Chasing Vertical: Diversity and Recognition in the field of Graphic Design

A thesis submitted to the School of Visual Communication Design,
College of Communication and Information of Kent State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

by

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June, 2017
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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my appreciation to my adviser Sanda Katila. Sanda, over the past year and a half, you've been more than kind enough to extend your patience and wisdom. I would like to thank my thesis committee members: Jessica Barness, Larrie King and Ken Visocky-O'Grady. Your continued support and guidance during my graduate experience has seemed without measure. To my wife, Angela, and my two sons Noah and Ezra, thank you for continuing to motivate and push me through it all. I love you each unconditionally. To my cousin, Neville, thank you for always encouraging me to be great. And to my mother, to whom I dedicate my degree, thank you for all of your sacrifices. Without you all I wouldn't be here today.
CHAPTER 1

Does Design Fail to Attract African American Students?

As a child, in complete admiration, I would often watch my mother draw. My mother, a quiet woman who seldom spoke, was often more expressive with her sketches than her words. My mother, a Jamaican immigrant, avoided subtlety and left nothing for interpretation. Her sketches, however, were quite nuanced and adventurous.

Many of the characters she drew would vary in feature and expression; her drawings would also differ in landscape and geography. Through these sketches, I was able to glimpse how my mother observed our community in the borough of the Bronx where she raised my two siblings and me.

As time progressed, I began sketching and sharing my illustrations hoping to impress both my mother and elder cousin. They both were instrumental in pushing me to utilize my talents as a vehicle to achieve the American Dream.

My family members subscribed to the idea of America as the land of milk and honey: the illustrious melting pot. For this reason, they left a small island paradise so that their children could have a chance at American success. Subsequently, I was inspired to attend secondary schools which specialized in artistic training, and competed in local and national competitions, eventually earning a partial scholarship to the Cleveland Institute of Art, where I would graduate with a BFA in Digital Media.

My childhood in New York City made it hard to envision a world where anything short of the diverse prototypical “melting pot” existed, so my undergraduate experience in Cleveland, Ohio was a rude awakening. Many of my classmates, who came to
Cleveland from rural mid-western towns, met their first person of color in the form of...me. In turn, they participated in some of my first experiences that contextualized the feeling of being the proverbial “other”.

I recall one particular experience as a freshman when I was working in an art studio alone one morning. To pass the time, I played music over the stereo. Some of my classmates began to trickle in. Since many of them enjoyed the music, it ignited conversation. Some of the students asked me who I was listening to, and I told them that I was listening to the hip hop group The Roots. As she was grooving along, perplexed, one of the female students said, “It sounds good...I guess I just cannot relate to the music because I have never been shot.”

The song, “Seed 2.0”, was a tribute to music legend Muddy Waters and his belief that rock and roll music descended from the blues. The song didn’t suggest any illicit or violent behavior, but her statement clearly showcased her implicit bias. Within one short sentence, my colleague lumped all rap music into a single category: criminal activity. Furthermore, she implied that only those criminally involved could relate to the music, and implied that there was an inherent connection between African Americans and criminality.

Later in my semester, in one of my foundation courses, I as well as a few other students asked the professor what we could do to gain extra credit on an upcoming assignment. We were tasked with creating a body sculpture made from plaster.

While the males in the class had varied hair lengths and styles, I was the only male of color with an afro. To the best of my knowledge, I was also the only student
whom the professor told that shaving his head to create a plaster mold would help improve his grade on the assignment. My colleagues told me that they were informed that additional torso molds would suffice for the extra credit.

Another formative experience: as one of the few students of color on a predominately White campus in inner city Cleveland, I was stopped more frequently by campus police as I headed from my dorm to other campus facilities.

During an attempt to visit a friend in a nearby dorm, a few White students and I were let into the building by passing students. An officer rushed into the building, pulled me from the crowd, and demanded I show him my identification. When I asked why I was being stopped, he stated that he hadn’t seen me use the university issued key card to get into the building. Of course, the other students hadn’t used theirs either, but he ignored them and honed in on me. He pointed out that it was campus policy for all guests to wait to be admitted to the building by their host.

The officer then asked me if I was a student on the campus, and I replied yes. He asked if I was telling the truth, and I said yes. He then demanded that I not only provide him with my student identification, but also my state ID and social security number so he could then verify.

