound with class-based pressures. Ashley's experiences with brunch was a gateway to a willingness to borrow money in order to keep up with perceived social expectations:

You're going out with your floor and they will always invite me to go places. My mom always taught me to go ahead and look up the menu [ahead of time] to see if you like it or if you're allergic to anything. Like with spring break, with the restaurant situation I always checked because I'm allergic to peanuts. So peanut oil is a big thing. But then I realized what I started checking was pricing. Like the cheapest thing on the menu would probably be \$30. For me I need the cheapest thing to be \$7. My mom always taught me to save money.

I started realizing maybe I should go out more. I started spending so much money eating and going out and buying clothes at Lincoln Road and paying for Uber's to get to the beach. Like I didn't live here my whole life! And then I asked to go to Cancun for spring break. My mom said no. We weren't paying for me to go to Cancun. It was the biggest shock. My mom and I had to have an actual talk together on why I couldn't just go for spring break. (Ashley, second interview)

Ashley was willing to take on credit card debt in order to go on a spring break trip to Cancun. She was quite upset when her mother denied her request. This speaks to the potency of the party pathway. As Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) stated, perceptions can be a compelling motivator. Peer social culture makes participation in the party pathway compelling (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Ashley and I carried over our discussion of brunch to the third interview. She had just celebrated her 21st birthday:

Miami is brunch heavy. Every Sunday people are brunching and depending on where you go, brunch means a \$40 package. Or if you want everything \$40 to \$80. The food I like, I'm very picky. I just don't want French toast. I would want eggs benedict or the full thing if I'm going to pay for it. I went to brunch this past Sunday. I was like 'how much does it cost to have bottomless mimosas?' This turning 21 years old thing is a scam. Don't do it. No one turn 21.

Brunching is big. Miami is big on brunch. They must make so much money based off of brunch and tourists. College students want to be grown-ups. That's all they want to do is brunch. Brunch is like bourgeois enough and elite enough where you seem important. (Ashley, third interview)

Following this excerpt Ashley made it clear to me that she does not like mimosas. But the social pressures she perceived influenced her to purchase bottomless mimosas during her

birthday brunch. Brunch became spatialized as more than a meal, but a class-based social experience.

Maria, who again does not consider her social experience to be typical because she does not consume alcohol, spoke about continually experiencing the same kinds of social expectations experienced by Ashley and others:

I don't think you should *have* to go out. People make me feel pressured to go out and drink. Sometimes people make me feel weird that I don't do that. I have a sensitive stomach and my stomach hurts if I drink. What am I going to do? I just think people need to be more open in general and receptive to different lifestyles.

I'm also in a place where I work multiple jobs and trying to save up money. I remember one day it was my friend's birthday and she wanted a birthday dinner at some restaurant that was expensive. It had four-dollar signs on Yelp. I couldn't justify it. It was ridiculous. Sometimes I'm in the mood to spend money. But I just paid \$260 for new tires. I couldn't make it [to the dinner] because of my tires.
(Maria, third interview)

From Maria's comments that "people need to be more open in general," I sensed a desire on her part that her peers would move away from synchrony and be accepting of different social preferences.

While Ashley and Maria described money as a notable factor in their social experiences, the pressures of the party pathway are not exclusively constructed financially. Andrew, the sole participant with a Greek-letter organization affiliation, stepped away from his fraternity's social scene because of what he considered to be obligatory synchrony. For Andrew, his affiliation became more of an obligation rather than the more organic space he sought:

I remember after freshman year I actually wanted to live off-campus with people in my frat. My mom was like, 'um, no you will live on campus again.' It was a whole thing for a while. At the end of the day, my parents were still like 'you will

live on campus.’ All right. Fine. I was still able to participate in Greek events. I’m honestly happy I lived on campus again.

But now my social life revolves around my own house versus the first few years. It would be like ‘this event is happening at the frat house. And this thing is going on. You want to come?’ I would always say yes. And there were always lots of people but not really anybody I was close with. I think that was the big change in college. It was at first all these bigger events with people you know, but not necessarily friends with. Versus now, which I’d rather go out with my intimate circle and actually have a good time with my friends. Like last Tuesday. My best friend and I went to \$6 movie night. It was great. I highly recommend it. I just don’t have that much free time anymore. So when I do go out, I’d rather do something I want instead of like events. (Andrew, second interview)

Over time, Andrew preferred intimate moments with peers rather than events. Events, such as those hosted at the fraternity house, became Andrew’s form of brunch. There is performative pressure that can motivate one to behave in particular ways such as attending a fraternity event even though it may be lacking one’s own “intimate circle” (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Whether it is from ordering bottomless mimosas or crowded parties filled with acquaintances, I noted movement from seemingly obligatory participation in the party pathway towards agency in negotiating social spaces.

Baxter Magolda’s (2001) self-authorship theory is premised on a student’s movement from uncritically following external formulas to a crossroads that leads to self-authorship. When following formulas, a student is concerned with societal expectations such as those related to perceived synchrony and the social norms of college. It is going to brunch for brunch’s sake and following formulas focused on theyness. Heidegger (1962) posited that the communal structure of the world means that participation with others cannot be annulled. Heidegger juxtaposed theyness with mineness. Theyness involves acting in stereotypical ways and “keeps watch over everything exceptional that

thrusts itself to the fore. Every kind of priority gets noiselessly suppressed” (p. 127).

Theyness is built on social standards and synchronous space. Mineness, on the other hand, is a recognition in one’s own singularity and unique spatial possibilities.

Through experience and time, a person appears to move towards mineness (Baxter Magolda, 2001). However, with space being constructed in part by social relations, there is no way to completely move away from theyness. Mineness and theyness are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There was certainly a notable pattern among the study’s participants of moving towards mineness. Such a phenomenon is similar to Baxter Magolda’s (2001) self-authorship. Defined as the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations, self-authorship inspires confidence and clarity as to who a person believes they are. In *Being and Time* Heidegger (1962) also noted that in order to move toward what one could become, there must be some movement away from theyness and conformity. Baxter Magolda credited “contexts” as informing how a person find themselves and moves towards self-authorship. Space and place comprise context (Massey, 2005). Through perceiving and experiencing synchronous spaces and places, theyness is likely perpetuated. Devon described theyness in the context of the field of dreams. Maria, Ashley, and Andrew experienced a shift from theyness to mineness or self-authorship through changes in their behaviors and thoughts regarding collegiate social life. These were stories of mitigated perceptions of synchrony in their respective journeys towards mineness.

Esther shared a remarkable story about moving from theyness to mineness. Through a change in her hairstyle, Esther stated she “became more confident and

developed an increased sense of who she is.” This style change and its related experiences comprised the most empowering and meaningful moments in her college experience:

I went natural in college. Before college my hair was always in braids. I had gotten a perm in elementary school. In college I decided I wasn’t going to braid my hair anymore. I’m just gonna leave it out. It’s been a journey because I never liked my hair color growing up. I never imagined I could have different hair. Hair products are always targeted to straight long hair versus my type of hair which isn’t really advertised. But now there’s products for kinkier types of hair and coiler hair textures like mine. So I’m getting into the groove of finding my curl pattern. It’s been good for me. Everything’s been good. I’m thriving. It’s making me happy because my hair’s been covered for so, so long. For most of my life. (Esther, third interview)

Esther described a sense of freedom that comes from no longer burdening her hair with products and trying to combat the natural curls of her hair. She “never imagined” she could look differently than what she previously knew. This sensation of experiencing newly imagined possibilities of one’s own style and image suggests a departure from perceiving synchrony in regard to what she should look like. Through this experience, Esther learned much of herself, but also experienced attempted synchrony by others:

When you go natural you learn that your hair isn’t even black. I grew up with my mom going to get hair packs. I always thought I had black hair. It turns out I have dark brown hair. Now I can’t imagine anything else than what I have. It’s the best part of being natural. You appreciate what you have and grow from there.

And hair is one thing. But I’ve become more assertive. When I started going natural my dad was like, ‘don’t because you’ll look like a Lesbian.’ He thought I’d give off this impression that wasn’t me. Well I guess my family’s kind of homophobic too. But I look in the mirror and I can’t pressure myself to look a certain way. Putting pressure on myself like that isn’t going to work. I’m not going to waste my time and prove something to people I don’t know.

Esther also recounted a similar experience when she was taunted by men on campus she did not know, all because of her natural hairstyle.

Esther's world of theyness included styling her hair since elementary. Over a lengthy period of time and numerous treatments she did not even know her own hair color. There is a Samson-like quality to Esther's newfound hairstyle and the strength it seems to give her. This sense of self-authorship instilled confidence and also awareness of her own values and interests. Each participant shared a similar journey from theyness to mineness. I considered this to be part of the essence of experiencing space and generating meaning in college.

Developing self-authorship or mineness came in different forms for each participant. Esther's was inspired by her natural hairstyle. Maria became comfortable not living up to the standards of the "typical" college social lifestyle. Ashley started going to brunch with her mother instead of friends. Devon reconnected with his faith. Andrew found taco night (Figure 13).

Figure 13

Andrew's photograph from Taco Night



This is a good place. I go here every Monday with my roommates. We go there and just be. It's nice to go there at the end of the day and not have anything to really worry about. You're done. And it's cheap. There's always good conversation. We're always so busy. That's how school goes. Here, we are able to sit down and be together. It's always nice. It's always tough to get together like this. Because even when we're all home we're all tired and going through class and work. Our house can be a little hectic and chaotic. This gets us away from that. (Andrew, fourth interview)

Andrew found a particular place and ritual which shielded him, at least temporarily, from his other commitments. To him, social enjoyment no longer came from obligatory fraternity events. Rather, it was a weekly intimate meal with close friends. Andrew and his friends experienced a place free from both academic and social pressures. Similar to Andrew's lighthouse, this ritual served to disjoint from spaces of theyness.

Among other things, disjointing from spaces of perceived synchrony may promote self-authorship. By occasionally stepping outside the synchronous sphere of

social and academic performance, students appeared to have been able to relish the moments free from expectations of theyness and in turn engage in reflective self-authorship. In other words, disjuncting from collegiate spaces may be an arena where epistemological reflection may occur¹² (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Finding disjointment or spaces of mineness may not necessarily be a matter of seeking different kinds of places. Time and repeated exposure to particular places may also serve such a purpose. This reflects Massey's (2005) argument on the dynamism of space and the temporality that is associated with experiencing place and space.

Maria shared a photograph that affirms how space is subject to continual reconstruction and interpretation. Maria found herself recently eating at the campus dining hall for the first time in a long time (Figure 14). During this recent visit she reflected that she did not experience the usual social and image pressures she was accustomed to when she started going to the dining hall during her earlier years.

¹² Baxter Magolda's (1999) text is concerned with the classroom context and how pedagogical practices can support self-authorship. I suggest that such advancements in self-authorship and epistemological reflection may also occur in disjointed and non-institutionally affiliated spaces.

Figure 14

Maria's Photograph from the Campus Dining Hall



Maria described this recent dining experience as a meaningful moment. Maria and a few friends were issued a voucher to eat at the dining hall for some service at a campus event.

This is a very specific photo. It's from the dining hall. This was during family weekend. My friend used to work at an ice cream shop so she knows how to serve it. It was funny because in the photo it just wasn't working out. Being here was an out of body experience that day. Just being back there was weird. But we loved it. There were such good memories that day with two of my best friends from the past four years. It represented a component of happiness. (Maria, fourth interview)

This photograph represents a contrast. As previously discussed, Maria's time and experiences during her first and only semester freshman year were embedded in strong sentiments of feeling behind, not knowing anyone, and doubting if she belonged at the institution because of her deferred enrollment and rejections from so many other institutions. Now, during this recent experience, her focus was solely on that moment with her closest peers. Within one place, the dining hall, Maria came back more grounded on mineness and self-authorship rather than theyness and comparative doubt.

Diffraction Discussion

Synchrony operates by institutionally spatializing perceptions of spaces and places in highly particular hegemonic ways (Massey, 2005). Massey argued that through structures and relations, idealized ways of being within particular spaces appear to become normalized. Synchrony does not assume nor afford the coexistence of different temporalities or spatial realities. This super-ordinate theme and its sub-themes suggest how students perceive synchrony academic and social contexts, as well as the desire to disjoint from such synchrony. This study's findings suggest that collegiate synchrony is created through systematized concerns with performativity, producing entrepreneurial space, centering the party pathway, and expanding synchronous immersion rather than affording disjointed spaces to students. Students generally moved from spaces centered on prestige maximization, theyness, and the party pathway towards self-authorship and mineness. Through this, they started to positively disjoint their spaces and places from synchrony.

In terms of engagement, I detected movement from concern and motivation inspired from synchrony to a more intrinsically inspired purpose. Engagement with theatrical performances, fraternity events, or even one's appearance existed in spaces of perceived synchrony. There appeared to be a desire to shape oneself for desirable positioning in the social, academic, and labor markets (Brown, 2015). This kind of transformation in engagement resembled both Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship as well as Heidegger's notions of mineness and theyness.

Engagement suggests psychological and behavioral involvement in academically purposeful ways (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While Kuh's high-impact practices may be commonly associated as institutional pillars of engagement, it is apparent through this study's findings that students are engaged in numerous ways that are related to the institution, the self, and with others. The party pathway, prestige-maximization, and the initial desire to succeed autonomously suggest other ways students' understandings of engagement are influenced. While these examples do not necessarily result in academic success through traditional markers such as grades, it seemed that the developmental and self-authorship gains from such involvement are meaningful. Through analysis I grew curious on how the two directly involved entities, student and institution, are co-dependent and negotiate synchrony together. And, what possibilities would be generated should synchrony be further discussed and addressed within the academy.

Making Workers: Radical Geographies of Education

Kathryn Mitchell's (2018) *Making Workers* is an analytical text on the structures, discourses, and practices that shape the education system in order to prioritize producing citizens for the workforce. With this perspective, schooling is not necessarily synonymous with learning (Illich, 1970). Mitchell argued that the American education system, including postsecondary education, trains youth and adolescents to prepare for labor markets through a heavily structured system bound by accountability practices and regulations. Similar to the participants' narratives, Mitchell described schooling centered on prestige-maximization and proving merit through standardized measures (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013).

Of greatest interest to me from this text was Mitchell's engagement with space. The author described space as bound by culture and geography. Mitchell posited that spaces in American schooling are concerned with labor market insecurities. This in turn has been transferred onto workers and consequently their children. Schooling becomes a space primarily concerned with preparedness. Borders also play a role in Mitchell's text. Similar to the geography of borderlessness, world markets and demands for particular industries exist in space. Limitations in institutional resources, social capital, accountability measures, and regional boundaries may inhibit the curriculum and thus serve as borders to educational and vocational opportunities. Through economically constructed borders, workers are "made" through their education. Mitchell argued that the making of workers is distinctly influenced by the resources and places affiliated with a particular educational space.

Each student participant in this study described spaces of perceived academic and social synchrony. Like Mitchell described, participants and presumably their families were engaged in choosing the best and most competitive schools, working on their self-branding, and leveraging their experiences for the market. In Mitchell's text, she noted that parents and students felt pressure to participate with institutions and practices that are branded as "the best." I found this motivation and concern described by Mitchell to resonate greatly with the participants' experiences. There is certainly a reasonable need to prepare for academic and career goals beyond undergraduate studies. However, the collegiate spaces described by participants appeared to have notably spatialized ways of

generating perceptions of preferring synchronous performance and at times supersedes epistemological reflection and learning (Baxter Magolda, 1999).

I sensed a disparity between the engagement outcomes described by participants and what is typically described in student engagement research. Through reading this particular text, I considered there to be two types of outcomes related to student engagement; institutional outcomes and student development outcomes. The first are those related to institutional metrics. Outcomes such as graduation rates and retention are accountability metrics that among other things, suggest a return on investment for both the student and institution (Mitchell, 2018). With this logic, through being engaged, students persist and graduate at greater rates as well as achieve higher grade point averages (Astin, 1993; Berger & Milem, 1999; Harper & Quaye, 2010; Hu & Kuh, 2003).

The other set of outcomes are those related to a student's own development. Students who report high levels of engagement tend to frequently interact with peers and teachers about substantive matters, have higher levels of self-esteem, and are better able to work with peers (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, 2009; Pace, 1990). However, as Harper and Quaye (2008) warn, there are cautionary notes about assuming a universality of outcomes with students who are engaged. In light of this study's findings, I concluded that one significant factor in influencing engagement, as described by participants, is negotiating spaces of synchrony. Through discussions on their academic and social involvements, it seemed that being engaged was influenced by varying degrees of perceived synchrony. Consequently, engagement may be as much a matter of negotiating synchrony as it is about degree attainment and intrapersonal development

Similar to the participants' desire for engaging with disjointed spaces, Mitchell (2018) suggested that participation in critical reflexivity increasingly exists outside of the closed loop of education. Like Massey, Mitchell is a proponent for disjointing from educational spaces. Fractures from "business as usual" in learning spaces produce educationally and intrinsically meaningful learning moments (Mitchell, 2018). I do not want to suggest that critical reflexivity and altruistic learning moments occurred solely outside of institutional spaces. I do, however, argue that such meaningful moments within institutional spaces were at times drowned out by perceptions of synchrony. Reading this chapter in relation to *Making Workers: Radical Geographies of Education* left me with these questions:

- Are traditional understandings and institutional metrics of college student engagement mechanisms which 'make' workers?
- How is a student's engagement affected when they sense their performance is "off-brand" according to perceived expectations?

Being a University

Through a geographic lens Mitchell's (2018) *Making Workers* examines how American schooling systems condition students to learn according to market-oriented values. After engaging with Mitchell's text, which described student and family behaviors in neoliberal education settings, I grew curious on the administrative tendencies of synchrony. Rather than a student orientation, who Mitchell suggested seeks to position oneself favorably in academic, labor, and social markets, I sought a text with

an administrative orientation that examines the role of the institution in spatializing synchrony.

Ronald Barnett's (2011) *Being a University* chronicles higher education with a particular focus on the changing missions and outputs throughout time. According to Barnett, the scientific university, or the research university, has become the defining form of today's university. Other universities across the globe aspire to this model. Barnett argued that the academic field, including pedagogy and research, is shaped by policy. The context in which an institution understands its knowledge possibilities exists with what the author describes as producing "knowledge" with "not-knowledge." Not-knowledge is described as engaging in research and instruction that offers minimal disruption to the policies and morals that are perceived to be socially tantamount. Engaging in not-knowledge production, as well as not-knowledge administrative practices, is engaging in synchrony.

Barnett argued that the increase in competition for enrollments, funding sources, and institutional prestige-maximization influenced the creation of the entrepreneurial university. "Many believe that universities in general are set on the path to entrepreneurialism: far from being idiosyncratic, the 'entrepreneurial university' is becoming and should become ubiquitous...All paths of university change lead to entrepreneurialism, it seems" (p. 33). Like the students' experiences described in this chapter, the entrepreneurial university may also be influenced by synchrony. Institutions, like students, are being shaped by pressures of institutional and individual branding. This notion of leveraging branding was also notably discussed in the previous text. Barnett

suggested that an institution's pressures come mostly from avoiding risk and maximizing return on investment.

Risk and return on investment seem to be potent motivators for students as well as institutions. According to Barnett, risk and the pursuit of a return on investment generate the expansion of intellectual capital such as prize-winning and distinguished staff, increased endowments, competitive enrollment metrics, and acceptance into prestigious membership groups. It seems that the motivation to garner distinguished metrics of success for both institution and student are similar. Whether institutional or individual, there is an apparent desire to leverage one's position and brand in accordance with achieving ideals informed by synchrony. With this, synchrony appears to effect both student and institution. For the student, social and academic spaces and places may inform synchrony. For the institution, synchrony may be formed by pressures in seeking competitive advantages. Examples include the recruitment of prestigious students and faculty, seeking to improve rankings, and pursue dollars awarded through endowments and research. Synchrony generation from institutional and student pressures may seem somewhat apparent. However, the challenge is not awareness of the synchrony caused by entrepreneurial behaviors, but rather the spatialized implications of such dominant thinking and behavior.