As I reached for my wallet to hand him my identification, the officer pointed towards another student waiting at the door for their host. The officer took my information, then asked me to let open the door for the host-less guest. The officer then verified my information and let me go.
These interactions illustrated to me the level of discomfort those within my immediate surroundings had both with me, or perhaps with their perceptions of who I was. While many of my classmates prepared for class by packing or unpacking their supplies, I had to unpack and navigate the weight of my blackness in a homogenous space.

My freshman year at The Cleveland Institute of Art, I was one of five Black students at the school, one of four the following semester, one of two my junior year, and the only Black male of the five-year program to walk across the stage during graduation.

A recent article by NPR explored the narrowing mortality gap between Whites and African Americans. The report found that African Americans in their 20s, 30s and 40s are living and dying with chronic conditions that are typically seen in older populations (Stein, 2017).

The phenomenon known as "weathering" was referenced as a contributing factor. Weathering is when a person develops signs of premature aging and an earlier deterioration in health. Weathering can be caused by a variety of factors, one such factor is encountering the stress of racism on a regular basis (Stein, 2017).

Stress as an effect of racism is an observable thing, and as such, it has certainly affected minority students such as myself.

The lack of black and brown faces concerned me especially considering the Cleveland Institute of Art was on an urban campus, in a city that happens to be 53.3% Black or African American, and 33.4% Hispanic/Latino (U.S. Census, 2016). Interestingly, a mile down the road is the Cleveland School of the Arts, which provides a
robust art program to students in the sixth through twelfth grades, and better reflects the city’s current demographic.

During my time at the Cleveland Institute of Art, I had the luxury of assisting Professor Danny Carver at the School of the Arts. In class discussions with senior students, I noticed that several talented students had no intention of pursuing a career in a design-related field. Many of these students expressed interest in pursuing psychology, sociology, business, or engineering. Each of these fields draw on dramatically different skills than those they nurtured between sixth and twelfth grade.

This experience with the students, in addition to the isolation I felt while pursuing my bachelor’s degree, sparked the questions: does design appeal to minority students? Is there a cultural disconnect between the field and minority applicants? How can we better attract a diverse selection of students?

In the greater scheme of things, why does diversity matter? In his book *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, Scott E. Page argues that diverse teams are more innovative and perform at higher levels. He also suggests that Individuals who identify differently can often produce variations in ways they process and organize information. These differences can, in turn, result in the benefits of new ideas, more debate and, ultimately, better business decisions (Page, 2008).

Page makes the argument in closing: “when we meet people who think differently than we do, ..., we should see opportunity and possibility. We should recognize that a talented ‘I’ and a talented ‘they’ can become even more talented we.” (Page, 2008).
Through this thesis, I used design research methods to investigate what African American students viewed as priorities when they chose a major. The intention was to better understand why design has failed to attract African American students, and to understand what can be learned from the success other fields have had in developing a diverse population.

The primary method of research consisted of various interviews with college graduates, working professionals, undergraduate students and other stakeholders, each of whom participated in the process of guiding students through college. My intent was to gain a firm understanding of how the various programs target and influence their prospective students. Other methods of research consisted of a series of surveys and card sorts among college freshman and sophomores, with the goal of understanding what factors students prioritize when choosing a major.
CHAPTER II

Secondary Research

On May 17, 1954, the landmark case of Brown vs. the Board of Education declared establishing separate institutions for black and white students to be unconstitutional.

Since Brown vs. The Board of Education, implementation of the new law as well as the very topics of diversity and inclusion have resulted in much debate. While segregation legally died several decades ago, and each subsequent generation has been more diverse than the former, the American populace has continued to struggle.

Despite the growing number of minority students entering college, their numbers are not reflected in design-related fields. This issue has received much attention since the 1991 AIGA summary report "Why is Graphic Design 93% white? Removing barriers to Increase Opportunities in Design" (Mitchell-Powell, 1991).

This article reported that among graphic designers in the field, 2 percent are black, 4 percent Hispanic, Latino, 6 percent Asian, and 2 percent other (AIGA, the Professional Association for Design, & Brenda Mitchell-Powell, n.d.). While this article is nearing the 30-year mark, in 2012 as written by Jessica Cumberbatch Anderson in her article "Black Designers Still Fight for a Seat at The Table—Are They Finding Success?" The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) reported that while 103,000 students enrolled in art/design-focused bachelor of fine arts programs in the fall of 2010, only 3,600 (3.5%) of the enrolled students were black non-Hispanic (Anderson, 2012).
Furthermore, data collected from a 2017 U.S. Department of Labor report outlined that of 899,000 designers only 5.1% were working African Americans (“Employed persons,” 2017). This number was also down from 5.4% in 2013. Each statistic functions as a reminder that over a 30-year window the growth of black representation within the field has been minor at best. Which leads me to the questions, “why” and “what is the solution”? 

If minority students are now entering colleges and universities, in much larger numbers than ever before, why is their presence not felt in the field of design? And what other areas of study could be drawing their attention? 

In my preliminary research, I chose to cast a wide net in an attempt to find factors which contribute to the lower number of African Americans represented in the field of Graphic Design. During that process, I first established an understanding of structural constraints that may influence the decisions of African American college applicants. Some of these Structural constraints included cost of college application, tuition, and access to art classes prior to college. This was necessary to properly compare their motivations to their early 90's (or Generation X) predecessors.

This comparison may make it easier to recognize strategies that could improve African American recruitment to the field of graphic design.
Who are the Millennials? The Current Generation of College Students, the Future of our Workforce

With a growing percentage of Baby Boomers retiring annually, and the number of Millennials entering the labor force continuing to grow, Millennials who outnumber Gen X'ers will soon control the largest percentage of the workforce market. Millennials are better educated than their predecessors. This is measured by the total number of degrees acquired as well as by the number of college graduates (Buckley, Viechnicki, & Barua, 2015).

Where education once promised to produce a good middle-class life, the rising cost of school combined with a slow labor market has made prospects bleaker. The current job market appears to require ever more education to secure increasingly meager wages.

Millennials are also more diverse than older generations. Today, 44.2 percent of Millennials are persons of color, the level of diversity is only projected to increase, as the 2010 U.S. Census data projects that by 2043, the United States will become a majority-minority nation for the first time. While of course there will be several variations among different racial groups, no one group will make up the majority (Buckley, Viechnicki, & Barua, 2015).

The non-Hispanic white population is projected to cap in 2024 at 199.6 million. However, unlike other race or ethnic groups, its population is expected decrease by nearly 20.6 million from 2024 to 2060. The African American populace is projected to increase from 41.2 million to 61.8 million, and the Hispanic population will more than
double, growing from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128.8 million in 2060 over the same period (Buckley, Viechnicki, & Barua, 2015).

**Black Millennials: College Degrees and Preferred Majors**

African Americans have seen steady progress in regards to both high school and college achievement. African American women have made the most gains as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (“Status and Trends,” 2010).

Over the past 25 years, the cumulative number of adults in degree-granting institutions increased among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics/Latinos. Per the National Center for Education Statistics, the overall Black college enrollment grew from 943,000 to 2,269,000, expanding the percentage of overall African American enrollment from 10 to 14 percent (“Status and Trends,” 2010).

A current report from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce has found that black students were far more likely to choose majors that focus on “intellectual and caring” fields. To be more specific, black students tend to gravitate toward areas like early childhood education and social work. Income potential in these fields is typically low and may not reflect students’ years pursuing higher education. These majors, while lower-paying, happen to be of great social value, states Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the Georgetown Center and coauthor of the report (Carnevale, Fasules, Porter, & Landis-Santos, 2016).
Where are African American Students Receiving their Primary and Secondary Education?

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, during the 2013–14 school year, there were 5.4 million students, (approximately 10 percent of the kindergarten through twelfth grade population) who received private elementary and secondary education (“Private School”, 2017).

Morris (2014) found that Black youth make up 7 percent of children in private Catholic schools and 11 percent of other conservative Christian Schools. Black youth make up 10 percent of all students in secular private schools and 21 percent in secular special education schools. 7 percent of National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) boarding school students are black (Morris & Muhammad, 2014).

Currently, 16 percent of the students who are enrolled in American Public Schools happen to be African American. The largest percentages of publically educated African American live in the south. In the South, African American children compose 24 percent of the public school population, 16 percent of the public school population both in the Northeast and Midwest, and 6 percent of the student population in the West (Morris & Muhammad, 2014).

In 1954, the milestone verdict in Brown v. Board of Education began the dismantling of separate and unequal school systems. Despite the social advancements made during the Civil Rights era in regard to desegregation, schools have been quietly resegregating. Federal data released by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the sixty-second anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education shows that high-poverty
schools serving primarily African American and Hispanic/Latino students have doubled in number between 2001 and 2014 (Better Use of Information, 2016). Poor students, Black students and Hispanic/Latino students are becoming increasingly isolated from their white, affluent peers in the nation’s public schools, according to the same study.

Often, students who are isolated in high-poverty schools do not receive the same access to opportunities as do their peers. For example, high-poverty, majority African American, and Hispanic/Latino schools are less likely to receive a full range of Math, Science or Art courses as their counterparts. These schools are also more liable to use expulsion and suspension as disciplinary tools (Better Use of Information, 2016).