"The entrepreneurial university may be risking more than it understands, for it may be risking itself. In coming to be a different kind of institution, it risks coming to live by new sets of institutional values (Barnett, 2011, p. 36). Barnett's discussion on the implications of values by entrepreneurial activities speaks directly to student engagement

influenced by synchrony. Each participant, at least early in their college experience, described theyness-oriented experiences that motivated involvement in certain kinds of social outings, academic majors, or cocurricular involvement. While described as development similar to Baxter-Magolda's movement towards self-authorship, the participants' experiences highlighted how engagement does not occur in a spatial void and may be influenced by perceptions of synchrony.

Within the student affairs profession, the notion of student engagement is predominantly bound by noble pursuits of self-development and enhancing the intrapersonal outcomes of college (Abes et al., 2019; Astin, 1993; Harper & Quaye, 2020; Mayhew et al., 2016). This is likely informed by the institution's origins as a space of possibility. Barnett drew from Heidegger and argued that for institutions as well as individuals "being" includes "being-possible." However, "being" is bound by ideological and imaginative conditions as well as value concerns (Barnett, 2011). Narrowly defining engagement to a series of institutional practices demonstrates how "being" in regard to engagement can be limited by value concerns. In other words, the possibilities that lie in front of "being" are bound by space.

If ideological and value conditions are grounded in entrepreneurial activities, then the possibilities of "being" changes or narrowed if influenced by synchrony. Theories and student affairs practices framing engagement as occurring within spaces of noble academic pursuits and holistic development no longer accurately align with the lived experience of a college student. With Barnett's logic in mind, "being" and "space" are bound and shaped by social values. I argue that when analyzed through a spatial lens,

student engagement is influenced by perceptions of synchrony. Moreover, pressures associated with synchrony may essentially wipe out disjointed spaces as sites of meaningful experiences. Borrowing from Barnett's description of factors that influence "becoming," a student's ability to be engaged exists within spaces informed by institutional values as well as imaginative conditions (such as synchrony) that drive both the academy's and student's priorities.

Reading this chapter in relation to *Being a University* left me with these questions:

- What are examples and consequences of institutional practices motivated by "knowledge" and "not-knowledge"?
- How do institutionally-driven entrepreneurial activities influence spaces and places directly related to institutional practices of student engagement?

Chapter Summary

Participants described perceptions of synchrony in the spaces and places they experienced. Synchrony in academic and social settings not only served as potent motivators, but also created a constant and unhealthy sense of trying to keep up or even be ahead of others. By engaging according to synchronous perceptions, students were conditioned to be concerned and perform according to idealized and a-temporal standards. Synchrony may induce a constant threat of falling behind in the pursuit of prestige-maximization. Influenced by synchrony and the pressures associated with it, students were engaged in seeking disjointed spaces and places. These places completely unaffiliated with the institution not only offered some kind of respite, but were also described as meaningful and rich with learning potential. Over time and experience, each

participant described a shift from theyness to mineness where they gained authorship in negotiating their own less-synchronous space and how to engage with it.

I selected Katharyne Mitchell's (2018) *Making Workers: Radical Geographies of Education* because of her engagement with educational spaces and how they inform the drive for "getting ahead." This text affirmed the pressurized space experienced by participants. Mitchell argued that through policy, pedagogy, and sociocultural influences, the desire to "get ahead" is embedded in students and their families at a very young age.

Whereas Mitchell examined the experiences of students, Barnett's (2011) *Being a University* discussed how post-secondary institutions are influenced by ideological and value conditions embedded in society. I noted a kind of mirroring effect between institutional concerns and student concerns. The experiences described by participants pointed directly to the ways in which space is produced by structures and relations (Massey, 2005). Rather than simply being a space of neutral "becoming" and affording multiplicitous spaces, the university perpetuates synchrony which is in turn negotiated by students who must make sense of their own experiences as existing in comparison to particular versions of the academic and social experience. This in turn creates the collegiate synchrony house.

Based on my findings, I argue that the synchrony is produced through pressures sensed and experienced by both the institution and the student. In the next chapter, I focus on bureaucracy, institutional rules, and the interplay they have with a student's engagement. More distinct and tangible than synchrony, institutional rules, modes of

communication, and the administrative arrangements of the organization are the mechanisms of governing student engagement.

Chapter 7: Ordering Space

As previously discussed, student engagement “represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in those activities” (Kuh, 2009b, p. 683). Kuh’s description suggests that engagement is as much an institutional effort as it is a student’s. This super-ordinate theme of ordering space examines the institution’s role in the student engagement relationship. Specifically, this super-ordinate theme discusses institutionally spatialized bureaucracy as experienced by the study’s participants. The findings related to this theme reminded me of Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial triad, which in part described how spatialized daily practices can create rigid networks and routines.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I detected contrasts between students’ self-described spaces of engagement and the institutional practices seemingly designed to facilitate their engagement. It would seem that given Kuh’s definition of student engagement, student and institutional efforts would need to co-exist in a symbiotic relationship in order to achieve the attitudinal, behavioral, and learning outcomes promulgated by engagement (Astin, 1993). However, participants described environments where their intellectually-driven attention and efforts did not always seem to fit into the places afforded by the institution. In this chapter I describe the range of what I call spatial parity between students and institution. Based on my findings related to ordering space, I argue that it is critical to have spatialized alignment between student and institution in order to facilitate student engagement.

Since this is a study about engagement, I discussed at length with participants about their intellectual interests and how they pursued them. I wanted to know how they were engaged in the academic goals and issues that mattered most to them. Esther's passion for arts and culture was applied through dance in curricular and co-curricular areas. Ashley founded a non-profit that combined her interest in music theater and mental health. Devon, an aspiring physician, suddenly found himself interested in a medical research career inspired by his frequent reading of COVID-19 articles on vaccinations and public health. Each participant had their own stories and behaviors that reflected how they apply their academic and developmental interests into action. Participants described an acute awareness and intent on how they wanted to be engaged. In order to frame their awareness into a spatial lens, I discussed with participants how their engagement efforts existed in relation to the campus and other collegiate places and spaces.

The most notable finding and subject of this super-ordinate theme was the prominence of bureaucracy and institutional rules in either impeding or supporting engagement. Andrew described this seemingly never-ending effort as “a whole process of running around the campus and making sure everything is correct.” This issue of spaces and places governed by seemingly immovable rules is the primary mechanism of ordering space (Massey, 2005). Bureaucracy influencing a student's ability and desire to be engaged was a notable topic with each of the five participants. Discussed in the first sub-theme, institutional rules and practices appear to produce discreet administrative arrangements that may not necessarily align with students' understandings of meaningful engagement.

The issue of bureaucracy was particularly amplified during the fifth interview when students' experiences related to COVID-19 were discussed. The administrative and student engagement implications of COVID-19 is the focus of the second sub-theme in this chapter. Bureaucratic rules, especially as they relate to accessing resources or information, are a critical factor in either deterring or supporting a student's desire and ability to be engaged (Kuh, 2009b). It seems that institutional rules, and the ability to navigate them, is a pre-requisite for engagement with the campus or other collegiate places (Berger, 2000).

I must distinguish between rules and synchrony. Rules are explicitly stated and enforced whereas synchrony is implied, perceived, or socialized (Magolda, 2000; Massey, 2005). The previous chapter discussed how students engage in social and academic ways while negotiating perceptions of synchrony. Students' experiences are fundamentally shaped by social and academic contexts formulated by both pressures and rules (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). In this chapter, I examine the role of engaging with collegiate spaces and places governed by a bureaucratic institution. Specifically, I discuss and argue that the administrative organization of the institution as well as the rules in place are critical in shaping the spaces of student engagement (Braxton, 2000; Kuh, 2019b).

I refer to administrative organization as the ways a university is arranged (Schloss & Cragg, 2013). An example of administrative organization is the way academic departments are divided and funded. Rules are distinguished from administrative organization since rules are "the giving of orders" through communications, policies,

procedures, and business practices (Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2011). Referring back to Kuh's (2009b) definition of engagement, both rules and administrative organization are spatialized mechanisms of attempting to structure spaces and places for engagement.

Given this study's concern with lived experience and engagement, I am not necessarily focusing on the bureaucratic organization itself or the rules that govern its constituents. Rather, it is the ways they are experienced by the participants that drives the subject of ordering space. As I reflected on this throughout the subsumption process, I noted that participants hardly spoke about any specific policies or departments. What seemed to matter most to participants was the meaning or sentiments generated from the experiences related to such policies or departments. Bureaucracies are typically perceived as disembodied organizations created and governed by rules and the division of labor (Shafritz et al., 2011). Based on this study's phenomenological methodology and framework, I suggest that bureaucracies exist in space and are therefore subject to being sensed and experienced.

In her discussion on the built environment, Low (2017) discussed how seeing, reading, and otherwise experiencing the texts of an environment creates spatial meaning. With Low's description of generating spatial meaning in mind, it would appear that a student is constantly reading spatial texts such as rules, written communications, and language by power-holding users. "Text is recognizable even when reading is not possible, and it remains socially and psychologically relevant" (Low, 2017, p. 128). By sensing institutional texts, the student likely develops their sociopolitical understanding of the spaces they occupy. These actions, of sensing texts and interpreting them, can

inform impressions of inclusion and exclusion (Low, 2017). Within the context of this study, sensing institutional texts suggests that dividing lines are drawn in which a student either senses compatibility between their engagement goals or identifies structures that impede their ability to be involved in meaningful ways. Dividing lines are drawn not only by the student through their experience and related sense-making, but also by the institution through its bureaucratic arrangements and rules (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005).

Drawing lines or dividing spaces is a critical point of discussion in Massey's (2005) *For Space*. Spatialized practices of dividing space may have consequences for the subjectivities developed by students and all others in the institution. Examined spatially, the drawing lines of bureaucratic arrangements and rules suggest that a student's agency in being engaged may be influenced by the university's governing practices. Massey suggested that governmental structures that attempt to order space through conditions and rules are a potent form of power-laden spatialization. Ordering space establishes hegemonic understandings of the very nature of space itself:

This is a representation of space, a particular form of ordering and organizing space which refuses to acknowledge its multiplicities, its fractures, and its dynamism...What has evolved with the project of modernity, in other words, was the establishment and (attempted) universalization of a way of imagining space (and the space/society relation) which underpinned the material enforcement of certain ways of organizing space and the relationship between society and space. And it is still with us today. (Massey, 2005, p. 65)

Massey argued that attempting to order space creates the phenomenon of the single trajectory. Student affairs practices that impose spaces of single trajectories such as pathways built on predictive analytics are certainly prominent. Moreover, such practices

of establishing single trajectories have established a hegemonic understanding of student engagement as predicted by Massey when agents of power attempt to order space.

Measuring student progress according to pre-defined outcomes, defining engagement through involvement with best practices, and limiting places of engagement to the campus exemplify the spatialized treatment of engagement as occurring in ordered space. Such practices concerned with order, discreet separation, and linearity reflect efforts of taming space:

What is going on here is the taming of space. The suppression of what it presents us with: actually existing in multiplicity. The refusal to face up to space as quite the opposite of the 'dead, the fixed, the immobile'. (Massey, 2005, p. 69)

With Massey's argument in mind, taming space through ordering practices can potentially be a suppressive act. I previously discussed that my hope for this study is to present student engagement experiences as existing in space, bound with multiple possibilities, and not traversing across a plane absent from time, structures, meaning, and multiplicitous outcomes. The phenomenon of the single trajectory, which is the goal of ordering space, is a taming rather than an enabling effort. As I will discuss in this chapter, the taming of space oftentimes means the taming of a student's engagement.

The pink slip hasn't existed in 30 years

I asked each participant why they went to college. I remain fascinated by their responses and what appeared to be a lack of critical thought as to whether or not this was ever an option. Esther, for example, just knew she was going to college:

My parents always felt this. Since I was a kid they were like 'you're going to college.' I have some distant relatives that went to college. They always had that

hope for me and my sister. I don't know how college got into my mind. But I always knew I wanted to come. (Esther, first interview)

Such a statement by Esther may reflect a class-oriented spatialized knowledge about college. Social production can transform particular ways of being, such as going to college, as simply normal and implicitly expected (Berger, 2000; Massey, 2005; Sacks, 2007). Ashley also considered college attendance as normal:

My grandma and my mother and both my aunts are all graduates from historically Black colleges. I always knew about college because they were like 'this is what you're doing. You're going to college!' I wasn't really pushed, but it was an expectation. I also think they knew that I wanted to go to college. It just wasn't a big deal. It was kind of expected. College is normal. (Ashley, first interview)

The supposition that "college is normal" suggests a kind of class-based ordered space. I recognize that students with a different class standing may have spatialized education and career pathways in a manner that does not consider college as normal (Low, 2017; Sacks, 2007). In addition to Esther and Ashley, the remaining three participants had similar narratives of college as a kind of implicit expectation. From this conversation of college as a socialized assumption, I grew curious how they learned to apply, enroll, and persist in college. Assuming one would go to college was one thing, but knowing how to navigate the institution was another. In other words, I wanted to know how college-going assumptions turned into action.

Unfortunately, pre-application lessons in navigating college were sparse and students often had to navigate forms, rules, offices, and the pursuit of accurate information on their own. Esther referred to "the FAFSA stuff" in reference to the application process and "not really knowing what they were asking of me." Esther shared

the following story from a scholarship interview as an example of the stress and fatigue such efforts can induce:

I had to leave early from [high] school. I needed a signed consent to leave. Even though I was 18, they said I couldn't leave and I needed consent. So I got into my parent's email. Okay, whatever. Then there was hella traffic on I-95. There were only two lanes. No fluidity. Mind you, it was me, my mom, my sister, and my cousin. We drag her along for trips like this. I kept on telling my mom we had to take the express lane. We were booking it and watching out for cops.

When I got to the hotel the bus for UM had already left. I had to rush and get ready. The email didn't say where the event would be. I think it said a building. When I got there [to the building] a girl said there was no event there. I was in the brink of tears and my mom calmed me down. And then my mom saw some caterers and that's how we found someone to help us out. (Esther, first interview)

This event in which Esther was late was for an interview weekend. If she did well she would earn a full scholarship to the university. She did earn that scholarship, which started off embedded in a place she stated as “not knowing where I was or where I was supposed to go.” This sense, that Esther did not know where to go, appears to exist simultaneously with two major assumptions of college as described by participants. First, as described by all participants, it is assumed that one will go to college. Second, it is assumed that one will graduate. In Esther's example, she knew she was going to college. However, the sudden reality of her college-going assumptions as existing in bureaucratic space and being lost on an unfamiliar campus may inform a sense of aimlessness and angst.

Organizational and administrative behaviors have strong effects on a number of student outcomes, including student engagement (Berger, 2000; Kuh, 2003). The ways organizational decisions and administrative agents interact with students can either

promote or inhibit retention, engagement, and persistence to graduation (Berger, 2000; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Berger & Milem, 2000). This relationship between institutional practices and student outcomes is stronger at highly selective universities, such as the one which serves as this study's research site (Berger & Braxton, 1998). Berger (2000) stated that as students encounter organizational environments at the institution, their chances of persistence are affected by the extent their assumptions and related beliefs of entitlement are congruent with their experiences.

The participants' experiences with the university's administration and its rules support Berger's (2000) argument that students are strongly influenced by interactions with the institution. The institution may be perceived as existing at individual and broader organizational levels. I detected a pattern of speech among participants when describing the institution's organization and rules. Generally, when spoken of favorably, institutional agents were described individually by name and as mentors and champions who served to support a student's efforts. In a previous excerpt, Ashley spoke fondly of a playwright who served as a champion and took an interest in her freshman year. Maria's self-described second home is at a student lounge near her supervisor and mentor's office. Each student fondly recounted moments and persons that supported their educational experience.

However, when encounters were less favorable or challenged their desire to be engaged, the university was presented as a corpus whose anatomy is comprised of red tape, countless offices, and irrational regulations. For example, Ashley described entire

academic units and position classifications when sharing her frustrations with pursuing a psychology minor:

I thought about double majoring in music therapy. But the way the university's theater school is, and the way the music school is...they used to be together. But then they had an issue so now they're not together. You could only be in one or the other. You can't even get a double major in both because of their hatred toward each other. I got here thinking I was going to be a music therapy double major and it didn't really work out. So I became a psychology major. But because of the way the scheduling works and the way teachers accept certain students in their classes, I couldn't be a psychology minor because there was a statistics class I just couldn't get in. I've tried for three years. I called advisors. I called teachers. And they're just like, 'it's always full.' (Ashley, first interview)

Ashley perceived politically-charged and bureaucratic rivalry, as well as narrow scheduling windows, as preventing her ability to pursue a psychology minor. I must admit I initially doubted much of Ashley's assumptions about the theater and music schools. Sure enough, after my own research on course requirements and schedules, it did appear that aligning one's curriculum between both schools is quite challenging. Ashley returned to her attempts of enrolling in a statistics course in each of her first three interviews. It is a source of agony and frustration for her. She has a passion for music theater and mental health. It appears that she exists in an institutional space ordered in a way in which theater, music, and psychology are three separate matters that do not bureaucratically connect. With this kind of logic, bureaucratic connections would appear to be a kind of pre-requisite for institutionally recognized engagement.

Existing in this kind of space has been remarkably infuriating for Ashley. Her desired academic and professional forms of engagement center around the blending of music, theater, and mental health as evidenced by her founding of a non-profit music

therapy corporation and writing a play about mental health in the Black community.

According to Ashley, she encountered “nothing but challenges over the past three years whenever attempting to enroll in courses or seek resources” that afforded her the opportunity to blend theater, music, and mental health. The continued denial of enrolling in a required statistics course, as well as seeking additional music coaching, are the most salient examples. Fortunately for Ashley, she had a happenstance encounter with the music school dean that helped her circumvent ordered space:

I ran into the dean of the music school at Starbucks. He remembered me. It was very bizarre. He said he remembered me when I was a junior in high school. I met him because I was one of the only vocalists in his master class from the Young Arts Foundation. He invited me to meet with him. He pushed the idea of me dropping theater and joining his school in the music therapy program. Community service is my thing.

He was basically saying I can get a full ride. All I have to do is drop theater. It's funny because the music and theater schools hate each other. It was very stressful for me. From that I had a lot of meetings with advisors and finally the head of the theater program. Finally, he was like ‘well I can open things up and make sure you can take music, guitar lessons, and jazz voice outside of the theater department.’ He [the music school dean] was willing to make a change for myself and [me] leave the program. (Ashley, third interview)

The opportunities and resources suddenly offered to Ashley by the music school dean were not new requests on her part. With little success, she previously tried through standard forms, emails, and conversations with advisors.

By this point, Ashley attempted to enroll in a required statistics class four semesters in a row. Another year and two attempts would go by before she finally gave up on her psychology minor. She also previously requested to enroll in vocal and instrument lessons, all of which were matters conflicting with her theater department's

rules. According to Ashley as a theater student she was limited to one hour of music training a week, “but that wasn’t how it works in the music school. We could only do one hour per week. And because of this I was missing a lot of my foundations in music.” It seemed clear to Ashley that academic and professional music training were not matters of institutional resource limitations, but rather having the means and leverage to access what she desired. This was evidenced by her request being granted following the conversation with the music school dean at Starbucks. Ashley’s curriculum was spatialized in such a way that to her, institutional politics and rules impeded on her ability to be engaged. Engagement opportunities appeared to have been limited by the terms and conditions of her academic program.