Morris (2014) found that 46 percent of African American students attend predominantly Black schools. 42 percent of African American students are taught in high poverty schools. 29 percent of African American students attend predominantly white schools, and 39 percent of African American students are educated in intensely segregated schools, where the student bodies range from 90-100 percent students of color. (Morris & Muhammad, 2014, p.9)

Battling Bias

In a 2014 MSNBC segment about disproportionately white police forces serving diverse populations, a heated debate erupted between former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Georgetown professor Michael Eric Dyson.

The debate took a controversial turn when Mayor Rudy Giuliani asked why people were protesting the killing of unarmed Ferguson, Missouri teen, Michael Brown,
instead of protesting black-on-black crime. Mayor Giuliani not only argued that Blacks kill 93 percent of Blacks, but also insisted that the presence of White police officers would not be necessary if Blacks weren’t killing each other.

During the same segment, Giuliani insisted that the circumstances of Michael Brown’s death only reflected a small percentage of bad policing. He then suggested that the focus of concern should be on black on black crime rather police brutality.

"The Fact is I find it very disappointing that you're not discussing the fact that 93% of blacks in America are killed by other blacks. We are talking about the exception here. We are talking about the significant exception. 93% percent of blacks are killed by blacks; I would like to see the attention paid to that that you do to this, and the solutions to that. It is hardly insignificant; It is the reason for the heavy police presence in the black community. 93% percent, it's because of the high level of crime."

Giuliani's brief statements communicated that police brutality in communities of color were isolated instances not worth concern, and described black on black crime as the constant terror we all should fear. His statements also suggested that issues of police brutality, and specifically, the shooting of unarmed men, were the collective responsibility of African Americans who hadn’t worked hard enough to bring the numbers of homicides down (Terkel, 2014).

Since reaching a peak in the early 90's, violent crime has been on a historic decline, seeing rates the lowest they have been since the 1970's. For instance, New York City, home to one of the country's largest populations of African Americans, went from

This number has not been adjusted for population growth; it reflects only the numbers of murders and non-negligent manslaughter reported ("New York Police Department (NYPD) Stop, Question, and Frisk Database, 2006," 2006).

Additionally, the U.S. imprisonment rate has also declined. According to reports from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, since 2000, the incarceration rate for African American women has decreased by 47 percent, whereas the rate among White women has increased by 56 percent, which narrowed the racial disparity between incarcerated women by two-thirds (Humphreys, 2016).

Giuliani is far from the only person whose perceptions counter the improvements in African American communities. Individuals such as Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, Tomi Lahren and other much farther-right figures have all used their soap box to perpetuate similar perspectives at one point or another (Cganemccalla, 2016; Humphreys, 2016; Martinelli, 2016; Reilly, 2017).

Through Mayor Rudy Giuliani’s eyes, African Americans were not victims of mistreatment, but rather social deviants who needed to be kept in line. Mayor Giuliani’s words not only ignored that White victims were killed by White assailants at similar percentages, that violent crimes in urban communities have been on a historic decline, but continued the perception that African Americans are inherently dangerous.

Nationally, several police departments (including but not limited to Ferguson) have been investigated for their use of excessive force, or violations of civil liberties. Each finding
suggests the use of police force is most frequently excessive in instances that involve African American and Hispanic-Latino citizens, implying bias.

While sharing these statistics may seem tangential when considering recruitment for the field of design, if addressing these issues happen to be priority for minority students how (if at all) has the field of design attempted to address these concerns? Does failing to address these issues put the field at a disadvantage?

**Effect of International Enrollment on the Number of Seats Available for Minority Students in American Universities**

As the populations of Eastern nations continued to grow beyond their universities’ capacity to educate, American institutions have been on the receiving end of some of the overflow. Students who have traveled from various countries have paid higher tuition rates than their domestic counterparts and have had less need for scholarship or financial assistance.

American universities have been educating a growing number of international students, as reported by the Institute of International Education. The “Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange,” report found that one million international students studied at American institutions in the 2014-15 school year. Based on this trend, one might conclude that the growing number of international students attending American universities has impacted the number of seats available to minority students ("Open Doors 2016 Executive Summary," n.d.).
However, while the overall number of international students studying in the United States has increased, the number is still a fraction of the overall population of college attendants. I was not able to find evidence to suggest that international student enrollment was a hindrance to Black students interested in pursuing design.