Ashley’s desire to be engaged with the curriculum and faculty mentors through music training was likely impeded because of the nature of bureaucracy. Weber described a bureaucracy as “involving clear-cut division of integrated activities which are regarded as duties inherent in the office. A system of differentiated controls and sanctions as stated in the regulations” (Merton, 2011, p. 107). I consider Weber’s definition of a bureaucracy to be possibly contradictory within the idealized tenets of higher education. The terms “clear-cut division” and “differentiated controls” suggest a primary concern with ordering space despite promoting integrated activities such as student engagement. It seems that at the same time, the notion of student engagement which again are educationally purposeful activities within and outside the classroom, are matters of blending and immersion rather than division (Kuh, 2003). It is troubling that the desire for integrated space through engagement exists in bureaucratically governed ordered space. I offer the

imagery of the carbon-copy pink slip as representative of the dilemma of engagement as existing in ordered space.

Andrew, an exercise physiology major and public health minor, has a deep interest in history. Similar to Ashley, his academic interests extend far beyond his chosen major. Andrew credited his “restless personality” as “always wanting to learn more. If I could have 15 minors, I would.” Prior to the pandemic, Andrew commented that he finally “could have the opportunity to take different kinds of classes:”

The classes I’m taking this semester, I’m so happy I’m in them. I’m taking an intro to policymaking class as well as a class on World War II. I needed to take two writing credit electives so I got free reign on what the classes could be. With the World War II class it’s funny because it is a writing elective. I guess the professor didn’t do the proper paperwork when I enrolled in the class. He’s a great guy though. I love him. But I had to talk to my professor the first day of class and ask ‘hey, is there any way I could take this class as a writing credit?’ He said ‘yeah’, just write an extra essay and fill out the pink slip.

He sent me on a whole goose chase on these pink slip forms he thought I needed to get signed. When I finally got to the school, the advisor I saw, an older lady, started laughing. She told me the pink slip form that he wanted signed hasn’t existed in thirty years. (Andrew, second interview)

Ironically, after the campus search for the pink slip Andrew learned that he did not need to pursue this course approval process. “I was under the impression I needed to do it for my arts and humanities cognate, which in hindsight I didn’t.” Unlike Ashley until her chance encounter with the music school dean, Andrew was afforded the opportunity to enroll in courses that met his desire to be engaged through education on history and public health. As silly as the pink slip story may seem, it is significant because the pink slip form demonstrates what can be the institutional absurdity in validating a student’s desire to be engaged. As previously stated by Andrew, trying to negotiate institutional

support or recognition of engagement may “be a whole process of running around the campus and making sure everything is correct.”

Organizational structures and their agents may seek to operate in “structural absolutes” (Merton, 2011, p. 110). Schmidt (2001) dubbed such a desire and tendency as “playpen critical thinking.” According to Merton, one of the goals of a bureaucracy is to transform rules into absolutes. As a consequence of this goal, which again is an effort to order space, it is likely that rules treated as absolutes will obstruct rational adaptation to warranted circumstances. Examples of obstructed adaptation may include the denial of a psychology minor because of a statistics course scheduling conflict or the scavenger hunt for a form not used since the Reagan administration.

Similar to the other participants, Maria appeared to have sensed the obstructive potential of an institutional bureaucracy early-on in her collegiate career. Maria seemed to have been actively involved in avoiding ordered spaces of academic arrangements. As previously discussed, according to her relatives Maria lamented that her “psychology major is going to get me nowhere. I should do something that gets me a job.” Despite her relatives’ wishes and unlike her peers in this study, she chose a major for reasons other than her career goals. According to Maria, her major choice was simply based on her interests and wanted her major to afford her as much variety as possible:

I picked up the [psychology] major because I don’t know what I want to do with my life and it’s something that can be applied so broadly. I wanted to do something that I can apply and lets me look at other things I’m interested academically. (Maria, second interview)

Maria's major-choice was driven by what she found "interesting and fun." While I admire her desire to blend her academic interests in a manner that attempts to dodge spatialized order, I do caution against Maria's assumption of a mutual exclusivity between an "interesting and fun" major with one that is career-aligned. At no point did any participant describe regret for their major choice.

Maria's understanding that psychology is a rare kind of major that is applicable beyond its specific professional discipline is an assumption I consider wrought with fallacies. For example, Devon's major choice in mathematics was based on his own interests as well as connections he drew between mathematics and medical research focused on public health. Despite my reservations with the notion that major choice exists in a continuum between career-specific and broader applications, I did detect a kind of freedom in Maria's approach. As an example, Maria presented me with a photograph of a bouquet of flowers, each with a pill embedded in its center (Figure 15).

Figure 15

Maria's Photograph of an Opioid Bouquet



Through this photograph and her discussion of it, Maria described a project of meaningful engagement. What resonated with me the most from this narrative was the manner Maria's story framed engagement as existing beyond ordered space. To me, the opioid bouquet is a kind of symbol of the possibilities that exist when engagement is unbound by disconnected organizational administration and rules. Maria, who again desired a curriculum that blended her interests and wanted to avoid a strictly career-based approach towards academics, found a way on her own accord to apply her academic and personal interests in a meaningful way:

I did this for a magazine photoshoot. I chose [this photo] because this was the most frustrating thing in my life because I didn't know what I was supposed to do for the photoshoot because nobody gave me any information until like two days before. I ordered these flowers online because the story was about opioids.

I found whatever expired pills we didn't need that we had at home. I brought them, stuck them in the flowers, and took the picture. It was a really frustrating two days. Everyone was like 'oh my gosh these pictures are perfect. We love what you did!' I felt extremely accomplished after that. The whole task of taking nothing to something, like a concept, and executing it the way I wanted was remarkable. (Maria, fourth interview)

Maria, with her interest in both photography and psychology and little direction, created an opioid bouquet to represent a magazine article on the issue.

I shared with Maria my amazement with this idea and her photo. Her ensuing response, which was prompted by a simple compliment on her work, remains significant and directly addressed this study's concern with ordering space.

It was just a creative outlet. I think it's really important to be creative because a lot of people are held in boxes of linearness. Really, in photography there are rules you are supposed to follow. I don't care because I'm not doing this for a living. I'm doing it for fun. I don't care much about the rule of thirds because if I think a picture looks good in the way I'm framing it, I'm going to take the picture. (Maria, fourth interview)

We spoke at length about the rule of thirds, as I was not familiar with the term. "There are three sections to a photo. Two vertical lines, two horizontal lines. You're supposed to frame things in the right place. These are rules, which I think should be suggestions since rules can ruin the purpose of creativity." Maria described the rule of thirds as "boxes of linearness." It appears that to Maria, boxes of linearness not only exist in photography, but also within academic majors and other places where creativity may be stifled by rules.

The parallels between Maria's description of the rule of thirds and ordering space are considerably strong. So too it seems, are the potentially restrictive outcomes of such efforts. Whether labeled as ordering space or the rule of thirds, efforts of spatialized order are often intended to tame space or suppress what is actually existing in multiplicity such as a student trying to develop their interests (Massey, 2005). "The regulation of the world into a single trajectory," at least in collegiate spaces, creates dividing lines that mirror and enforce bureaucratic ideals (Massey, 2005, p. 71). By recognizing students as existing in ordered space, the "rule of thirds" organizational practices that attempt to embed engagement in discreet bureaucratic spaces suddenly becomes fairly non-sensical and should awaken administrators to realign institutional practices with a student's efforts to be engaged. Again, Kuh's (2009b) definition suggests that student engagement is both a student as well as institutional endeavor.

More than any other super-ordinate theme, ordering space left me concerned with the state of administrative practice in student affairs. Generally, participants described a desire to be engaged yet frequently encountering administrative rules and practices that inhibited their efforts. Through discussions with participants I grew increasingly concerned that administrative practices and organizational structures have aligned so closely with the ideals of ordering space that we have collectively pushed students' developmental trajectories and multiplicitous potentialities out of focus. Once again, the taming of the spatial establishes power through practices and forms of knowledge that favor one kind of story and exclude others (Massey, 2005). Inspired by my concerns and desire to identify a way forward that moves away from ordering space, I returned to my

codes and annotations in order to find narratives that suggested alignment between students' engagement goals and institutional practices.

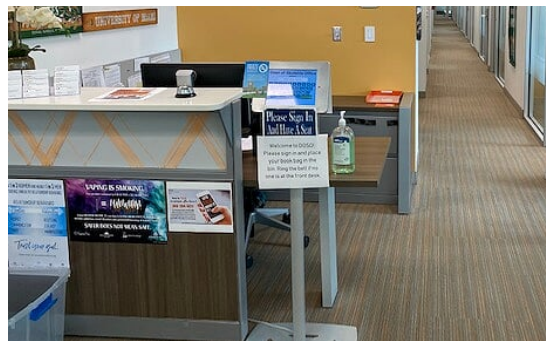
I considered Devon's student employment experience as a narrative apart from ordered space. The job itself may seem trivial:

I met with a lady and we had a great conversation. It wasn't really an interview. I was then hired to be a student assistant at a front desk. I did general student assistant things like hand deliveries, wiping down conference tables, watering plants, filling copy machines with paper. You know, all kinds of office stuff. (Devon, fourth interview)

To Devon his experience was remarkably enjoyable since he got to be part of "such a great environment" and "couldn't imagine what college would be like if he were matched up to work somewhere else." He was randomly selected to participate in a student employment matching program. Through his job, Devon made new friends, found mentorship through his "office moms," and also learned of the inner-workings of the university. He jokingly described his experience as if he was part of a fraternity comprised of people from his office (Figure 16).

Figure 16

Devon's Photograph of his Work Space



Devon's student employment experience affirmed two practices that appear to promulgate student engagement. First is institutional outreach (Kuh, 2003, 2009b). The actions taken by the student employment office suggests that the institution was engaged with him rather than simply awaiting Devon's outreach. Devon was fairly confident that if he would not have been randomly matched with his employer, he "would have never had such a meaningful job experience." Recruitment and outreach practices on the institution's part "induce students to participate" in campus activities (Kuh, 2003, p. 25). Esther's full scholarship and all the resources that accompanied it also started with an institutional agent reaching out to her. These kinds of outreach stories seem to affirm the institution as an active agent in influencing a student's engagement.

It seems that when institutional resources and opportunities simply exist awaiting utilization, a student is not induced in the same manner as when one senses being seen and invited to participate in an engaging experience. When the institution invites the student to engage rather than the other way around, the probability of engaged reciprocity between student and institution likely grows. Communications and actions that signal invitations to engage with students appear to be a form of moving away from ordered space.

The second outcome I noted from Devon's job experience was a perceived shift from the institution as a disembodied corpus to now a more personable organization operated by people and mentors. I previously noted that when a student spoke favorably of a department or resource, institutional agents were often referred to by name and likely assigned meaning because of the mentorship or support provided to a student. On the

other hand, when such persons served as enforcers of ordering space, the institution became seemingly faceless.

Increased exposure to the sub-environments of an institution appears to give way to understandings on the ways of the university (Berger, 2000). Berger went on to suggest that by exposure to sub-environments, a student's likelihood of persistence increases. Maria, having worked at the alumni center, had a proficient understanding on the funding and political implications with donor relations that may have served her well in her role as a homecoming committee member. Ashley's prior mentoring relationship with a new theater school faculty member provided her with direct access to a distinguished practicing scholar and insights on the graduate school search for aspiring playwrights.

Each participant described their own series of frustrating encounters with ordered space as well as intimate and supportive moments with institutional agents that appeared to transgress tamed space. The two common elements as to which side of the ordered space continuum an encounter fell on were usually held in relation to the previously described matters of institutional outreach and perceived facelessness of the institution. Ashley described her feelings of existing in institutionally ordered space as forcing a sense of survival. According to her, there is "a sense that they don't care about you. They gotta get theirs and you gotta do anything to survive. College can destroy you if you let it. You have to survive socially, financially, and educationally." Ashley's response followed my question of "What have you learned as the most important rule in college?"

Space, when analyzed, can reveal hidden truths about what is being produced and perpetuated (Low, 2016). It appears that an institution of higher learning is

simultaneously attempting to support student learning and engagement as well as ordering space. Returning to Kuh's definition of engagement, there must be institutional alignment with students' efforts to engage. Certeau (1984) described how "people's ways of operating constitutes space" (p. 19). I do not claim mutual exclusivity between bureaucratic ideals and supporting student engagement in producing space. However, I must argue that based on my findings the institution's "ways of operating" have notably potent effects on a student's ability to experience engagement. Therefore, in recognizing engagement as both a student and institutional effort, the ordering practices of a university must be as critically analyzed as existing in space and understood as influencing a student's engagement experience.

Hand gestures and filler assignments

In the previous sub-theme, "the pink slip hasn't existed in 30 years" I discussed the implications on student engagement when students encounter spatialized practices of bureaucratically ordered space. I argued that engagement is as much an institutional practice as it is a student's. Organizational practices that align with the transcendent nature of engagement, as well as move the institution from a faceless bureaucracy towards a more intimate place, may be best positioned to support a student's desire to be engaged (Strange & Banning, 2001). Such efforts are supported by Strange and Banning who posited that "the arrangement of environments is perhaps the most powerful technique we have for influencing human behavior" (p. 2). In the authors' discussion of organizational environments, they described formalization as the manner in which rules are created and enforced. Lefebvre (1991) referred to formalized practices such as rules

and implementations of strategic plans as representations of space. Formalization directly influences “how things are done” at an institution, including student engagement.

Through formalization and other institutional practices, spaces and places give impressions of being divided up, each with their own ascribed preferential forms of knowledge and behaviors (Massey, 2005). In her discussion of divided and tamed space, Massey presented the idea that temporal elements treated as discreet stages rather than existing in multiplicity is another means of ordering space. Discreet stages of temporality are often used in student engagement typologies and informing practices of prediction. Maria referred to this disparity between the neatly planned and the true nature of experience as the tumbleweed effect:

It sounds silly, but it blows my mind that we invest heavily in students in trying to create tracks for them. Like, ‘here is the path you should follow.’ But you kinda come in like a tumbleweed and pick up stuff along the way. And it works perfect. (Maria, second interview)

Maria, who described much of her experiences as comparative because of her deferred acceptance, ultimately may have learned that experiences such as those related to being an engaged student, do not actually exist in accordance with pre-planned tracks. To use her own example, Maria learned that she does not necessarily need to abide by “the rule of thirds.” I previously discussed this matter of presumed sequential ordering of engagement in chapter three when I critiqued the manner in which phases, vectors, and sequentially-ordered development creates hegemonic understandings of the collegiate experience. One such institutional stage that four participants were preparing to transition into was their departure from the institution.

I concluded the initial round of data collection, comprised of four interviews with each participant, just prior to spring break of 2020. Devon, Ashley, Maria, and Andrew were all seniors and spoke excitedly about their upcoming spring break plans, commencement, and life after college. At the time, Maria was job hunting, Andrew recently accepted an offer to his top-choice graduate program, and Devon was awaiting MCAT scores. What was coming next for graduating participants seemed somewhat clear to them. These upcoming experiences appeared as some kind of re-entry into the “real world.”

Devon described “college as existing here, but the real world is over there.” I considered this to be an interpretation of ordered space I found concerning. It was as if he and his peers were occupying spaces and places divorced from elements of reality. Devon’s statement reflects the assumption that college is a kind of bubble often noted in the “best four years of your life” mantra. Such understandings of the collegiate experience may serve to create the illusion that both the student and the institution exist as somewhat separate in both time and space from the rest of society. As I argue throughout this study, student engagement and the institution do not exist in aspatial and a-temporal environments. With his statement that “the real world is over there,” Devon treated college as a temporal stage divided from the rest of one’s lifetime and experiences (Massey, 2005).

Learning what to do and how to act in “the real world” was referred to as adulting. All five participants spoke about “adulting.” I remain intrigued how all participants distinguished what I consider to be life skills as a matter somewhat separate

from the collegiate experience. Andrew had to find an apartment in Atlanta for his upcoming move to graduate school. Maria was interviewing for jobs. Devon was applying to medical schools. Ashley was auditioning for professional performances. And Esther, a junior, was learning how to cook (Figure 22). Andrew described “adulting as learning how to become a functioning human in the outside world.” Similar to Devon, he perceived divided space between college and the “outside world.” Andrew went on to state that adulting “is getting out of my parent’s umbrella, grasping things early, and learning how to move forward.” To quote Devon, “I had to buy a shower curtain. Adulting sucks.”

Figure 17

Esther's Photograph of a Homemade Dinner



Esther took much pride in her growing independence as demonstrated by her cooking and hosting friends. I consider her stories about learning to cook as evidence of her growing independence and confidence. Additionally, she grounded her description of Haitian culture in the practice of hospitality. She now found herself, through “adulting,” as being able to practice both hospitality as well as elements of her culture:

This photo was from our first dinner in our apartment. It [cooking] gives good vibes because of my Caribbean culture. At least in Haitian culture we like to

throw beans on the floor because then it'll be a place with plenty of food. I really did cook that! And you know, I'm getting better. The salt control is still kind of an issue, but I'll get there...And we went on at the table for hours. It was girl talk, you know, funny things. We didn't just sit there, eat, and do the dishes. (Esther, fourth interview)

Esther talked about her cooking and hospitality in all five of her interviews. These were clearly important matters to her and I think reflect her engagement in “adulting.” All participants were involved in “adulting.” What stood out to me in regard to this sub-theme was the general supposition that collegiate spaces and places are divided from the rest of society and one's life. I found such a perception to be another practice of ordered space.

The first sub-theme described complications of engagement when encountering spatialized bureaucratic ideals. This sub-theme of “hand gestures and filler assignments” is concerned with college as a kind of hiatus from what otherwise simply exists such as space and time and the complications that ensued at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Space, according to Massey (2005), is a coexisting heterogeneity of relations, knowledge, and the temporal. It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the perceived sequential ordering of college, “the real world,” and adulting as separate spatial and temporal spheres. The sensed dividing lines were removed and students were suddenly catapulted into forced coexistence between college and adulting.

As previously discussed, this study's proposal and original IRB application were approved before any personal or even national conversation of COVID-19. The initial phase of data collection, interviews one through four, were completed prior to any COVID-19 implications to American society and education. Through the initial post-data

collection writing process, which was occurring as the country was shutting down, I considered it essential to continue inquiry on student engagement in relation to space and place. The participants of this study, like many other college students across the country, experienced a great deal of disruption. Part of their disruption included the abrupt disordering as college and “the real world” as distinctly separate spaces and times.

The effects, at least to the participants, appeared to be significant. Engagement, or educationally meaningful involvement, seemed to have dissipated. In chapter two I discussed how each of the four students that participated in the COVID-19 interview were displaced and were attempting to adjust to college. Prior to those experiences, there was a previously shared sense of optimism for commencement, celebratory cookouts, and vacations which were now suddenly gone. The collective tone I sensed from the COVID-19 interviews was one of trepidation, fatigue, and loss. Maria described the campus as “now gone.” She also went on to state that “because I don’t know what to do now, my four years are just completely ruined. Completely destroyed.” I do recognize that Maria, a previously highly campus-based engaged student, was experiencing grief and anxiety because of no post-commencement plans at the time of the interview as well as the loss of her campus involvement experiences. More than any other participant, her campus involvement certainly was central to her college experience and I do hope that she changes her stance as the previous years as “ruined.”