**Effects of Cuts to Government-Funded Art Programs on Minority Student Interest in Design**

One of the earliest ideas I explored was the possibility that post-recession funding cuts for art programs could have influenced the number of minority college applicants to designer related degree programs.

Per a 2013 Bloomberg News report, during the 2008 -2011 school years, many school districts nationwide had to make tough cuts. Teachers were laid off, which increased class size. Extracurricular activities, summer school, field trips, and courses not required for graduation were cut or scaled back. Some schools even moved to a four-day work week. In many of these instances, art programs were partially or completely eliminated from school districts (Crawford, 2013).

Even though art programs were cut nationwide, schools with higher collections of impoverished students or minority students suffered the most. According to 2008 data from Americans for the Arts, African American and Hispanic/ Latino students were two times less likely to have access to art programs in their school districts compared to their White peers (Metla, 2016). Furthermore, the rates of African American and Hispanic/
Latino students who received art education while in school were in decline long before the 2008 recession.

In 1992, just over half of African American 18-24 year olds received art education in childhood, while in 2008, only 26.2 percent had access to art classes in schools (Metla, 2016). As a result, some institutions of higher learning have adapted by creating programs geared to supply a steady stream of students to their colleges (Anderson, 2012). The Pre-College Preparation Scholarship Program at the Parsons School of Design in New York, which has connected with students in their sophomore year of high school and provided them with full scholarships. In Philadelphia, The Charter School of Architecture and Design has offered students 80 minutes of coursework each day, centered on architecture and design. Other institutions such as the New Bridge Academy Center for Arts and Technology in Pittsburgh, or the Manchester Bidwell Corporation in Cleveland, have continued to provide a dynamic assortment of creative courses year round for underserved populations (Anderson, 2012).

The data I collected suggest that long before the 2008 recession, inadequate funding in urban schools may have been impacting Black student enrollment in design programs. Additional questions evolved: Did most Black design school applicants come by way of pre-college art classes? If so, was this unique for creative fields, or were other majors finding methods to attract and convert undecided minority students to their majors?
Black Students Valued Social Returns on Investments

Some have assumed that there has been a low incentive to enter creative fields due to a misconception that creative fields have not offered profitable outlets. However, this idea was disproved by a recent Georgetown study that suggested that while African Americans represented 12 percent of the US population, they were underrepresented in the number of degree holders in college majors associated with the fastest-growing, highest-paying occupations. In fact, African Americans were highly concentrated in lower-paying majors (Carnevale, Fasules, Porter & Landis-Santos, 2016).

Per the Georgetown study, African Americans tended to be strongly represented in majors with the lowest salaries. African American students largely selected ten majors in college. These majors were Health and Medical Administration Services, Human Services and Community Organization, Public Administration, Sociology, Criminal Justice and Fire Protection, Computer and Information Systems, Human Resources and Personnel Management, Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, Pre-Law and Legal Studies, Philosophy and Religious Studies. Most of these areas of study led to careers in which the earning potential was less than $65,000 annually (Carnevale, Fasules, Porter & Landis-Santos, 2016).

In contrast, per the Design Census conducted by Google and the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), the average salary for a designer in all locations at all seniority levels in all industries was $67,424. The average salary varied for African Americans, who across all genders in all locations at all seniority levels was $62,888. The average salary was $67,584 for African American males, $59,015 for African American
women and $51,298 for Black / African American, non-binary/third gender people (Design Census Results, 2016).

The fact that the earning potential for African American design students happened to be slightly higher than those who chose a career in one of the majors mentioned above suggested that interest in that array of fields was not primarily about income.

**Conclusion of Secondary Research**

Harris-Perry (2013) argued that political involvement is a part of a larger fight for recognition, despite the fact that when most people have considered politics, they have often thought only of voters, party affiliations, protesters, elections, public policy and so forth.

Since African Americans have always had to grapple with assumptions about their character and identity to protect their true selves, or to secure validation as citizens, then the internal, mental, emotional and personal experiences of African Americans were inherently political (Harris-Perry, 2013).

The work of a designer has been centered largely on “the hows”. How to use software, how to organize information, how to work with printers and so forth. The focus has been on ways to solve commercial problems for customers while overlooked, perhaps, has been the immense influence designers may have on culture and society. Artifacts produced by designers have been intended to be seen, but designers themselves have often been invisible contributors to the flow of everyday life. In many ways, this anonymity has mirrored the African American experience, or the fight for recognition.
Design has become a dispassionate profession distant from ethical or political values. The field has trained students to view themselves as passive apolitical arbitrators of the message between client and audience, rather than as advocates for the message or cause (McCoy, 2003).