What was previously planned as his last spring break trip became a rush to figure out where to live and what to do. Andrew’s spaces of adulting and college suddenly

collided in the early morning hours of a hostel bathroom when he had to figure out how to adapt to newly presented circumstances:

I still went to London at the beginning of this. Everyone had their reservations, but we still went. Then there's a funny story. We decided Tuesday morning in the hostel bathroom at six in the morning. Our flights were scheduled for nine and we had a full-on discussion about whether we were going to continue or not. I was probably the most level-headed about the whole situation. My gut was like no this isn't a good idea. (Andrew, fifth interview)

He described that realization of what was going on and the loss of his envisioned ending of college, as “bittersweet and tough.” During this time, Andrew not only had to figure out where to live at the present moment, but also reconsider his post-graduation plans.

It's stressful. We may be out of school a week, a month, a year...who knows? And then I have to add the scenario of where am I going to live. All this is stressful on its own. But it's also weird enough with this remote thing.

The “remote thing” Andrew referred to was the present semester in which the interview occurred. While participants were figuring out housing, post-graduation plans, and even filing for unemployment (all but Maria lost their jobs), they had to still finish their semester. Adulting was in full effect, and so too was the need to complete their remaining exams, assignments, and co-curricular obligations.

Perhaps ordering space in a manner that suggests a separation of adulting from college affords students the opportunity to be engaged in their educational experience. Given all the very serious adulting they were managing during the onset of the pandemic, coupled with the sudden remote format of courses and student involvement, I detected little to no desire to be engaged. This is of course an observation made within the context of a residential college. The collegiate experience now appeared to be driven solely by

obligation with little motivational fuel provided by engagement. Maria went from experiencing the campus and courses at highly engaged levels, to just barely involved in one class-based interaction a week, which was ultimately cancelled:

I'm taking four classes. I only consistently go to one a week. Which is really weird, because what am I supposed to do with my time? What do I do with one class? I basically just have one class. Other teachers are doing completely different things like recording lectures and putting them online. Or having us take quizzes on Fridays. I have one [a teacher] who scheduled classes, but cancelled them and just has us working on our final project. (Maria, fifth interview)

Each participant described mild motivation by obligation, not engagement which is a more intrinsic kind of motivation. Even though the coursework may have seemed easier to complete, such as Maria's reduction in live classes to occasionally once per week, there appeared to be a collective struggle to muster the energy to participate in the curriculum. Devon described himself as busy as ever, but with a lack of motivation:

There's so many things I've had to adjust to in my personal life, like not visiting my friends and not being able to hang out. My professors have done a fairly good job. Workload wise it's pretty much the same. But I've also had to adjust to extracurriculars. It's all online. I'm on Zoom a lot. It's a lot. It's an adjustment. I'm as busy as ever, but there's a lack of motivation since it's all online. (Devon, fifth interview)

Both Maria and Devon were certainly busy before, given their positions, extracurriculars, and more. Now, the same kinds of efforts, albeit existing much differently and in different spaces, were certainly not indicative of engagement. Such an observation supports the previously discussed idea that time alone cannot measure engagement.

Esther described the transition from being engaged, and the ensuing sense of loss, remarkably well. Esther, who again was selected as a kind of negative case for this study, seemed to have really situated herself quite well just prior to the pandemic with the

campus, classes, and extracurricular activities. I think she knew this. Among other things, Esther was excited about a dance class, recent involvement with a dance club, feeling a growing sense of independence, and also recently met a fellow student of color in her class:

I meet people in classes now [prior to COVID-19]. Like, totally different people. In dance classes, you're required to show up. So everyone shows up and I engage with them. I always find this really fun. I met this one girl in my class. She was the only other Black girl in my class. We started talking. We got cut off so abruptly. And I don't have her social media. I can't continue that relationship after this. I guess I'll never see her again.

I previously discussed the importance of representation in experiencing collegiate places. In this case, representation was excitedly represented by a peer of color in her class, which seems to be a rare occasion. Because of COVID, any semblance of representation seemed lost. There was a sense of loss and obligatory involvement expressed by Esther and others. This was most likely a feeling many of her peers and others at the institution were experiencing. With such a feeling of coercion, and the absurdity of hand gestures and filler assignments, it was understandably hard to be engaged as she recently was prior to the campus closure:

Most classes are recorded because you can only have so many people on Zoom at one time. But like I don't really need to be in class right now. I can chill and do nothing. I could be doing something else. But I'm forcing myself. Especially for math class. I feel really forced to go to class and make sure I take notes and asked questions. And then one of my professors, because I'm taking dance class, that's not really easy to do over video. It's not the same experience. There's a reason why I wanted to take dance classes. This was the semester I was going to take a break from my STEM stuff and it was my time to do another aspect of me. Now we're just doing filler assignments. It's just hand gestures and filler assignments. (Esther, fifth interview)

The expectations to complete coursework certainly continued. Understandably so, given the unprecedented circumstances of the time. Esther went from experiencing an exciting class with a potentially new friend, to just recording hand gestures and completing “filler assignments.” What Esther and others experienced and described is that college is not indeed a kind of hiatus from other spaces and places. Such a fallacy reflects the socially spatialized ordered space of college. Through ordering, space and even time are treated as merely discreet stages arranged in a line (Massey, 2005).

In part, engagement is defined as involvement in educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2009a). It seemed that each participant previously met that criteria to varying degrees. However, after the onset of the pandemic it appeared that there was no indication of excitement or a desire to continue in curricular and cocurricular activities. The participants may have been experiencing life in repeated space. Lefebvre (1991) described repeated spaces as spaces that defeat uniqueness. “Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures (of the workers)” such as hand gestures and filler assignments (p. 75). Since Lefebvre was concerned with labor, he suggested that repetitious spaces are concerned with calculable outputs. To Andrew, his physics lab participation was reduced to the very practice of calculable outputs:

I’m taking a physics lab. The lab is completely different now. Basically we watch the guy do an experiment. He sends us the raw data and we just submit the lab report. This goes back to the question of online versus in-person. There are still limits to technology we can’t overcome yet. (Andrew, fifth interview)

It seemed that recordings of hand gestures and simply plugging in data from a lab were calculable measures that can be documented for the sake of course completion. It

appeared that students moved from a space grounded in their own respective engagement and goals, to simply existing in repetitious space. Such a shift suggests that there must have been some intrinsic element missing that may serve as a corequisite for engagement.

The students' experiences and changes caused by COVID-19 suggest that engagement is more than a measure of time spent involved in educationally purposeful ways. Low's (2016) description on the affects of space, or the emotionality on ascribes towards space, may point towards the missing element in Kuh's description of involvement. Without a sense of emotional affect for the spaces and places one engages with, it is unlikely to generate any form of valuable meaning or sense of belonging (Low, 2016).

Based on my own experience adjusting to life during a pandemic, which occurred simultaneously with the COVID-19 interviews, I too suffered a stark decrease in motivation and emotional affect towards my involvement with schooling. I was worried about my own job security, graduate school funding, and learning how to homeschool two preschool-aged children. I shared the participants' struggles in generating any kind of motivation to be engaged in the academic experience. I recalled Popescu (2016) asking "Isn't college by nature an uncomfortable experience?" (as cited in Taylor & Reynolds, 2019). I presumed Popescu did not imagine such a question embedded in a pandemic and financial crisis. Clearly all participants and myself were experiencing concern with a new virus, adapting to unforeseen circumstances, and continuing in our respective educational experience.

Despite the significant disruptions myself and the participants were experiencing, and its effects on motivation and affect, we all collectively remained involved in the performative aspects of the student role. I turned my attention to analyzing the meaning of collegiate spaces and places institutionally treated as ordered constants, regardless of external circumstances. I determined that despite insurmountable disruptions and concerns cause by the pandemic, attempts at ordering space carried on.

I recalled Esther's description of her home formerly serving as a place where she may be in "vacation mode." This was a place that reflected the previously described spaces of disjointment. Now, feeling essentially grounded, Esther felt resigned by being consumed with "hand gestures and filler assignments" in her vacation place. Her experience reflects Lefebvre's (1991) discussion on spaces of leisure and spaces of labor. Lefebvre posited that "spaces of leisure are supplied by agencies of political power and their mechanisms of control" (p. 59). He suggested that power-wielding agencies concerned with labor essentially grant spaces of leisure. I think this is what Esther was feeling as if somehow her home, or at least the feelings she was currently experiencing while at home, were taken over by the demands of her academic commitments. The feelings of leisure often provided by the institution by way of course breaks were essentially rescinded and replaced by ordered space.

Massey (2005) described efforts of ordering space to include drawing dividing lines. Based on participants' experiences, the lines they knew and understood between collegiate and otherwise may have been redrawn with little agency in the matter. While I do recognize that "space can never be definitively purified," students were accustomed to

spaces and places that at least felt purified from college (Massey, 2005, p. 95). Examples previously included Esther's home or Andrew's lighthouse. In her discussion of globalization, Massey (2005) described "the local as being implicated in the production of the global" (p. 102). When the students' perceived local place was taken over by the global (collegiate), space appeared to have been reordered and "the campus was lost" as described by Maria.

The participants' relationships with the campus, and the related drawing lines negotiated both by student and institution, changed dramatically during the pandemic. Now it seemed that the performativity of college crept up on spaces and places previously affiliated with "the real world." I remain curious if in fact college, at least according to the participants, is a matter strictly held in existence and in relation to the campus. In doing so, and treating the campus and one's time in college as somewhat separate from broader social spaces, there may be the opportunity to float around:

Being involved on campus gave me a sense of purpose. By floating around, I don't know, I definitely made a name for myself. I did things I'm proud of because of it. Now it's pretty hard to float around just as a number. The resources aren't there. I can't pop into anyone's office. I can't just walk to Starbucks. Everything is missing. (Maria, fifth interview)

With the ability to "float around" now seemingly gone, all of the study's participants were in a constant struggle to labor through their academics while left on their own to adapt to new conditions. Devon shared similar sentiments and described this shift as "no more wandering on campus or Wharf Fridays. There's just this one thing. I'm living dualistic lives. Either I'm on Zoom. Or I'm not."

I found myself constantly reflecting on what other choices the students and the institution had in terms of the remainder of the spring 2020 semester once the conditions of the pandemic affected the campus. The notable change in tone from the fourth interview to the fifth was disheartening to me. What once was a concluding conversation with Devon on detailed plans for celebratory “backyard cookouts (Figure 18) and doing the walk [graduation]” was now described by him as time spent “shaking off disappointment and frustration.” During the fourth interview Devon presented the photograph of his home in relation to his envisioned graduation celebration and fond memories with roommates. His discussion about his place of residence was notably different during the fifth interview and served as another example of Lefebvre’s repetition of space.

Figure 18

Devon’s photograph of his home



The “college as existing here, but the real world is over there” mentality posited by Devon, but likely sensed by all was significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. I do consider such a notion of the duality of college and “the real world” to be a fallacy as well as indicative of myriad problems with the oftentimes infantile treatment of undergraduate students. However, the power and meaning from negotiating space according to the separation of what is “collegiate” and what is “real” firmly supports that places are environments that are intimately lived, sensed, and experienced (Massey, 2005; Tuan, 1977). At the same time, spaces and places are subject to the governance and politics of institutions such as a university. The spatial experience, much like student engagement, is negotiated by both an individual as well as the institutions that attempt to govern space. I imagine, as Massey (2005) did, that space may come to be known as the sphere of possibilities. Moving towards treating space as the sphere of multiplicitous possibilities is in part dependent on shifting from the primary concern of ordering space towards mutually aligned interrelations between student and institution.

I close my discussion on ordering space as well as ““hand gestures and filler assignments” by presenting the beheading of Holofernes (Figure 19). While Caravaggio’s painting may be a depiction of a Biblical tale between a widow and the decapitation of a Syrian general, Andrew’s experience related to this artwork embodies the learning and engagement potential when operating outside of ordered space.

Figure 19

Andrew's photograph of Judith Beheading Holofernes by Caravaggio



Andrew discussed this painting and his experiences related to it on numerous occasions. He was initially somewhat surprised that he had so much creative agency in this assignment. Andrew was encouraged by his professor to make his own interpretations of what he saw:

The creative writing class I took was my favorite. Each of us got assigned one painting. I got this one by Caravaggio. It's this woman who is cutting off this man's head while he's asleep. The class taught me to look at the lines, look at the focal point, the way light is used, determine how my focus is drawn. But then I had to bring in my own interpretation of the image. Even though it's from a [biblical] story. I was told I can interpret it completely independent and how I saw it. I didn't have to think about their story, but rather focus on what I can come up with. It was liberty. It was creative liberty. To be able to create something like this based on my own interpretation. Whether for writing, or art, or whatever.

I had to draw on my own meaning. I was forced to think outside the box. It's already a cool story, about the beheading. But I kind of like had to think about it from my own angle. Drawing my own meaning from my own analysis was something very important for me from this class. I think it's a very important skill

moving forward and something applicable for other things in life. (Andrew, fourth interview)

This particular experience is a counternarrative of ordering space. What I detected most was his enthusiasm to engage in an opportunity that blended his interests in a way that encouraged “drawing my own meaning from my own analysis.” Andrew was excited with the “creative liberty” that was assigned to him by his instructor. Through this assignment, he was afforded agency in thinking and interpretation. Coupled with his teacher’s encouragement to pursue his thinking wherever it may lead, Andrew demonstrated an excitement for being involved in an educationally-effective manner. Rather than guided by administrative organization or bureaucratic rules, it seemed that the ability to engage was deferred to Andrew as the producer of his own meaning and engagement.

Diffraction Discussion

I am an administrator by trade, training, and education. My professional work is often governed by matters related to budgets, institutional regulations, and organizational charts. Throughout my analysis with the super-ordinate theme of ordering space, I often reflected on my own actions as the potential faceless bureaucrat or the student champion. More than any other theme, I found that the students’ joys and frustrations existing in relation to ordered space spoke directly to my role and history as an administrator. I often found myself listening as an administrator more so than a doctoral candidate. While I do recognize that my roles as student and administrator cannot be separated, I considered other themes and discussions much easier to bracket.

As stunningly simple as the concept may seem, a major finding from this super-ordinate theme may be in arguing that engagement is institutionally as well as student driven. The term “student” in student engagement appears to be a misnomer. As described by participants, the desire to engage largely exists on the student’s part. It appears that the ability to facilitate engagement from desire to action is partly dependent on institutional actions. The desire to be engaged may be better facilitated by enabling institutional agents to conduct outreach to students. It was evident from participants’ experiences that being the recipient of personalized outreach created a sense of recognition by the institution and drew students further towards turning engagement into action. Another promising measure was by providing resources and rules aligned with students’ interests rather than organizational hierarchies. Searching for the pink slip is a somewhat symbolic gesture which points at the nature of bureaucratic practices to be more concerned with institutional rules and not always supporting efforts of student engagement.

The Impact of Culture on Organizational Decision Making: Theory and Practice in Higher Education

From the early stages of subsuming a theme concerned with institutional practices, I knew I wanted to revisit and discuss a classic higher education organizational administration text. Again, my academic and professional background is in management and administration. In light of the data and ensuing analysis, I considered it prudent to engage in diffraction through a foundational text on administration. I selected William Tierney’s (2008) *The Impact of Culture on Organizational Decision Making: Theory and*

Practice in Higher Education because of his juxtaposition of administrative practices with organizational culture. I identified parallels between Tierney's description of culture and elements of space, spatialization, and ordering space.

Tierney defined culture as "the shared values, practices, and symbols of an organization" (p. 14). Recognizing that culture is expressed in multivocal ways, the author articulated that "one" culture cannot necessarily be identified through the study of organizational practices. As an institution of higher learning, Tierney argued that a university's culture should be grounded in innovation, not stasis. This argument, of innovation versus stasis, is the focus of my diffractive analysis with Tierney's text. Ordering space is the attempted taming of space through administrative functions. While I recognize the limitations of this study and I do not suggest generalizability, there seems to be a contrast between Massey's description of governance and Tierney's optimistic perspective of organizational culture. Massey (2005) argued that those in power are seemingly inclined to impose modes of governance that tame or freeze space. Such practices reflect representations of space, which are conceptualized by planners and managers, according to Lefebvre's triad. Tierney posits that an organizational culture is "good" if it is centered in creativity. On the other hand, given this super-ordinate theme's concern with ordering space, I am curious if a bureaucratic organization would deem a culture as good based on metrics of order more so than creativity.

The kind of creativity I am concerned with is in regard to administrative practice such as management and institutional planning, not necessarily creativity in the curricular

or pedagogical sense. With Tierney suggesting that culture is partially that which is unspoken, I remain curious how creativity exists in unspoken administrative culture:

The culture of an organization is grounded in the shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization. Often taken for granted by the actors themselves, these assumptions can be identified through stories, special language, norms, institutional ideology, and attitudes that emerge from individual and organizational behavior. (p. 25).

It seems that the kinds of assumptions or actions taken for granted by institutional agents are often framed by spatialized practices of ordering space. The pink slip and inflexibility of vocal lesson arrangements suggests ways a student's engagement may exist within a culture concerned with rules and practice more so than a culture of creativity. The "locals," such as mentors and champions, may be valuable in not just their personal relationships with students, but also their knowledge of administrative culture, systems, and rules. In the truest sense of the term, locals are familiar with the spaces they occupy and in turn serve as guides through the dividing lines and practices of ordering space.

I position administrative practice as somewhat separate from institutional ideology because I sensed a guise that frames the institution as existing for noble reasons such as learning, research, and innovation although existing in accordance with ordered practices. Though certainly interdependent as suggested by Tierney, there may exist mixed messaging between institutional ideals that are communicated to students, but divorced from social conditions. It seems that one kind of culture, of integration and creativity, tends to be explicitly expressed to students, yet a culture of administrative practice articulates another kind of culture often experienced by students.

It would seem that a university is not the kind of cultural oasis that exists apart from the rest of society, such as the kind that was noted by Devon as college and the real world existing in two different places and times. A university is in fact not ordered from the rest of society:

To assume that colleges and universities do not reflect the culture of mainstream society is to overlook the crucial importance of the sociocultural contexts surrounding postsecondary organizations. Simply stated, higher education's institutions have histories and current contexts that help determine their ideology and culture. (p. 71)

This phenomenon of portraying an organizational culture divorced from social and politically-charged relations is the creation of a spatial nostalgia that frames an institution as seeming to operate based on ideals of creativity rather than order (Massey, 2005).

Once within the particular space, students appeared to sense a shift from an ideological space comprised of creativity in the name of student opportunities to one that is governed according to spatialized order. Participants' narratives suggest that they encountered places where the administrative concern was with the rules and not necessarily a student's desired outcome. Inspired by the data and Tierney's text, I remain curious if higher education has found a way to articulate one particular culture of creativity and immersive space, yet govern through ordering space. Such a duality would support the continued need to articulate spatial descriptions of higher education.

Reading this chapter in relation to *The Impact of Culture on Organizational Decision Making: Theory and Practice in Higher Education* left me with these questions:

- How is organizational culture spatialized in relation to administrative practice?
- What agency do students have in contributing to an institution's culture?

The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy

Tierney's text was concerned with organizational culture. After reading the data in relation to Tierney's *The Impact of Culture*, I grew curious about the idea of organizational purpose. Literature on bureaucracies tend to describe matters of arranging people and other resources (Shafritz et al., 2011; St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). I initially considered this concern of arranging to be just short of describing a purpose. However, after continued engagement with Massey (2005) and the data, it appeared to me that the purpose of a bureaucracy may very well be to order space rather than function in support of the greater mission of the organization. I previously supposed that the purpose of an administrative organization would be to support the operations related to a broader culture or ideology, not be a mechanism of its own ordering ideology. Rather than encourage engagement, learning, and innovation, which seem to be the often-cited ideals of higher learning, the greater concern of a governing entity such as a university's administrative organization, may be that of ordering space through practices, communications, and rules.

I selected David Graeber's (2015) *The Utopia of Rules* because the text offers a critique of bureaucratic culture within the context of higher education. Graeber also noted a distinction between bureaucratic practice and the expressed ideals of higher education.

In most times and places, the way one goes about doing something is assumed to be the ultimate expression of who one is. But it also seems as if the moment one divides the world into two spheres in this way—into the domain of sheer technical competence and a separate domain of ultimate values—each sphere inevitably trying to invade the other. (p. 40)

This duality of places as described by Graeber is not unlike Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad in which underground spatial practices exist in relation to practices of representation. According to Graeber, there is an ethereal element to the tenets of bureaucracy to the point that "they become so omnipresent that we no longer realize we're being threatened" (p 42). I argue that the ethereal element may exist mostly with those who serve as institutional agents. Based on my analysis, students described poignant observations of the challenges of engaging with bureaucracy. Their observations suggest that when experienced as an impediment, a bureaucracy is anything but ethereal to those who depend on them.

Graeber suggested that experiences with bureaucracies can oftentimes create a sensation of alienation. A constituent's imaginations and inspirations can be impeded or deemed as existing outside the horizon of possibility when positioned according to the rigid choices and pathways granted by the bureaucrat (Graeber, 2015). In turn, one resigns to feelings of alienation and withdrawal. Graeber's description of what occurs when encountering the frustrations of navigating complex organizations is quite similar to practices that deter retention and persistence (Braxton, 2000). Whether defined as student departure, transfer, withdrawal, non-engagement, or alienation, such an outcome becomes increasingly likely when "a timid bureaucratic spirit comes to suffuse every aspect of intellectual life" (Graeber, 2015, p. 137).

Both Massey (2005) and Graeber (2015) engaged in discussions related to ordering space. In regard to student engagement, negative encounters within ordered space likely promulgate the kind of alienation described by Graeber and experienced by

the study's participants. In order to better understand the outcomes of ordering space, I grew curious as to why such a fascination with governance and drawing dividing lines exists within space. With space as something that is negotiated, there must be forces and priorities that drive individuals and agencies to engage in ordering space through bureaucracies and other means (Lefebvre, 1991). Graeber, like Lefebvre, centered his argument on labor.

Graeber noted that a bureaucrat in American society is not a synonym for a civil servant. The reason bureaucracy and its tendencies “is so easy to overlook is because most of American bureaucratic habits and sensibilities—from the clothing to the language to the design of forms and offices—emerged from the private sector” (p. 13). With the corporatization of higher education came the tendencies of middle management. Consider, for example, institutional priorities on value-maximization and returns on investment. Predictive analytics and the privileging of high impact practices may also serve as exemplars of the tendencies of middle management. Institutional rules, metrics that insinuate foreclosure, and rewards for advancement become the mechanisms of advancing a corporate culture. Consequently, a student's desire to engage in vocal lessons becomes reduced to a matter of forms and schedules, rather than a concern with an educationally purposeful activity.

Graeber argued that we as a society really love bureaucracy. He posited that bureaucratic organizations and practices promise transparency through consistency of rules, predictability through repetitious practices, and equality through indifference. Space through order and as a constant seems tempting. However, returning to this study's

phenomenological concern, lived experience whether as a participant or institutional agent is anything but static. Lived experience, by its definition, is a matter related to how one lives in the course of every day existence as well as the meaning that is generated (van Manen, 2016). Herein lies the major shortcoming of bureaucracy operating in the hopes of constant practice and ordering space. People, through their identities, backgrounds, and the meaning they generate, experience and negotiate spaces and places through an intimate manner that is subject to continual reinterpretation and not bound by the ordering of governance (Massey, 2005).

Engagement, which again is a matter of both student and institutional concern, is a product of an intimately lived experience and its garnered meaning by the student. Moreover, engagement exists in both space and time. Despite a bureaucrat's best efforts, engagement does not completely exist in a calculable arena. Graeber closes his text by discussing the nature of the organization-constituent relationship. Constituents engage with an organization and abide by the rules because there is an expressed need or interest in partaking in what the institution offers. Students enrolling in a university exemplify the organization-constituent relationship. The desire on the constituent's part is to capitalize on that which is offered such as a college degree or the ideals expressed the institution. No participant expressed the desire to enroll in college for the sake of engaging with bureaucracy. Rather than ordering space, it is my hope that institutional agents center practices and politics on "the liveliness, complexity, positive multiplicities, and appreciation for what is inherently spatial" (Massey, 2005, p.13).

Reading this chapter in relation to *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* left me with these questions:

- How do student affairs administrators understand their role in the student engagement experience, while also operationalizing bureaucratic ideals?
- How can administrative practices better align with student engagement ideals?

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed the institutional role in the student engagement relationship. With the definition of student engagement implicating institutional practices, I described the ways organizational administrative practices either inhibit or promulgate a student's desire to be engaged. Framed by Massey's discussion of ordering space, bureaucratic practices attempt to govern space by creating dividing lines, discreet pathways, and sequential timelines of operating. Participants were inclined to describe the institution as a faceless corpus when experiencing bureaucratic challenges, and identified committed individuals when aided by locals in navigating ordered space.

Through ordered space, participants described a kind of dislocation in both space and time. College was described as somewhat separate from society and the rest of one's life. This notion was suddenly disrupted because of displacement and changes caused by COVID-19. The ability to be engaged dissipated. There was a notable adjustment to eager involvement in college to simultaneously coping with myriad challenges and collegiate involvement premised on obligation. The pandemic, and the institution's related actions, appeared to have consumed spaces and places previously sensed as

separate from the institution. Lastly, I selected two texts which discussed the role of organizational administration in shaping culture and practice in higher education.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of student engagement in relation to space, spatialization, and place. It was my goal to move beyond abstracted and simply time-based understandings of the ways students are involved in educationally purposeful activities. I previously discussed problems associated with treating environments as static and comprised of interchangeable bits of information. I am concerned with the problems associated with foreclosing engagement opportunities and understandings by mostly defining them according to the existence of a few institutional practices or measured according to predictive analytics. I sought to understand how spaces and places “become” in the same fashion that students develop and “become” themselves (Massey, 2005; Mayhew et al., 2016; Strange & Banning, 2001). Through a phenomenological methodology, this study interviewed five participants who completed 24 interviews and submitted 60 photographs. I employed semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation for data collection. My analysis was grounded in interpretive phenomenological analysis and diffractive readings.

During the early stages of my research, I presumed the findings of my study would offer the kind of clarity which seems to be offered by studies centered on prediction and abstraction. I initially sought answers, not more questions. Perhaps such an assumption was built on my administrative inclination to arrange in the name of ordered space. However, the seemingly natural habit of seeking order through overdeterminism reflects the very problem this study addresses (Resnick & Wolff, 2013). As discussed by Resnick and Wolff and also by Massey, it is quite logically impossible to

isolate and predict processes and people in the ways which are often desired through abstraction and bureaucracy (Graeber, 2015; Kuntz, 2015).

Processes, such as meaning-making and engagement, cannot be entirely fixed and determined through predictive logics of abstraction (Resnick & Wolff, 2013; van Manen, 2016). As simply, but truthfully stated by Resnick and Wolff (2013) in regard to understanding any existing beings, “a mess is a mess” (p. 343). I do consider my study’s purpose to have been achieved by presenting spatialized descriptions of student engagement, which certainly present space and place as “messy” (Kuntz, 2019). “Our inquiry work should necessarily imagine new problems, not previously defined or articulated (or even registered “as a problem”) among conventional research approaches” (p. 76). The most salient “new problem” as defined by Kuntz (2019) identified from this study is that student engagement is indeed a lived experience negotiated by students within spaces and places. Phenomenologically, this is understood as a form of *dasein*, or being in the world. As such, understandings of students’ experiences are not completely measured by time or assessment-generated affirmations of institutional practices. Limiting engagement to these practices mostly serve to order space in ways that often inhibit spatial freedom. I set to expand literature on student engagement by utilizing a spatial framework as well as phenomenological and diffractive methods.

Simply doing something, such as hours spent involved in a high-impact practice, was notably absent from the narratives shared by the study’s participants. The absence of a mostly time-based description of involvement affirms that experiences related to educationally purposeful activities are more than performative. The only instances when

time was discussed in a binary way of involved or not involved was when students used time to separate themselves from institutional space during the pandemic and quarantine. In these cases, the collective desire was to not be involved. Otherwise, the college experience was notably described as lived and simultaneously negotiating social relations, structures, politics, geography, identity, and governance. In other words, to be engaged with college in educationally purposeful ways is to be engaged with space and place.

Summary of Findings

In this section I summarize the salient points of each thematic chapter. Through my analysis of discussions with participants, the photographs they provided, and my own annotations and memos, I identified three super-ordinate themes. In each of the following sub-sections I present the major findings of each theme in relation to literature. The three super-ordinate themes are:

1. Geography of Borderlessness
2. The Synchrony House
3. Ordering Space

Geography of Borderlessness: Student Engagement and Identity

Four of the five participants identified as persons of color. I detected a strong undercurrent of constant comparison to perceived norms established by the participants' white peers. There were also perspectives of nationality, gender, and social class discussed in interviews and in my related analysis. My discussions with the participants often led to ruminations on how a student of color may not have the perceived "normal"

college experience. Based on the identity-driven comparisons students made, I discussed the notion of the gold standard. The gold standard was described in many contexts. Binge drinking, relations with parents and relatives, and physical appearance were brought up and discussed by each of the four participants of color. Their narratives embodied Lefebvre's (1991) description of underground spatial practices. The comparative nature of one's own identity and habits to a spatial gold standard may inhibit a student's desire to participate fully with the institution or induce the sense that one is negotiating with spaces and places not necessarily intended for them (Pascarella et al., 2007; Wechsler & Kuo, 2003).

The desire to experience space in a manner that feels "normal" is a phenomenon which drives the desire to fix space (Massey, 2005). Norms are often marketed as a good thing when attempting to educate students on peer drinking behaviors or graduating in four years (Borsari & Carey 2001). However, Tillapaugh (2019) advised against the dangerous mindset that is created when so much emphasis is placed on curating "normal" within the college experience. Through the constant comparison with gold standards, participants at times appeared to endure rather than thrive through space and time. Students were left to make sense of the different kinds of normal they perceived yet did not identify with. And consequently, it was up to them to make sense and meaning from their sensed positions in collegiate spaces.

The geography of borderlessness is a kind of amorphous and two-faced system built on hospitality and rejection (Massey, 2005). The theme is not necessarily concerned about borders themselves, but rather agency over their existence. I referred to Derrida's

(2001) writing on unconditional hospitality. As an example, there is a wholesome imagery conjured in college marketing materials that invites one to participate in an oasis of education and comradery (Armstrong & Lumsden, 2000; Pippert et al., 2013).

Unconditional hospitality represents the open-ended side of a geography of borderlessness. Through borderlessness, individuals and social identity groups are invited to share their experiences and labor in the name of the greater good such as learning and student engagement (Massey, 2005). Nevertheless, what lies beyond the welcoming doormat of college mirrored similar politics and relations that inform other spaces in society (Massey, 2005; Pippert et al., 2013; Sacks, 2007). As an example. Maria's simple presence in a leadership opportunity was questioned in a fairly public manner before she could even act or say anything to inform her peer's opinions of her.

I posited that the participants of color, namely Ashley, Devon, Maria, and Esther, experienced a geography of borderlessness where they were left to negotiate spaces of openness and covered-up borders. In the first sub-theme I described borders which appear to separate the participants of color from the perceived normal. Devon dubbed these moments and experiences as "cultural things." Mirroring Massey's (2005) discussion on perceived pathways through open borders, hard work was one of those "cultural things" described by participants. Another salient point from this sub-theme was the meaning generated when participants saw themselves and their identities as centered. Encounters with representation through cultural artifacts, demographics, and the planned curriculum certainly mattered and served as places of inspiration and encouragement.

The second sub-theme, “I get that being Black is in, but...” speaks to the ways the throwntogetherness of people is often questioned (Massey, 2005). For example, Ashley experienced a racially charged encounter from her school audition of *Audrey II* and was the subject of attempted body shaming. Referring back to Derrida (2001), there were moments when the welcome mat of unconditional hospitality was removed. In other words, students encountered previously covered-up borders and places of exclusion. In the geography of borderlessness there are sorting habits that spatialize conceptualizations of who goes where (Ancis et al., 2000; Massey, 2005). In the redlining of college student places, it appeared that placement is contingent on acceptance. Limiting acceptance to certain places in order to inhibit throwntogetherness are acts of purifying space (Massey, 2005).

Attempts of purification created sensed separation as experienced and described by participants. Separationist policies and behaviors attempt to establish hegemonic rhythm in both space and time (Massey, 2005). Lefebvre (1991) described intrinsic and social rhythm when there are harmonious interactions between a place, a time, and a person’s expenditure of energy. Student engagement models tend to depict an idealized collegiate rhythm that is oftentimes depicted as existing in perpetuity. As particularly demonstrated when experiencing biased acts, constantly noting a lack of representation on campus, or in the aftermath of the pandemic, rhythm suggests somewhat anticipatory ebbs and flows. Those ebbs and flows, which were experienced by students as places, draw in and cast out students in confusing ways.

The Synchrony House: Student Engagement and Perceptions

Perceiving synchrony appears to be quite the motivator and influencer (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). The tyranny of brunch exemplifies the formability of synchrony. Spatialized pressures create the illusion that spaces and places are a-temporal, unchanging, and therefore absolute (Massey, 2005). In order to produce illusions of absolute and timeless space, synchrony is required (Massey, 2005). Rather than existing as sites promoting real heterogeneity, synchrony imposes constraints on how one should act, think, and possibly dream and treats those ideals as timeless (Lefebvre, 1991). The participants appeared to have developed perceptions of synchrony through encountering implicit and explicit forms of pressure. Based on the five cases of this study, perceptions of academic and social synchrony were notably palpable.

I presented my description of lived experiences related to academic performativity in relation to Brown's (2015) discussion of *homo oeconomicus*. The pressure to "get ahead" and avoid mistakes in a competitive closed market was tenacious. Space also seems closed when perceived as synchronous. A grade of a B- was jarring to Andrew. Devon had to negotiate a-temporal and perceived unchanging performative expectations in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and the pandemic two years later. Concerns with performativity were a driving force in making meaning and at times served to the detriment of the student's well-being (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Patton et al. 2016). While pressurized performance and outcomes are not necessarily exclusively mutual, the preoccupation of concerns with the former reflect Massey's discussion of the path and the

journey. A greater concern on the student's part of the path one should follow may induce worry if one's own journey is adequate.

Much credence is given by the literature to development gained by students through seemingly noble pursuits of engagement (Abes et al., 2019; Mayhew et al., 2016; Patton et al., 2016). Findings from this chapter speak to perceptions of synchrony that shaped many experiences often associated with educationally purposeful activities. The narratives contained in this chapter seemed quite different to pre-existing literature. The holistic outcomes of engagement appeared to be a secondary concern. Negotiating a-temporal notions of engagement, performative expectations, and making sense of mistakes along the way appeared to serve as more primary concerns (Brown, 2015; Mayhew et al, 2016).

The narratives shared by participants suggest that there are costs and benefits to being engaged in college. Although enjoying her campus involvement, Maria often had to make sense of her relatives' perceptions that she was just doing "unpaid labor" for the university. Such a supposition complicates engagement as simply being a matter of involvement in educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2003). I state this because *homo oeconomicus* is not solely concerned with education, but also with cost-benefit analyses (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Brown, 2015; Sacks, 2007). The marketplace is not necessarily comprised of academic and career opportunities, but social ones as well (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Family and classmates were notably discussed as inducing or diffusing pressures related to engagement. Going back to Maria's example,

she had to make choices if the benefits of her continued involvement outweighed the negative feedback she received from family.

Social life was another aspect of synchrony described by participants. In their ethnographic study, Armstrong and Hamilton posited that the party pathway systemically creates fun. The institution is a silent partner in the production of fun. Tailgating and football was certainly a salient example. Following the pressurized rules of the synchrony house, there was a sense described by participants that suggested the party pathway was mostly performative. Motivated by synchrony, participation drew students in. Whether it is an order of bottomless mimosas or attendance at a fraternity social, involvement does not necessarily result in meaningful engagement when participation is driven by synchrony. Synchrony also produces perceptions of binaries, such as if a person is a “party” person or not or enjoys the field of dreams, or not.

I detected increased agentive power through transitions from theyness to mineness with each participant. Esther’s journey growing and showing off her natural hair exemplified this transition from theyness to mineness. The participatory nature of space means that one must oblige in certain rituals (Heidegger, 1962; Massey, 2005). I drew parallels with Baxter Magolda’s (2001) research on self-authorship. As supported by Baxter Magolda, each participant expressed less concern with conformity and involvement with the party pathway towards the later years of college. Consider, for example, Andrew’s departure from obligatory fraternity events to more intimate moments with a select few. I detected a gradual transition to engage based on one’s own genuine

interests. Such a desire to transition from theyness to mineness reflected the pursuit of spatial dislocation.

Spatial dislocation, as evidenced by Andrew's lighthouse or Ashley's places where "kickbacks" occur, was a particularly surprising finding for me. With the somewhat imperial desire of college to be immersive well beyond the campus, I found notable student resistance to engage in places that are always connected with the institution and perceptions of synchrony. Dislocation offered respite and promoted self-authorship or mineness (Baxter Magolda, 1999). While students never truly separated themselves from their institution, especially during COVID-19, what they actively sought were experiences divorced from institutional oversight. Meaningful and educationally purposeful engagement certainly appeared to exist in dislocated spaces. Much like Lefebvre's (1991) underground spatial practices, dislocation may be places that are institutionally unrecognized but equally meaningful in a student's lived experience.

Ordering Space: Student Engagement and the Institution

The term "student engagement" may be a misnomer. The nomenclature suggests that the onus is on the student to be engaged. While this is certainly true to a certain extent, as defined by Kuh (2009b), student engagement refers to both a student's devotion to educationally purposeful activities as well as what the institution does to entice students. The super-ordinate theme of ordering space discusses the institution's role in the college student experience as described by participants. I subsumed the super-ordinate theme of ordering space because of pervasive discussions on rules and bureaucracy that at times seemed to run counter to the ideals of student engagement.

Ashley's multiple attempts of pursuing a psychology minor and Andrew's goose chase for "the pink slip" were spatialized experiences with ordering space. Such encounters reflect experiences in ordered space.

Ordering space refers to governance by seemingly immovable rules (Massey, 2005). The ability to navigate institutional rules influences a student's ability to be engaged (Braxton, 2000; Kuh, 2009b). I particularly described ordering space as spatialized through practices of administrative organization, rules, and "the giving of orders" through communications (Schloss & Cragg, 2013; Shafritz et al., 2011).

Grounded in the argument that student engagement is a matter of lived experience, the implications of ordering space can either produce places of intimacy or isolation. I noted that at times participants painted the institution as a disembodied corpus of bureaucracy concerned with its own rules. At other times, there were moments of inspiration and support likely influenced by very particular institutional agents who served as mentors and champions. Devon's student employment experience exemplified an inspiring and engagement experience with institutional practices. At the same time, his example is contrasted when he struggled to find out about his employment status after the onset of the pandemic.