In the clear majority of projects, professional designers and students have placed a heavy priority on the corporate economic sector, and less emphasis has been placed on social needs. Since graphic designers have functioned as handlers of both content and context for the population at large, the omission of social need and prioritization of corporate advancement can be viewed as a political choice.

Harris-Perry (2013) referenced a post-Second World War cognitive psychology research study on field dependence. The study investigated how people locate vertical alignment within a space.

Subjects were placed in a crooked chair in a crooked room and then asked to vertically align themselves. To the surprise of the researchers, some of the subjects could be tilted as much as 35 degrees while under the assumption that they were aligned vertically, while others could get themselves more or less upright regardless of how crooked the room. Harris-Perry (2013) then suggested that when confronting issues of race, African Americans have been standing in a crooked room.

The great thinker Friedrich Nietzsche once shared the idea that every man is either a hammer or an anvil (Mgge, 2010). That is to say a man has either molded society or has been molded by society. Could the general silence of design practitioners regarding social issues have contributed to the field’s inability to attract African
American students who remain disadvantaged in most categories? Is it possible that African American students have chosen professions that are more directly assisting them in locating vertical in the crooked room?
CHAPTER III

Social Science Interviews

The goal of this study was to interview African American subjects with diverse career aspirations in Social Science and Design related fields. In interviews, I determined each subject’s long-term career goals and investigated what each found enticing about their career path. Using this information, I intended to do a comparative analysis to the goals and interests of the general design student cohort.

Introductions

The initial step was to reach out to various schools of sociology within Northeast Ohio. Three undergraduate students from Kent State University, a professor of psychology from the College of Wooster, and two practicing community organizers from the city of Cleveland all made themselves available for interview.

Designers also made themselves available for interviews. Four graduate students from Kent State University, a senior at Cuyahoga Community College, an undergraduate design student at Kent State University, three graduate students at Kent State University and a professor of design at Kent State University were involved. In addition, current host of Revision Path, an award-winning weekly interview podcast that focuses on showcasing some of the best Black graphic designers, also participated.
**Students Were Inspired to Acquire Knowledge to Effect Social Change**

Patrick Ferguson, a sociology and child psychology double major at Kent State University, was interested in better understanding communities at large. As one of a handful of African Americans from the suburb of Rocky River, he wanted to find a way to bridge the growing racial divide he observed between Black and White students.

Don'Tayeja Barnes, a Criminology and Justice Studies major at Kent State University wanted to better assist children who were involved in the criminal justice systems. Barnes was encouraged in this course of study by her mother. In addition, she was also motivated by her observation of harsher sentencing and abuses of power against African Americans. Consequently, she sought out majors that she felt would best equip her to advocate for people of color.

Zenobia Bell studied at Carnegie Mellon where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. From there she received both a Master of Arts degree in African American studies and a Juris Doctor degree from The University of California, Los Angeles. She is now a practicing attorney who has represented children in abuse or neglect cases.

When asked about what inspired her to become a lawyer she stated that her goal has always been to get involved in politics. She expressed the belief that politicians hold power to make the world better, so she chose majors that would best position her to impact change through politics.
Students Chose Majors Based on Their Direct Experiences in Culture

Janayia Thompson, a Psychology major at Kent State University, expressed an early interest in the human mind. She voiced a desire to help marginalized groups. She specifically expressed a sincere desire to assist those who had a mental illness, who she felt were not given proper attention or empathy.

Thompson later explained when she was young, her mother was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia and began to suffer with depression. She detailed not only how her mother's depression impacted her, but also how her father’s inability to understand her mother's condition inspired her to enter field of psychology.

In her words, “I have always wanted to help people, but there is a difference between wanting to do something and actually experiencing it. You can always see someone with a mental illness and choose to help them, but coming home to Mother who suffered from a mental illness was a major factor in my decision.”

Ryan Clopton-Zymler received his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Ohio University, as well as a Master of Science. in Social Administration from Case Western Reserve University. He currently works as the community relations coordinator for the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland.

Ryan's first-hand experience with mental illness came by way of a sibling who suffered from depression. Clopton-Zymler was largely drawn to study psychology because he felt it would help him contextualize his experiences with his sibling’s depression.
Social Science Student Experiences of Diversity and Inclusion

Don’Tayeja Barnes felt that there was a healthy blend of people from various backgrounds taking courses in her field. Barnes also felt that courses specifically dealing with issues within African American communities were inclusive.

Indigo Bishop experienced very little to no diversity in her high school experience. She experienced class diversity, but was one of three African American students in a class of 52. Indigo experienced higher levels of diversity in her undergraduate experience course at Case Western University than she previously experienced at Laurel School for Girls.

During Patrick Ferguson's interview, he expressed that the diversity level in the classes specifically related to his major was not very high, but there was a willingness to explore issues surrounding race.

Janayia Thompson explained that her psychology courses were not very diverse, but noticed greater diversity in the supplementary classes that closer related to issues within the African American community, for example Criminal Justice courses.

Ryan Clopton-Zymler explained that as a practicing professional he has seen diversity in the positions that require the most emotional investment, however, he noted that the diversity stopped at management levels that happen to have less direct interaction with the people being serviced.
Students Developed Interest in Fields of Study Through Early Exposure

Barbara Thelamour, a Doctor of Philosophy from Michigan State University, was exposed to the study of psychology her junior year of high school. She described her instructor as an innovator who used film and literature to connect psychology with everyday life. Janayia Thompson and Don’Tayeja Barnes also expressed taking an introductory psychology course in high school. Thompson expressed a regret that she had not had more exposure to her field at an earlier age. Her early experience was limited to a one year course where half of the course material covered psychology, and the remaining material covered sociology. None of the subjects interviewed had received much career advice from their high school guidance counsellors.

Would Students be Intrigued by Design Projects Intended for Social Good?

Each subject interviewed expressed a deep desire to create some form of positive social change. This desire was expressed as a key motivating factor in each subject's career ambitions. Having noticed this trend, the principal investigator introduced design projects that focused on utilizing design for social good. The primary project proposed was a Kent State University collaborative project with Rule29. This collaboration was initiated by Kent State Associate Professor of Visual Communication Design in the Graduate Studio course, Ken Visocky O’Grady.

Rule29 is a Chicago based design agency, founded and directed by Justin Ahrens. Recently, Rule29 has collaborated with Life in Abundance, a Kenyan NGO which has helped to train, equip and empower local churches to serve the poor (Ahrens, 2017).
Through the Kent State/Rule29/Life in Abundance collaboration, students in the Master of Fine Arts program were able to spend a semester researching health care, literacy, and malaria in Kibera, a slum outside Nairobi, Kenya. The team developed, tested and refined a set of cards aimed at identifying common symptoms of malaria in order to aid practitioners in treatment.

The collaborative project was described to the students and professionals in our interview control group. They learned how graphic design was utilized to service and potentially save the lives of people in an at-risk community. They were then asked the following: if these types of design projects were described to you before declaring your major, would it have sparked your interest? Surprisingly, all subjects responded affirmatively, and stated that a key motivating factor in their career choices was the potential to help others. Based on this information, it seems that some African American students may choose a career path because of the social value it may offer. If field leaders communicate how they can contribute to the community through their work, African American students may be more likely to choose majors in those fields. During the ethnographic study section of this thesis, we will explore how various majors describe their fields and courses.

**What Other Majors Did Students Consider?**

Both Janayia Thompson and Don’Tayeja Barnes separately expressed prior interest in becoming veterinarians. When asked to elaborate on why they were interested in helping animals, the subjects explained they felt a sincere desire to help animals
because animals are voiceless and vulnerable. Thompson then explained that she is allergic to some pets, so she searched for other careers where she would be better suited to help the vulnerable and voiceless.

**Card Sort Methods**

To gather information about the interview subjects’ priorities in choosing a major or career path, the principal investigator gave each subject four cards, each labeled with four categories that the subjects were required to organize from most to least important. The four categories presented on these cards were Money, Diversity and Inclusion, Impact, and finally, Fun and Creativity.

Money was defined as salary. Diversity and Inclusion were defined as a diverse representation of people and a welcoming culture within the core group that the subject would work or study. Impact was defined as the subject’s ability to use the vehicle of their major or career to create social change. Finally, Fun and Creativity were defined as the subject’s freedom to be expressive and to try new things.

70 percent of the subjects interviewed said that the ability to impact communities in need would be a top priority when choosing their major, and would continue to be a top priority when deciding a career. 70 percent also listed money as the lowest priority when choosing a major or future career. 86 percent of the people interviewed placed money in the bottom half of the four possible options. Only one person placed impact in the lower half, and in all the interviews, the ability to impact was never listed as the lowest priority.
Conclusion to Social Science Interviews

The interview notes suggested that the way subjects were inspired or motivated toward a career path could be best described by three distinct modes: enthusiastic, direct exposure, and indirect exposure. The enthusiastic mode described a student impressed by the tutelage of a former instructor. The experience of having had class with that instructor has ingrained a deep love for the subject matter taught, and the related field. For these students, the experience with a specific teacher, played a huge role in how they would later choose a major in college.