As students were seeking "mineness" through their curricular and extracurricular choices, it was clear that their actions were dependent on institutional rules and agents. Again, engagement is a matter of both student and institutional efforts (Kuh, 2009b). The narratives of participants reflect how lived experience is indeed multilayered and largely untamed as discussed by Massey (2005). It seemed that this phenomenological

perspective of engagement being a matter of intimately lived experience is not necessarily compatible with the administrative world of ordered space. Course schedules, political relations, assignments, and the infamous pink slip were points of frustration and inhibition discussed by participants. When existing in an organizational arrangement concerned with structural absolutes, it is the student who is left to adjust and make sense of what happens next (Merton, 2011).

There were moments of spatial freedom and opportunity that seemed to be departures from ordered space. Ordered space, which I analogized to the photographic rule of thirds as explained by Maria, is concerned with a world of single trajectories (Massey, 2005). This likely means a rule of thirds centered on student persistence, resource management, and abidance by sequential course plans (Barnett, 2011; Brown, 2015; Mayhew et al, 2016). Participants presented perspectives on major and career choices that appeared to be much more integrative than the divided-up world of majors and course plans they experienced.

This contrast of integrative ways of being, juxtaposed with ordered space is reminiscent of Certeau's (1984) discussion on identifying people's natural ways of operating in space. There was much promise and excitement shared by participants when describing moments they sensed institutional mirroring to the ways they naturally operate in space. Andrew excitedly reflected such a sensation with his art history assignment on *Judith Beheading Holofernes*. Departures from the rule of thirds seem to most closely resemble the kinds of institutional efforts described by Kuh (2003, 2009b) that advance a student's engagement from desire to action.

COVID-19, as described by participants, is a projection of ordered space to an exhaustive degree. As noted by the sub-theme's title and Esther's comments on how she was not engaged during the pandemic, college was now a matter of "hand gestures and filler assignments." Devon described "college as existing here, but the real world is over there." Now, because of the pandemic, there was a strong sense of resignation and disengagement among the four participants involved in the COVID-19 interview. A consequence of the pandemic was an unexpected wake-up call from the supposition that college is a time and place separate from the rest of one's life and society. Ordered space permeated both collegiate and other spaces and inhibited both student and institutionally generated ways to be engaged.

There was a great deal of imposed order experienced by participants during the pandemic. Whether by local laws such as quarantine or the continuance of curricular activities, the spaces described were order seemed exhaustive. In ordered space, such as the kinds experienced in the wake of the pandemic, space became repetitious. In repetitious space there is a loss of dynamism and agency of local inhabitants (such as students) since the greater concern becomes that which is calculable such as assignments and staying in quarantine (Lefebvre, 1991). Ordering space, whether pre- or during COVID-19, mitigates the kind of affect, agency, and spatial freedom fondly described by participants and described by the literature as a co-requisite of engagement (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Lefebvre, 1991; Low, 2017; Mayhew et al., 2016).

Implications for Future Research

Through this study, I examined how five students understood the spaces and places related to their engagement experiences in college. I discussed findings in relation to the data, related literature, and diffractive readings. I framed the literature and data according to space and place as described by Doreen Massey (2005) and other spatial theorists. I detected “new problems” as described by Kuntz (2019). In this section I discuss these new problems and their implications for research.

Defining Engagement

Experiencing space and place is deeply contextual and unique to each person (Massey, 2005). To experience a place is to apply moral, intellectual, and aesthetic discernment to one’s surroundings (Tuan, 1977). I state this in order to suggest that engagement and involvement in college is anything but performative. The problem addressed through this study is the institutionalization of the phenomenon that is student engagement. I am concerned with the metrics-based checkbox approach that predominantly defines student engagement. Through my review of the literature, it seemed that engagement is mostly understood through time-oriented variables and the existence of particular institutional practices. (Kuh 2003, 2009b; Patton et al., 2016; Tillapaugh, 2019). These aspatial and a-temporal understandings and practices of engagement foreclose possibilities for research, practice, and students’ lived experiences. The emphasis placed on particular institutional practices and other determinants of predictive practices casts out implications of space, place, and lived experience.

There must be continued research on understanding engagement itself and not just utilizing methods that serve to justify foreclosed space (Ekowo & Palmer, 2016). In a phenomenological sense, engagement could mean very different things to different people and would certainly disrupt institutional definitions of the term. The lessons I learned from phenomenology as both philosophy and method are certainly applicable to this context. I argue that engagement, like phenomenology, is also philosophy and method. As argued throughout this study, the existence of certain institutional practices does not necessarily equate engagement. There appears to be an absence of philosophical thought on what it means to experience college through space and place. Rather, the profession-wide concern seems to be on prediction and resource justification. Such an inclination to jump straight to evidence of efficacy supports Massey's (2005) stance that governing agents tend to be more concerned with carving out particular pathways (and justifying them) instead of understanding the implications of the journey itself.

I advocate for expanded research on college students by incorporating frameworks and methods associated with space and place. While not mutually exclusive, there currently appears to be a methodological emphasis of time over space (Lefebvre, 1991). When thought of spatially, research on students and engagement becomes embedded in local and global sociopolitical relations. This broader scope moves beyond reductions of engagement as held in relation to involvement with particular collegiate practices. This study has implications for approaching student engagement, and other aspects of the student experience, as existing spatially. From the experiences described by participants, time is hardly a meaningful factor when describing involvement in

educationally purposeful ways. I remain curious as to how else engagement can be articulated through research.

As an administrator, I am particularly sensitive to the Moneyball approach towards proving that one's practices result in meaningful student engagement. As an example, success by attendance numbers typically satisfies resource justification requirements. I admit complicity in skirting around philosophical underpinnings of the student experience in order to rush towards proving outcomes based on particular practices. I am left reflecting on the work that needs to be done in order to better understand engagement as a matter of lived experience embedded in space and place. I remain equally reflective and curious how space, spatialization, and place can be applied further in higher education research.

Revealing the Institution

Through this study I discussed the role of the university and broader social structures in shaping the college student experience for five participants. The study of organizational practices is nothing new to research on college students (Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton, 2000; Tierney, 2008). In regard to student engagement, the onus typically falls on the student to act in ways that are educationally purposeful. Such an understanding can render the university as a somewhat uninvolved entity. Massey (2005) argued that hegemonic imaginations of space render certain practices and relations as being invisible. It is possible that such a phenomenon has occurred with the student-institution engagement relationship. Through my review of the literature and affirmed by the data, assumptions abound that suggest it is the student who must be engaged. The

institutional role appears to be limited to creating programs and services to facilitate engagement. Both are certainly true, to an extent. What seems notably absent from literature and research are the unspoken ways the institution may inhibit engagement and students' desires to be involved in meaningful ways (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2010; Tillapaugh, 2019).

This study's findings speak to the "up there and out there" elements of space and place, such as assuming engagement is a matter concerned with the student while the institution appears to exist ethereally (Massey, 2005). Articulating and researching elements of the collegiate ether warrant additional research. Part of coding is also coding for that which is unspoken (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). There is much opportunity through research to uncover ethereal elements of higher education. As an example, previously unknown institutional practices were revealed to participants shortly after enrollment. Each student discussed a kind of sudden clash when widely held college-going assumptions were met with the realities of navigating peer and institutional experiences. What was uncovered was how messy and bureaucratic the collegiate experience can be. Research that examines spatial assumptions can expand awareness of relational constitutions and patterns that tend to privilege those of exclusive groups with favorable kinds of social capital (Berger, 2000; Massey, 2005).

Continued inquiry is necessary in order to educate constituents of higher education, including its students, as to what kinds of creative possibilities or spatialized practices they may encounter. As supported by the data, elements of the tamed and untamed spatial certainly exist in college. With particular attention to ways space can

become perceived as ordered and synchronized, much can be understood when spatial practices are analyzed (Massey, 2005). Institutionally spatialized knowledge and practices can at times impose the global on the local, such as prioritizing engagement according to bureaucratic rules over supporting students' genuine academic interests. Another example of the global being imposed on the local is the previously discussed institutional pursuit of symmetrical space beyond the campus, which can clash with a student's desire to seek disjointed spaces and places. There are implications for research in understanding the college student experience through tamed and untamed, global and local, symmetrical and disjointed.

Massey (2005) argued that governing institutions tend to be primarily concerned with the global and oftentimes pitches itself as acting favorably for the local. Elements and narratives of the local are usually unaccounted for in spatial imaginations built on global and synchronous practices. An exemplar of this is delimiting evidence of engagement as defined by time spent with a particular practice, models of prediction, and institutional resource justifications. These are concerns of the global (Massey, 2005). The experiences and concerns of the locals (students) may not exactly be present through such testimonies.

Expanding Spaces of Engagement

There are space-based research implications from this study. I employed the works of critical geographers such as Doreen Massey to frame how the college experience is understood by participants. As reflected in my interview protocol, I was curious what the campus meant for participants. I presumed the campus to be the

geographic core of engagement. Instances of such a presumption were certainly described by participants, especially upon reflecting on the campus during the COVID-19 interview. However, as evidenced by the findings, engagement requires meaning-making and therefore cannot simply be reduced to a place. Geography and meaning are certainly connected (Tuan, 1977). The relationship between geography and meaning-making was evidenced by Andrew and Devon's desire to stay near campus during the pandemic. Or Maria's description as "the campus as gone" when she was no longer able to be involved with the places associated with her involvement. These narratives affirm what I previously stated, that the existence of place alone hardly serves as evidence of engagement.

Student engagement is typically understood as campus centric (Graham, Hurtado, & Gonyea, 2018; Tillapaugh, 2019). At best, engagement extending beyond the campus is often treated as spaces of symmetry. Studying abroad, service-learning, or internships reflect symmetry of space and place that extend the university beyond the physical campus. My findings suggest that disjointed spaces may be institutionally unrecognized places of the college experience. Though mostly unrecognized, these disjointed places and experiences may yield much educationally purposeful meaning for students. Based on this finding, I argue that inquiry on collegiate experiences can be expanded by following the student's self-described cartography through disjointed places and not necessarily centering the campus. With the supposition posited by Devon, that college exists as a kind of separation from the rest of social space and time, it is easy to contain assumptions of the college-going experience and its outcomes to the campus.

As previously discussed, the days of the integrationist Tintonian college may be gone. I did not sense a desire by participants to be further immersed with collegiate spaces and places. The exception of course was when the participants were displaced as a result of the pandemic. Generally, participants expressed a longing for separation from places governed by the university. The lighthouse frequented by Andrew during semester breaks, or Esther's home pre-pandemic suggest that there are places of respite and inspiration that may be a co-requisite for being involved in educationally purposeful ways. Further research is warranted in order to expand understandings of collegiate places not governed by the institution, as well as students' motivations of seeking disjointment from institutional governance. With an integrative approach that understands space and place as negotiated by students, future research can inquire on the co-existence of non-institutional places and spaces that also foster meaning-making.

Implications for Practice

I offer the following as potential implications for practice, particularly within student affairs. I recognize that much of these implications are framed not only by the study's findings, but my own professional experiences as well. As stated in the first chapter, administrators such as myself exist within systems where metrics and spatialized priorities foreclose ideas and imaginations of practice. Similar to the implications for future research, the following recommendations are based on the understanding that engagement is a matter of lived experience and not necessarily dependent on institutional practices.

Spatializing Untamed Spaces

Potentiality through multiplicitous pathways may become better supported by institutional agents when student experiences are understood as embedded within space and place. Supporting diverse students and their unique pathways is the credo of student affairs (Eaton, 2016; Marine, 2019). While there appears to be synergy between multiple spatial realities and the intended outcomes of student affairs practices such as caring for a student's well-being, this study's findings problematize practices and knowledge based on institutionalized foreclosure. Foreclosed practices have implications for achieving spatial equilibrium. I define spatial equilibrium as a balance between spaces and places that are tamed and untamed.

Experiences with planned extracurricular institutional activities were sparsely described by participants. It concerned me how so many student-oriented efforts through programming, resources, and communications can be so absent from conversations on meaningful moments in college. My intent is certainly not to critique particular practices or resources. Rather, I wish to call attention to administrative tendencies that prioritize the tamed spatial. There are implications for understanding institutional efforts that seem to focus almost exclusively on that which can be tamed. The tamed spatial is just one element of spatial equilibrium. As cautioned from my discussions on COVID-19, a space which is exhaustively ordered induces little desire to be engaged.

If student affairs practice is indeed grounded in supporting a student's educationally purposeful activities, this study's findings suggest we as a profession may be giving ourselves too much credit. Institutional efforts represent just one aspect of

Lefebvre's spatial triad (representations of space) and this study suggests that space is produced through other means as well. Behaviors such as seeking selective enclaves, pursuing disjointed spaces, and moving towards mineness occurred with places of engagement that at times existed on the fringes of spatialized gold standards.

There are of course political and power implications associated with taming the spatial (Massey, 2005). Administrative practice is often defined according to success metrics and resource justification (Sacks, 2007). With the aid of predictive analytics and the incorporation of programmatic safe bets such as those deemed as high-impact, success is typically defined by measures of time and in relation to particular practices. As previously discussed, time alone is an inadequate determinant of a spatial experience (Massey, 2005). Additionally, I also suggest that primarily operationalizing engagement in relation to particular activities forecloses potentiality. Foreclosed spatialized practices perpetuates the production of gold standards and practices deemed as normal. When described by participants, the ways of the university seemed to produce points of comparison more so than opportunities for meaningful engagement (Magolda, 2000).

There are legitimate reasons to continue advancing knowledge and practice that may be deemed as practices of the tamed spatial. Orientation programs, scholarship programs, and study abroad were valuable practices described by participants. There are equally legitimate reasons to recognize the engagement that exists in untamed spaces. As an administrator, it is scary to consider that we as institutional agents cannot or should not exhaustively tame students' spaces and places. Inspired by this study's findings and methodology, there are implications for understanding engagement as a matter of

relationally-driven lived experience that is not necessarily defined by institutional practices. There are relational and practical aspects that relate to untamed spatial experiences. The greatest implication in this regard is to position institutional agents, such as administrators, as locals that express the kind of meaningful interest and support described throughout this study.

Rules & Governance

Spatial frameworks are particularly useful in identifying assumptions held by constituents (Massey, 2005). This study's findings call attention to assumptions of engagement so often held and perpetuated by higher education institutions, particularly those based on residential college models. While at no point Massey refers to postsecondary institutions, I consider her text a critical read for the field of higher education. The spatial implications of governance and subjectivation are certainly applicable to the profession of higher education. Participant narratives spoke to their subjectivities in relation to their desires to be engaged. Administrative arrangements and institutional rules have notable effects on engagement outcomes (Hart & Fellabaum, 2009; Mayhew et al., 2016; Rankin & Reason, 2008). I previously discussed what appears to be an onus on students in the student-institution engagement relationship. Findings and implications on the governmental role in producing space suggests that the institution, as well as the student, plays an equally important role in promulgating an enriched student experience.

At times, the university was described as a kind of disembodied corpus from the student experience. Administrative practices may not be as benevolent as previously

imagined (Graeber, 2016; Tierney, 2008). I am left concerned and curious as to how administrative practices can at times govern through ethereal ways and reinforce a-temporal understandings of engagement. This study's findings call attention to institutional behaviors that enforce order and perceptions of synchrony. While they can be certainly useful, benchmarking and other assessment efforts can also be used as tools of spatialized synchrony and order by foreclosing places of engagement. It is possible that a student may not necessarily sense that which is promisingly conveyed in institutional reports. Program effectiveness seems to be the administrator's concern whereas a student's concern is likely informed by pursuits of meaning-making and spatial centeredness.

It would seem wise to invest future efforts in assessing and shaping practices according to spatial frameworks as opposed to limiting the existence of engagement to the presence of particular programs and practices. This study identifies "new problems" by drawing attention to the unintended consequences of the longstanding organizational desire to fix space, such as treating engagement as predictive. Through the continued spirit of *in loco parentis*, governmentality appears to exist through obsessive taming of the spatial within student affairs practices. The programmatic and resource pathways forged can oftentimes be so narrow and foreclosed that what is in turn perpetuated are golden ways of the university (Magolda, 2000). The participants' lived experiences and essences related to student engagement point towards implications of establishing practices of potential, rather than proof.

Localizing the Global

The students' experiences described in this study reflect how that which seems distant do little to garner meaning. Each participant spoke to the potent role mentors, champions, and others who expressed interest had on their journey. Spaces of meaning may be places of familiarity (Low, 2017). There are implications for understanding the role of higher education practices and relations between institutional agents and students. Institutional agents that gave impressions of a faceless bureaucracy appeared to leave a less than favorable outcome with students. The locals, who I describe as those who are familiar with institutional spaces and provided direct attention and support to students, were notably significant in transforming the global into places that are more intimate and familiar to participants.

Massey (2005) suggested that "local places, in this understanding of globalization, have no agency. The global is associated with space, capital, history, and agency when the local, conversely, is associated with place, labor, and tradition" (p. 101). In relation to this study, this is a disheartening statement which may bear some truth and inspiration for future practice. As an administrator, I often reflected on what my greatest work concerns are. Admittedly, they are typically grounded in the priorities of the global. Predominantly preoccupied by capital and resource management as well as matters of policy, it is easy to identify how my own practices have prioritized the global over the local.

If, as I have posited, student engagement is to be understood as a lived experience, then elements of the local must be preserved and expanded. Local agents and practices were not necessarily absent from participant discussions. They were however,

sensed as somewhat unique and occurring less frequently than encounters seemingly aimed at global priorities such as covering borders or producing order. This study speaks to the meaning-making potential and centeredness experienced when a participant felt local and connected with other locals. Such discourse serves as strong arguments in the defense of place (Massey, 2005).

Producing spaces and places concerned with the local is not impractical. It is about creating experiences of familiarity and agency. Promising efforts, such as mentoring and outreach programs, were spoken of favorably by participants. Localizing lived experience, according to Massey (2005), is largely dependent on properly aligned resources and relations. Administrative professionals within higher education, myself included, have proven ourselves as obsessive with resource pursuits and justification according to global standards. I am curious how spaces can be transformed if our attention turned towards placing resources, relations, and pursuits of the local.

Summarizing the Framework & Methodology

I framed this study according to Doreen Massey's (2005) *For Space*. I also positioned Massey's work in relation to van Manen's (2016) understanding of phenomenology. Each thematic chapter is also held in relation to discussions from Massey's text. Phenomenological tenets according to van Manen, as well as Massey's description of space, center lived experience and the highly contextual nature of being and processes such as meaning-making. My selected framework and methods support inquiry that counters problems associated with treating space as a series of typically unexamined assumptions.

Informed by increasingly corporatized practices, socialized imaginations of existing in particular spaces and places are built on hegemony and can contribute to singular ways of understanding lived experience (Massey, 2005). I previously provided “The” college experience and its associated imaginations as an example of spatialized hegemony. Another example, which reflects dominant assumptions of the college student experience, is the utilization of time to describe a spatial experience (Astin, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Mayhew et al., 2016; Wilder, J., 1993). Astin (1993) and Kuh (2008) likely depended on time-oriented variables in order to define campus environments. Within higher education, the emphasis on time is reflected in enrollment-year specific developmental assumptions as well as understanding if a student is engaged (or not) depending on reported hours of involvement in pre-selected activities. Sequential and time-based development, coupled with foreclosed places of engagement, cast other possibilities of lived experience to the fringes of space. Maria’s constant struggle to catch up because of her deferred enrollment exhibits the kind of comparative pressures induced in such stringent time-oriented spaces.

Representation through spatialization is another important concept from Massey’s text which frames this study. In this regard, representation is understood as “fixing things and taking the time out of them” (Massey, 2005, p. 23). Representation appears to make certain spatial experiences timeless, such as the a-temporal perceptions developed by students in the synchrony house chapter. The nostalgia and revelry often ascribed to college tailgating and football certainly abound with elements of representation (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Another example is the curated randomness of

orientation, represented in a way which may signal to students that seeking intimate enclaves is discouraged. Recall that both Esther and Ashley bypassed institutional expectations during their first days and instead sought more intimate and identity-based enclaves. The appeal of spatial representation is not unlike the outcomes of bureaucratization. Such practices appeal to the governmental desire to stabilize, capture, and predict.

As previously discussed, spatialization is the act of identifying socialized assigned meanings and representations of space (Shields, 1991). Simply stated, spatialization is the process of moving place to space. According to Massey (2005), spatialization is problematized when agencies of power implicitly and explicitly prioritize spatialized understandings as the preferred way of existing. Synchrony and order through spatialization run counter to both Massey's (2005) as well as Resnick and Wolff's (2013) argument that overdetermination ignores intimately lived experience. "A mess is a mess" (Resnick & Wolff, 2013, p. 343). To treat lived experience otherwise is to live according to the photographic rule of thirds discussed by Maria.

The greater concern of Massey's text is one that aligns with the study's purpose. Similar to van Manen's (2016) description of lived experience, there is something uniquely intimate, relational, and interpretive in the meaning-making process that renders a world of absolutes and stasis as inaccurate. As posited by van Manen (2016), "the predicament is that scientific knowledge as well as everyday knowledge believes that it has already had much to say about a phenomenon...before it has actually come to an understanding of what it means in the first place" (p. 47). Van Manen suggested that

scientific knowledge may come to assign meaning before it is even lived and interpreted.

Similarly, Massey described old chains of meaning, and the powers that accompany

them, as rendering out space as comprised of multiple trajectories:

I am calling space as the dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories-so-far. Space as the dimension of a multiplicity of durations. The problem has been that the old chain of meaning -space-presentation-stasis—continues to wield its power. The legacy lingers on. (p.24)

With space described as co-formed between person and context, and not reducible to stasis, lived experiences such as student engagement must be treated as stories-so-far, not stories-that-should (Massey, 2005).

The notion of stories-that-should reminded me of van Manen's description of essences. As discussed in chapter three, to search for an essence through a phenomenological approach should not serve to essentialize. Essentializing reflects the representational exercises and ordering of space critiqued throughout this study (van Manen, 2016). I do not posit my findings as discreet arrangements of knowledge that can then be utilized in an overdeterministic fashion. Rather, it is my hope to imagine new problems as discussed by Kuntz (2019) as well as describe what the participants and I can "see" (van Manen, 2016). "Because we are what we can "see" (know, feel, understand), seeing is already a form of praxis—seeing the significance in a situation places us in the event, makes us part of the event" (p. 130). Whether as the participant, researcher, or reader, van Manen called us to "see" so that "we can be brought to play or realize into action" (p. 130).

Van Manen (2016) described an essence as the true being of a thing. Through open-ended interviews and photo-elicitation, I sought to describe “the true being of a thing” that is college student engagement. Based on my findings, I understand the essence of student engagement to be an experience grounded in meaning-making and negotiating with space and place. Participants did not frame their experiences in a manner which prioritized time and involvement with the institution. Conversations were deeply reflective and often turned towards thinking about their own existence and outcomes in relation to the university and its practices. The reflective nature of our conversations reminded me of the Heideggerian term *dasein*, which refers to aspects of inquiring about one’s existence (van Manen, 2016).

Van Manen (2016) posited that one can seek essences by uncovering the particulars, instances, and internal meaning structures of a lived experience. The phenomenological concern with particulars suggests another way writing about essences is not a matter of essentializing. After writing the thematic chapters, I was left wondering if I succeeded in presenting a phenomenological description of lived experience. Van Manen (2016) suggested that writing itself is the tool in which we garner the previously mentioned “ability to see.” In his description of writing and the study of essences, van Manen stated that “the essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (p. 10). Geographies of borderlessness, the synchrony house, and ordering space are phenomenological descriptions intended to

demonstrate student engagement in a fuller or deeper manner as envisioned by van Manen.

Reflections on Methods

I must again acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude for the five participants who shared their time and intimate stories with me. I came to consider my experiences with participants as well as the methods I employed as more than just mechanisms for data collection. Research design and data collection are processes and therefore warrant discussion. I did not want to leave the impression that the methods of this study are a series of unarticulated “sufficient conditions” used to frame the findings (Resnick & Wolff, 2013). In line with Resnick and Wolff’s logic, there is determining power or importance associated with choices, such as those related to data collection.

My methods were anything but simple choices selected from a methodological textbook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I employed phenomenology, photo-elicitation, and diffractive readings. Much like the inseparability of the participants’ discussions from the study’s findings, my methodological choices are also interwoven well beyond discussions in chapters three and four. Findings and methods do not exist “as is” but rather are contingent on the particular choices and discussions associated with this study. As evidenced by this study’s purpose and framework, I am as concerned with processes as I am with outcomes.

I initially designed a study comprised of three semi-structured interviews and one photo-elicitation interview. During my drafting of the data collection protocols, such as the interview questions, I was often asked by peers and loved ones to hypothesize what

my conclusions would be. I imagined Doreen Massey shaming me for attempting to foreclose imaginations of space. In order to expand my potential perspectives and interpretations, I attempted to limit as much foresight as I could. Besides, at no point in the early phases of my study did I have an inkling that a pandemic would disrupt society, let alone my research. Among countless implications caused by the pandemic, the addition of a fifth interview centered on COVID-19 reminded me that research methods are comprised of choices that must be articulated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The easy choice would have been to simply conclude my study as initially intended. However, to do so would have been a remarkably extractive choice ignoring the contexts that inform lived experience (Kuntz, 2015; van Manen, 2016).

Kuntz (2015) discussed the idea of the methodological bureaucrat. Similar to administrative mechanisms of ordering space, “methodological bureaucracy relies upon research technicians for continued advancement. This is a detachment from inquiry processes and the moral values that inform them” (p. 41). The problem addressed by this study is in part a response to pervasive administrative and methodological bureaucracy and the “thingification” of space, place, and students (Kuntz, 2015). As with any interview-based study, there are elements of “thingification” associated with freezing the ever-changing meaning-making process to a series of transcripts and codes. My attempt to combat the thingification induced by an interview-based study is by presenting findings that reflect Resnick and Wolff’s (2013) messiness of processes. I presented the participant’s narratives and photographs in a manner intended to convey processes in motion that are anything but complete, fixed, and “thingified.”

Summarizing the Literature

The Production of Student Engagement

Student engagement refers to involvement in educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2009a). Those educationally purposeful activities are most usually associated to high-impact practices. Student engagement as a place-based concept was not always foreclosed to particular activities governed by the institution. Kuh (2009a) described the engagement premise as fairly straightforward and easy to understand. The more students study and get involved, “the more adept they become at managing complexity, tolerating ambiguity, and working with people from different backgrounds or with different views” (p. 5). By being engaged, a student increases the likelihood of a satisfying life after college and develops habits that enlarge their capacity for continuous learning and development (Kuh, 2003).

Built in part on Astin’s research on student involvement and the I-E-O model, the introduction of high-impact practices in relation to student engagement became empirically supported avenues of meaningful engagement (Kuh, 2009b). It seemed sensible to invest and center institutional practices which improve college impact and the student experience. However, somewhere along the way engagement was institutionalized and came to be understood as performative and distinctly linked to particular campus-centric institutional activities (Abes et al., 2019). Kuh (2003) himself warned against defaulting on high-impact practices as the gold standard. He likely made deliberate choices when referring to NSSE as “messy NSSE” or often using the term “potentially” as a preface to the term “high-impact practices” (Kuh, 2003, 2009b).

Despite words of caution from Kuh and other scholars such as Lange and Stewart (2019), it seemed that engagement became spatialized in a manner that privileged foreclosed and institutionally selected activities. Similarly, the primacy of neoliberal concerns with accountability and reporting resulted in centering assessment efforts according to time-oriented variables (Lange & Stewart, 2019; Sacks, 2007). Proof of practice in the name of demonstrating performance seemed to overshadow proof of engagement. This shift associated involvement as primarily concerned with specific institutional practices, rather than a student's development and meaning-making experience. Calls for accountability, competition for limited resources, and the constant concern with proving college impact all signal towards student engagement becoming primarily concerned with resource justification (Brown, 2015).

I consider student engagement to be a phenomenon that extends well beyond proof of practice and instead centers on lived experience. A phenomenon refers to the objects and events as they appear in one's experience (van Manen, 2016). There are developmental gains and opportunities for generating meaning when one is engaged (Kuh, 2003; Mayhew et al., 2016). Unfortunately, it seems that the nature of meaning-making and development have become abstracted through administrative practice and ordering space. The campus does not simply appear. Neither does a student's engagement in college. Engagement, with the meaning-making and development outcomes ascribed to it, must be understood beyond input and output measures. As evidenced by this study's participants, student engagement is a process that is produced by both student and institution.

With student engagement understood as a process, pressure to change in the name of perceived institutional norms were certainly present in this study. The tyranny of brunch and turning down a job offer because of conflicts with one's identities according to relatives reflect pressures experienced by participants. Integration, socialization, orientation, or other processes of acclimation are terms previously described by the literature to describe the development and transition experience. Participants certainly described adjustments in behaviors and attitudes in order to acclimate to the ways of the university (Braxton, 2000; Magolda, 2000).

Maria encountered critiques of involvement as "unpaid labor," Esther spent years with a particular hairstyle, Devon repeatedly described his adjustment as a "struggle," and Andrew came to understand his fraternity as a matter of obligation rather than engagement. Their experiences were held according to time-based pressures. Esther and Ashley were "missing out" their freshman year. Maria felt behind because of deferred enrollment. The ways of the university, at least as experienced by participants, seemed to establish time-based behavioral norms. Time according to spatialized four-year norms seemed to produce synchrony, not engagement.

Another aspect of student engagement described by students was the nature and implications of perceived closed space and markets. Mistakes by participants were often interpreted as falling behind (Brown, 2015). As particularly discussed in the synchrony house, the comparative norms of the gold standard created a kind of pressure that turned students' attention to what they should be doing rather than reflectively and critically engaging in what they are doing (Baxter Magolda, 2001). These experiences reflect the

power of normalization and forming a specific subjectivity in relation to space. While participants seemed to have ultimately achieved spaces of increased mineness, it seemed that much of college is embedded in spatialized theyness (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Heidegger, 1962).

Recent critical perspectives on student engagement also call into question the institution-centric treatment of student engagement (Tillapaugh, 2019). Postsecondary institutions continue to enroll increasingly diverse students while also encountering changing student and family expectations of the institution (Mayhew et al., 2016). The consumerist “what’s in it for me approach” to college may support the need to orient engagement as something more than a campus-centric approach, and affirm experiences associated with meaning-making and developmental outcomes (Sacks, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2018). Recent scholarship on engagement supports this claim since findings suggest that to be engaged means involvement in a community, garnering a sense of belonging, and developing personal and professional critical thinking skills (Mayhew et al., 2016; Tillapaugh, 2019). Outcomes such as these are certainly noble and worth advancing through pedagogical and administrative means. However, the ability to achieve these outcomes are anything but universal and cannot be completely curated or predicted by a university.

Much like space and place, student engagement appears to be produced through both intimately lived and broader social contexts (Low, 2017; Massey, 2005). While institutional practices certainly play a role in advancing the student engagement experience, it is ultimately the individual who experiences space and generates their

meaning (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kuh, 2009b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Engagement as a matter of lived experience means that achieving the outcomes of educationally purposeful activities are not necessarily dependent on a series of planned programs and activities. As previously discussed, student engagement cannot be reduced to a place-based understanding, as spatial elements inform experience and meaning-making.

I certainly am not calling for the reduction or discontinuation of important practices of student engagement such as orientation or advising. Through this study, I recognize that such efforts are critically important platforms for potential engagement. Engagement, however, is not exclusively determined by the existence or participation with institutional practices and limited to the campus gates. Ultimately, it is up to the student to experience collegiate spaces and places and generate the kinds of outcomes posited by Mayhew et al. (2016). This in turn likely means that no campus office, student advisor, or curated event such as the campus tour, can alone produce a particular outcome such as engagement (Resnick & Wolff, 2013). At best, institutional agents and administrative arrangements can produce opportunities for engagement to occur. But, if engagement is to be understood in relation to space and meaning-making, then it is the student who must live through the experiences related to college and “educationally purposeful activities” and garner their own meaning and developmental gains.

The Production of Space & Place

In my introduction to the literature review I referred to my interest in a cable TV biopic on Albert Einstein. According to the program, the scientific community mostly

assumed that the ether, an invisible and undetectable substance, carried energies across space (Einstein, 1909). The ether was a neutral and invisible element. I drew parallels between the ether of the physical world and ethereal elements of college student environments. Assumptions that inform an ethereal backdrop of student engagement speak to the study's research problem. When a process, such as student engagement or meaning-making, is extracted from space and all its politically-laden nuances, then the treatment of such a process returns to the realm of the ether (Massey, 2005). Ethereal treatments advance hegemonic social assumptions and preferred ways of being. Gold standards sensed by student participants represent exactly the outcome incurred when space goes unexamined. Drinking, spending money, and not making mistakes were gold standards discussed with participants. Through this study, I argue that rather than a neutral ether, the student experience exists in space that is charged by sociopolitical elements.

I framed student engagement through a spatial lens posited by Doreen Massey in order to discuss the seemingly invisible assumptions and practices that normalize engagement as predominantly a matter of place-based institutional performance (Brown, 2015; Lange & Stewart, 2019). Elements of the “up there and out there,” or matters that appear to simply exist “as-is,” tend to construct dominant socialized understandings related to lived experiences in particular settings (Massey, 2005) Consider, for example, “the ways of the university” pondered by Magolda (2000). Magolda's campus tour ethnography engaged with theorizing the genesis of “the ways of the university” and how they came to be and communicated to its constituents. Informed by my study's findings

and the literature, I concluded that the primary way the particulars of space are communicated are through representational practices (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005).

The goal of representation is to fix and stabilize (Laclau, 1990; Massey, 2005). In higher education, this means organizing (and appropriately funding) practices built on predictive information and analytics (Abes et al., 2019; Ekowo & Palmer, 2016; Sacks, 2007). According to representational logic, it is important to fix practices and presumably produce a student typology that exchanges with such practices. Doing so would generate politically favorable institutional engagement practices on an annual basis. I am reminded of Lefebvre's (1991) description of repetitious spaces which are produced in order to defeat uniqueness and prioritize calculable outputs. Through the representational business of laying out knowledge and behavior in a particular manner, the production of space seems to be concerned with synchrony, not multiplicity (Massey, 2005). The primacy of course scheduling denying engagement, increased exams during crises, and the shock of a Black woman portraying a carnivorous plant point to experiences related to spatial representation.

Early literature of student involvement and engagement suggested that students dedicated to educationally purposeful activities were more likely to accomplish outcomes of college such as persistence, intrapersonal development, and subject matter competence (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2003; Mayhew et al, 2016; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Perhaps because of growing concerns with accountability or the desire to offer practices that promulgate involvement and persistence, engagement now seems to be mostly inseparable from very particular institutional practices (Brown, 2015; Kuh, 2009a;

Lange & Stewart, 2019; Sacks, 2007). Engagement held in relation to foreclosed practices mirrors administrative concerns and a place-based treatment of environments. Through spatial representation, the greater concern becomes establishing the path through policy and practice. The journey, which represents that which is lived and sense by a person, becomes the secondary concern (Massey, 2005).

Representations of space are one element of Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad. He dubbed representational practices as theories of planning. Theories of planning are reflected in institutional practices which seem to drive narrow administrative understandings of engagement. Lefebvre (1991) described theories of planning as potentially dominant, passively experienced, and usually unexamined. Defining engagement according to particular institutional practices would be an exemplar of defining space according to one dimension of the spatial triad.

The previously discussed orientation programs and student employment programs serve as examples of theories of planning. These are institutionally planned initiatives with intended outcomes. Then there are the outcomes as lived and identified by the students who experience collegiate spaces and places. For example, Devon's student employment experiences most certainly aligned with institutional goals. He provided logistical support while gaining mentoring experience and support from administrators. Consider, however, how his perspectives and meaning changed when he was suddenly laid off and could not access information about his employment status. Such an example highlights how engagement is more than a place, but experienced in space as well as the relations that existed in Devon's employment shaped his experience and subjectivity.

I must emphasize that the simple existence of offerings, which is a place-based assumption, centered on engagement does not necessarily warrant evidence of engagement. To do so would reaffirm space as solely understood through theories of planning and existing only in places. In the business of conceptualization and representation, it seems that evidence of programming, rather than evidence of meaning-making, constitutes engagement. In addition to theories of planning, the other two elements of Lefebvre's triad must also be considered when spatializing student engagement.

The second element of the triad, lived practices, embeds engagement as a matter of lived experience as discussed throughout this study. When engaging with representations of space such as practices, a person's imaginations, impressions, and meaning are formulated (Lefebvre, 1991). It is this second element of the spatial triad, lived practices, where I advocate for continued attention when researching engagement. In student affairs dialect we may call lived practice a developmental outcome. Given the nature of lived practices according to Lefebvre, I caution my colleagues that we must resist foreclosing outcomes according to our desired departmental performance goals. Outcomes of lived experience are produced by experiencing place or that which is intimately lived (Tuan, 1977).

I also advocate for the third element of Lefebvre's triad, underground spatial practices. It is in this arena where multiple experiences and imaginations of space are produced, but hardly recognized by representational practices (Massey, 2005). Magolda (2000) noted the existence of sanctioned and unsanctioned ways of the university.

Underground spatial practices represent spaces of the unsanctioned. Esther and Ashley, by engaging in their selective approach to making friends based on shared identities, likely engaged in an unsanctioned practice. They both received grief from institutional agents for their efforts, yet considered such efforts to have meaningful outcomes through friendships and meeting peers with shared identities (Chang et al. 2010; Tillapaugh, 2019). Esther and Ashley's examples reflect a kind of counter-conduct and positioned themselves with agency in their college transition.

“So long as there is multiplicity there will be space” (Massey, 2005, p. 91). An organization in power, such as a university, will never be able to annihilate the inherent characteristics of space as multiplicitous and simultaneous (Massey, 2005). Moreover, space cannot be fully ordered and tamed. With this in mind, it seems wise to spend less time perpetuating gold standards associated with college and instead expand opportunities for those who find engagement with underground spatial practices. Esther's experiences and photographs offer a lesson in underground spatial practices. Esther served as this study's negative case. She was not involved in the traditional ways indicative of a traditionally defined highly engaged student. Esther's accounts of her college experience suggest that just like her more institutionally involved peers, she too gained developmental and meaning-making gains as a result of experiencing collegiate spaces and places.

Esther represents a loose end. In fact, all participants represent loose ends. Loose ends are a real challenge to representational practices and structures (Massey, 2005). It is tempting to engage in inquiry and administrative practices that “leads one into thinking

that vertical distance lends you truth” (p. 107). Massey went on to suggest that “perhaps science should itself open up to a little undecidability” (p. 115). Undecidability may be a troubling stance since such a suggestion appears to settle on the notion that “a mess is a mess” (Resnick & Wolff, 2013). Thinking spatially is indeed messy. “Space can never be definitively purified” (Massey, 2005, p. 95). Understood through Resnick and Wolff’s (2013) discussion on overdeterminism, “we tell the nature of being. However, that power is also an illusion, for the mess that is being has not disappeared because we as humans invoke/invent an ordering of it in our thinking (produced story)” (p. 345).

A Diffractive Conclusion

I enjoyed engaging in diffractive readings and encourage continued use in research. Diffraction, which again refers to “the reading of data through multiple theoretical insights,” inspired multiple understandings, perspectives, and implications (Mazzei, 2014, p. 742). Mazzei suggested there may be ceaseless variations of possibilities when engaging with diffraction. I found this to be particularly true when re-engaging with texts I thought I was familiar with. The nature of diffractive readings and discussions should leave a rhizomatic sense of thought and action *ad infinitum*. This is certainly where I find myself at the present moment.

In the spirit of diffraction, I continue to consider the study’s findings in relation to one another. While this is also a step in the IPA process (Smith et al., 2009), findings held through a diffractive lens point towards multiplicity, ambiguity, and incoherent subjectivity (Mazzei, 2014). Mazzei mirrors Massey’s (2005) sentiment that space is never fixed nor should be understood as complete. When synthesized, this study’s themes

advance research on student engagement by embedding participants' experiences with the production of space and place.

People go about experiencing, producing, and negotiating space (Low, 2017; Tuan). For students, spatial experiences influence the pursuit of achieving one's goals and garnering meaning (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Strange & Banning, 2001). Institutional practices do not seem to always align with the envisioned goals of the student experience (Braxton, 2000; Ranking & Reason, 2008; Sacks, 2007). The super-ordinate and sub-themes point towards two major spatial characteristics that must be understood in future inquiry and practice. The first characteristic is the dynamism of lived experiences as described by students. Participant descriptions reflect lived experience as always in movement. Consider, for example, the longing to step away from campus and pursue disjointment. Such a longing was reversed when the campus no longer was accessible. Experiences and space are always subject to reinterpretation and multiplicitous outcomes, such as relationships with the campus itself pre and post-pandemic.

The second major spatial characteristic is the constant negotiation of spatial production centered on fixity, synchrony, and order. To experience space is to experience movement and constant reinvention (Massey, 2005). Collectively, the super-ordinate themes speak to the nature of movement and in turn combat intellectual and administrative efforts of foreclosure and reductions of experience to simply place-based. In the literature, student experiences are typically described by movement. Student development theories tend to be based on movement-based models such as vectors, phases, being, and advancing. However, as evidenced by this study's findings, movement

cannot be defined by person and time alone. Space and meaning matter and are also in states of motion (Massey, 2005; Tuan, 1977). Similarly, movement cannot solely be observed by the distant observer as being a phenomenon that simply exists within a place. Movement also occurs at institutional levels. This is to say, much like students, institutions and spaces also “become.” Experiencing places and spaces, and spatialization at individual and institutional levels, appears to itself be a diffractive experience.

Spatial experiences are multiplicitous and subject to reinvention since lived experience is anything but overdeterministic (Resnick & Wolff, 2013). Consequently, as discussed throughout this study I propose that efforts centered on fixity do little to foster meaning-making and engagement with students. Massey (2005) described the production of space, and assumptions of fixity, as akin to riding a train. It may appear that movement is confined to that which is guided and ordered by the tracks. The tracks offer order, with movement occurring according to their direction. However, that which is presumed to be fixed must also be considered as existing in motion. The carriages of the train are not the only thing in motion. Space is altered by participation, even when an organization or individual appears fixed or considers oneself as such (Massey, 2005).

The description of a train as a collection of participatory movement reminded me of my first passenger train experience while visiting my sister in Europe. The images that remain in my memory appear to be fixed. The newspaper on the floor, the mother chastising her son with colorful language, the cramped conditions because of track repairs and a reduced schedule, and endless green pastures out the window served as vignettes to a particular time and place. I presumed it was just the train to be the object in

motion. Since that day, in my mind the newspaper is still on the floor, the track is still under repairs, and that poor child is still getting it from his mother. When understood spatially, I see that experiences such as this one are matters of entangled stories which are all in motion. Given the implications of hegemony on space discussed throughout this study, it appears that the luxury of institutional power and privilege is to influence assumptions as to what is fixed, and what is moving.

While the train is moving, so too is everyone and everything else. Much like a train, student engagement is often framed with a particular destination in mind. Institutionally defined outcomes may suggest that movement is defined by the tracks and the coaches that follow them. Whether it is a train or a student, movement does not always traverse along a predictive place-based surface. Surfaces in the aspatial sense are usually clean, discreet, and translated to overdeterministic variables (Resnick & Wolff, 2013). The highly relational and entangled manner in which space is negotiated suggests that much more than the train's coaches are in motion. Movement occurs across interwoven trajectories (Massey, 2005). While initially fixed in my mind, the newspaper is gone and the other memories of that particular train ride have gone along their own paths of movement. The places and spaces we once encountered will not be fixed in stasis.

We cannot hold places still, go back to where we have been, or arrange trajectories in exhaustively spatialized ways (Massey, 2005). I call attention to student engagement through a spatial framework in order to address the ways perceptions of borderlessness, synchrony, and order influence the lived experiences of this study's

participants. Space and place are comprised by an integrative throwntogetherness that results in diffractive pathways and outcomes (Massey, 2005). Much like the train ride, the students were not the only ones in motion. Engaging with understandings of space and place reveals new problems and implicates the institution and other social relations as active agents in producing space (Kuntz, 2019).

As evidenced by this study's findings and discussion with related literature, students negotiated their experiences and desire to be meaningfully engaged within spaces and places. There appeared to be a longing for spatial freedom from comparison, theyness, and fixity. "Place is security, space is freedom. We are attached to one and long for the other" (Tuan, 1977, p. 3). Tuan reflected on the longing for centeredness in space and overcoming the complacency of comfortable place-based stasis. It may seem natural to ground inquiry and practice on place-based prediction and fixity. Familiarity through foreclosure yields comfort and predictability for some. This is, however, in conflict with the nature of live experience and the possibilities that are unique to each student. Massey (2005) excitedly envisioned space existing with infinite possibilities. "On the road map you won't drive off the edge of your known world. In space as I want to imagine it, you just might." (p. 111). While it may be tempting to reduce students' experiences with particular places as points along predictive pathways, there is foreclosure in these efforts. Much like Maria's discussion of photography, much can be learned, sensed, and experienced when spatializing places to spaces and moving beyond the rule of thirds.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Participant Referral Email

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Ivan Ceballos and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at Florida International University. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting an interview-based research study to understand the meaningful spaces and experiences related to an undergraduate college education. I am recruiting full-time senior (4th year) students who have resided on campus for a minimum of two academic years.

Participation in this study will be comprised of four 60-minute interviews to be conducted over the course of a six-month period. Participants will also be asked to share photos related to their self-described meaningful experiences in college. If you are aware of any students who qualify and may be interested in participating, I kindly ask that you forward this email to those individuals.

Participation is voluntary and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate or withdraw from the study. Confidentiality of all participants will be maintained. The data will be kept secure and password protected.

Any additional questions regarding the project can be directed to me (iceba006@fiu.edu) or Dr. Daniel Saunders (dsaunder@fiu.edu), who serves as the Principal Investigator of this study. Thank you for your time and consideration in suggesting qualified participants.

Respectfully,

Ivan V. Ceballos Jr

Appendix B. Participant Recruitment Email

Dear _____,

Thank you for expressing interest and willingness to participate in this study. My name is Ivan Ceballos and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at Florida International University. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a research study to understand the meaningful spaces and experiences related to an undergraduate college education. I am recruiting full-time senior (4th year) students who have resided on campus for a minimum of two academic years.

If you would like to participate, or would like to learn more about the study and your role as a participant, I will gladly arrange a meeting in order to discuss further and review the informed consent document. The time, date, and location of the meeting is at your discretion.

As a participant I will ask you to do the following and will be scheduled over a six-month period:

- Participate in three one-hour long interviews about your college experience.
- Share photos that reflect your meaningful moments in college and participate in a one-hour interview to discuss the photos.

Participation is voluntary and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate or withdraw from the study. No compensation is available as a result of participation in this study. Confidentiality of all participants will be maintained. The data will be kept secure and password protected.

Any additional questions regarding the project can be directed to me or Dr. Daniel Saunders (dsaunder@fiu.edu), who serves as the Principal Investigator of this study. Thank you for your time and consideration in suggesting qualified participants.

Respectfully,

Ivan V. Ceballos Jr



ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
Student Engagement in Relation to Space and Place: A Phenomenological Study

SUMMARY INFORMATION

Things you should know about this study:

- **Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to understand the places, relationships and experiences most meaningful to undergraduate college students.
- **Procedures:** If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in four interviews. You will also be asked to share photos related to the study's purpose.
- **Duration:** This will take about one hour each session, or four hours total. The interviews will be spread out through a six-week period.
- **Risks:** The main risk or discomfort from this research is minimal.
- **Benefits:** There are no benefits available to you as a result of participation in this study.
- **Alternatives:** There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study.
- **Participation:** Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please carefully read the entire document before agreeing to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the context in which undergraduate student engagement occurs. Specifically, the purpose is to identify and describe the places, relationships and experiences most meaningful to undergraduate college students.

NUMBER OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of up to ten people in this research study.

DURATION OF THE STUDY

Your participation will involve a total of four interviews, each lasting up to one hour in length. The interviews will be scheduled over a six-week period.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a participant questionnaire. The questionnaire collects information related to the study such as major, gender, and areas of campus involvement.
2. Participate in three question and answer interviews. Each interview will be scheduled for one hour. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.
3. Participate in the photo collection activity. Submit a minimum of ten photos related to the research question and purpose of the study.
4. Participate in a fourth interview which will serve to discuss the photos submitted.

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS

This study poses no more than minimal risk and discomfort. The risk in participation in this study is no greater than that which is encountered in routine conversation or daily activity.

BENEFITS

The study has no direct benefits to you. The results of this study may be informative for scholars, administrators, and policymakers in higher education by informing the experiences related to student engagement and its related outcomes.

ALTERNATIVES

There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study. Any significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private and will be protected to the fullest extent provided by law. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher team will have access to the records. However, your records may be inspected by authorized University or other agents who will also keep the information confidential.

USE OF YOUR INFORMATION

- Identifiers about you might be removed from the identifiable private information and that, after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you or your legally authorized representative.

COMPENSATION & COSTS

There is no compensation for participating in this study. There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

RIGHT TO DECLINE OR WITHDRAW

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. You will not lose any benefits if you decide not to participate or if you quit the study early. The investigator reserves the right to remove you without your consent at such time that he/she feels it is in the best interest.

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about the purpose, procedures, or any other issues relating to this research study you may contact:

Ivan V. Ceballos Jr.
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IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like to talk with someone about your rights of being a subject in this research study or about ethical issues with this research study, you may contact the FIU Office of Research Integrity by phone at 305-348-2494 or by email at ori@fiu.edu.

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study. I have had a chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me. I understand that I will be given a copy of this form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix D. Photo-Elicitation Instructions

For this part of the interview, I ask that you take pictures that answer the prompt “Moments and places that have influenced my college experience.” We will then meet for a 45 minute to 1-hour interview to discuss the photos you took. Below are the guidelines for this activity.

- Please take digital pictures of places that have been influential to your college experience. This can include actual places as well as images from magazines, digital/social media, and other aspects related to the question. Please do not take pictures of people as it is important to protect identity and privacy in this study. All photos will be collected and discussed during our interview. Please do not take photos of illegal activity as I would be obligated to report it.
- Please take up to ten photos. You may take more if you wish.
- A Dropbox folder link will be sent to you. You can upload images to the folder.
- All images will be stored in a password-protected folder and will not be shared.
- Please contact me at i.ceballos@miami.edu if you have any questions.

Appendix E. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

General Overview
<p>The purpose of these interviews is to understand the student engagement and spatial experience of participants. I seek to understand the meanings and outcomes from engagement with the experiences and settings described. These questions serve as prompts for conversation. Follow-up and clarifying questions may be asked during the interview. Potential follow-up questions are listed in italics. The questions are intended to be open-ended in order to gain authentic responses free from researcher influence.</p>
Research Question
<p>How do a group of undergraduate upperclassmen students who have lived on campus a minimum of one year understand the spaces and places related to their college education?</p>
Introduction
<p>Thank you for taking time to have a conversation with me. I will be asking you questions about places related to your college experience and their meaning. I will make every effort to ensure your information and identity is protected. I will also use a pseudonym which you may choose if you wish. This conversation will be recorded and transcribed. Remember you are free to skip a question, refuse to answer, or discontinue the interview at any time.</p>
Interview 1: Focused Life History

The purpose of this first interview is to tell me as much about yourself as possible.

Think about stories and significant moments in relation to your college experience.

You may go as far back in your life as you wish.

Interview 1 Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself.

- a. Is there a specific or vivid memory that you have about your family or youth that stands out to you?*
- b. Where are you from?*
- c. How would you describe your family background?*
- d. How would you describe the town or neighborhood in which you grew up?*
- e. How would you describe your educational experience before college?*
- f. You mentioned _____, please tell me a little more about that.*

2. How did you learn about college?

- a. When did this occur?*
- b. How did this inform your understanding of college?*
- c. How accurate have these impressions been?*
- d. What impact has this had on you so far?*
- e. Where did these messages come from?*

f. Before getting to college, did you know anyone who went to college?

What did you learn from them?

g. What was missed, that you should have known?

3. How did you decide you were coming to college?

a. Talk me through your decision to come to college.

b. Is there a moment in which you recall this happening? Please share.

c. Did you consider any alternatives?

4. Growing up, is there an experience that stood out to you in relation to your understanding of college? Can you describe that experience?

a. Who was involved?

b. What relationship did you have with them?

c. Where and when did this occur?

d. Please tell me more about _____.

e. Did this understanding change over time?

f. What makes this experience so significant?

5. Walk me through the decision-making process that led to your chosen major.

a. What are your career goals?

b. Has your major changed? Do you anticipate it changing?

c. What is your understanding of this major?

d. How does this align with your career aspirations?

6. Describe a place related to college that means something special to you.

Can you talk about a recent experience there?

- a. What is significant about this place?*
- b. Who is present? Who isn't?*
- c. What role has it had on your experience?*
- d. You mentioned _____ please tell me more about that.*
- e. What have you learned from this?*
- f. How has this impacted your college experience?*

Interview 2: The Details of Experience

This interview will focus on details related to your college experience. I will ask you to talk about places and experiences in as much detail as possible.

Interview 2 Questions

1. What has your college experience been like?

- a. How does this compare to what you anticipated before college?*
- b. How has it changed throughout your time in college?*
- c. Can you share a moment that reflects your college experience so far?*
- d. Is there something missing, that you thought would be part of the college experience?*
- e. What kinds of surprises have you had in your college experience?*
- f. Who has been involved in your college experience?*

- g. Where have you lived? Please share a story that reflects what that experience was like.*

2. In what places, related to college, have you spent your time?

- a. How has this met or been different from your expectations?*
- b. Where do you feel you've "had to" spend your time? What was this like?*
- c. Where have you wanted to spend more/less time?*
- d. Where have you enjoyed spending time? Please share a specific memory related to this.*
- e. What were you doing during these times?*
- f. How did you learn about these places?*
- g. What do you consider when choosing where to spend time? Or not to spend time?*

3. Could you talk about where you feel most welcome or comfortable? How about where you do not feel welcome or comfortable?

- a. How do you go about choosing where to (and where not to) spend your time?*
- b. How did you learn this?*
- c. Did someone or some event influence this? If so, please describe.*
- d. Do you see this changing?*
- e. Did you anticipate this?*

f. How have these experiences influenced your overall college experience?

4. Based on your experience, what are the rules of college?

a. Who sets these rules?

b. Are they formal or informal? Where did you learn this?

c. Do you follow these rules?

d. How have knowing/abiding by these rules (or not) made you feel?

e. What purpose do these rules have?

f. How do you think your peers interpret them?

g. Can you provide me with an example?

h. How have these rules changed over your time in college?

Interview 3: Reflections on Meaning

Today we will talk about the meaning behind the places you described. Specifically, I want to learn more about what you have gotten out of those places.

Interview 3 Questions

1. What have the places and experiences you have previously described meant for your college experience?

a. What has the personal impact been?

b. What has the _____ impact been?

- c. Of the previous moments and places shared, which are the most important and why?*
- d. Do you see any connection between these experiences and significant “aha” moments for you?*
- e. You previously mentioned _____. Please tell me more about that and what meaning you got from it.*
- f. What moments have mattered the most in college?*
- g. What moments have mattered the least in college?*
- h. Years from now, which moment or experience will you remember most fondly?*

2. Given the places you described, how do you understand being involved in college?

- a. How did you get involved with _____?*
- b. Where do you feel you have to be involved?*
- c. Where do you like to be involved?*
- d. What motivates you to be involved with _____?*
- e. Please share more about your involvement with _____.*
- f. What involvement experiences will inform the rest of your college or professional experience?*

3. Where have the most significant forms of learning taken place for you?

- a. Did you anticipate this?*

- b. What did you learn from _____?*
- c. What learning has been most meaningful?*
- d. What have you learned that is worth it?*
- e. What have you learned that is not worth the time?*
- f. Who do you tend to learn from?*
- g. What role has _____ person played in your learning?*

4. How has your understanding of college changed over your time as a student?

- a. What was your first impression of this institution? Is there a story related to that experience you can share?*
- b. How has that impression changed over time?*
- c. How have these impressions influenced you?*
- d. Do you think your identity has had any role in your experience? If so, how? Please provide an example.*

5. How have these places prepared you for your future?

- a. What have these places meant for you personally? Socially? Academically? Professionally?*
- b. How does this compare to what you anticipated before college?*
- c. What places haven't prepared you for the future?*

6. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview 5: COVID-19 Follow Up Interview

The purpose of this interview is to describe your experience adjusting to college due to the Coronavirus pandemic. My study is about how a group of undergraduate upperclassmen students experience the spaces and places related to college. Given the abrupt and significant changes you have experienced, I would like to revisit the ways you experience college and make sense of the ways you've adjusted.

Questions

1. Please tell me about your experience transitioning to remote learning.

- a. In what ways has your college experience changed?*
- b. Please share a recent experience that reflects your new reality.*

2. What have these recent events, and the changes you have experienced, meant for you? For your college experience?

- a. What is missing in the way you now experience college?*
- b. What remains the same?*

3. Currently, where do you spend your time? With whom do you spend your time?

- a. Please share a recent experience with this place? With this person or people?*

4. Under these new circumstances, how are you experiencing college?

a. *What are you doing or engaged in when you are experiencing college?*

b. *What are you no longer doing or engaged in?*

5. Based on your recent experience, what do you think is valued by your institution?

a. *Please share an example.*

b. *What should be valued by your institution at the present moment?*

c. *How would you know if this is valued?*

VITA

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2007-2009	Graduate Assistant Fraternity & Sorority Life The Pennsylvania State University
2009	Graduate Fellow American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education
2009	Master's in Education College Student Affairs The Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania
2009-2011	Assistant Director for Student Life Office of Student Life Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland
2009-2013	Executive Board Member Latin@ Network American College Personnel Association
2011-Present	Various Positions. Promoted to current role of Executive Director, Residential Life in 2019 Department of Housing & Residential Life The University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida

SELECT PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Ceballos, I. (2020). *A New Framework for Understanding Student Engagement*. Paper presented at the 44th Annual ASHE Conference, Portland, OR

Ceballos, I. (2020). *Focused Assessment. Focused Practice* [Conference session]. SEAHQ 2020 Conference, Louisville, KY.

Kolek, E., Ceballos, I., Taylor, J. (2020). *Examining the Social Networks within How College Affects Students: A Bourdieuan Analysis*. Paper presented at the 44th Annual ASHE Conference, Portland, OR