Subjects who fell into the direct exposure category were individuals who had identified a disruptive issue and had developed a deep desire to find a way to contextualize their experiences. These students searched for classes whose descriptions they felt best connected with them on a personal level. For example, a student who battled mental illness, or has had a close family member who had, may have elected to take a psychology course dealing with mental illness.

Subjects included in the indirect experience category had not been directly affected by social issues, but were aware that they and other people of color were disenfranchised. These students became aware of the existence of social injustices through conversations with neighbors, reading news articles, television coverage, or personal research. These students were tied to seeking solutions rather than being tied to
any particular major, and chose fields which they perceived as being the most effective to bringing about change.

None of the subjects interviewed had family members who worked in the field they chose, none of the subjects interviewed were guided to any particular major by counselors in high school. The majors they chose and the courses they took in college were chosen based on personal investigation. Most subjects interviewed placed value on the ability to create change, over the ability to make large sums of money.
CHAPTER IV

Graphic Design Interviews

Introductions

Kayla Shine, James Yarbrough, Vanessa Okojie and Larrie King are graphic design students who each came to love painting, drawing and design through art courses. While working as an artist, Mahlon Rhodes graduated from Kent State University with a Bachelor's Degree in English. He then pursued a degree in design in order to enter a field that provided a steady income and also permitted him to better utilize his talents.

The Pressure of being an Ambassador, the Sunken Place, and Attempts to Challenge the Gaze of Peers

While the designers interviewed had varied experiences with the lack of diversity in the field, one constant experience that emerged in the interviews was that each designer had to navigate the tension of being a minority in a homogeneous environment.

Particular points of difficulty for students in diverse communities were the reality of being “other” in the classroom, and dealing with majority student perceptions of marginalized groups.

The students who grew up either with a greater level of diversity, or attended schools with predominately African American and Hispanic/Latino students expressed having a relatively more difficult time adjusting to the lack of diversity in their design courses.
On the other hand, African American students who grew up in predominately white schools felt the lack of diversity in college design courses wasn't a major issue for them. Since there was never an experience of diversity in the academic setting, being the only, or one of few African American students had become normalized to them.

Vanessa Okojie, a design student from Nigeria, described being the only black student in most of her undergraduate design program.

She explained that coming from Nigeria, she never had to consider race, but the lack of diversity in her classroom highlighted her difference. She described how she often felt that she was acting as an “ambassador” for all Black students. Due to the pressure of that role, she felt it necessary to silence herself and downplay her sense of agency in order to prevent her otherness from becoming a disruptor of the classrooms’ standard culture. The emotions and actions she expressed in some ways parallel the “sunken place” motif made famous in writer-director Jordan Peele’s horror satire “Get Out” (Peele, 2017).

In the film, the ‘sunken place’ was a brainwashing technique that left an unsuspecting African American victim in a state of internal paralysis. The technique separated the consciousness of the victim from his or her control of their physical body. The technique rendered the victim voiceless, in an internal struggle, attempting to regain autonomy, while others would guide the experiences of the victim's body.

The concept functioned not only as a metaphor for the history of slavery, (an institution that kidnapped, trapped and stripped millions of their free will) but also for the use of social nuances and micro aggressions that enforced socio-political hierarchies.
"The Sunken Place means we're marginalized. No matter how hard we scream, the system silences us" (Peele, 2017). The film emphasized two key methods used to draw the film’s main character, Chris, into the sunken place. They were the perception of failure, and isolation (Moses, 2017).

Some African American students, when they have transitioned to predominantly white institutions, have felt that they are made to carry the perceived failures of all African Americans. Several things about design in particular heighten this issue for African American students. First, design inherently involves a state of failure until a solution to the problem at hand is discovered. Secondly, the design process involves a series of public critiques. In combination, the sense of being an “ambassador”, and the particular weight of failure inherent in the design process may have made African American design students feel it was necessary to quiet their voices in order to succeed.

During his interview, James Yarbrough revealed that he floated between public and private schools for the bulk of his childhood. He felt very lonely as he transitioned between diverse settings and settings devoid of diversity. He called it a feeling of immediate separation and isolation, and experienced discomfort as he attempted to avoid being stereotyped.

In design classes, Yarbrough felt that he had to work harder in order to avoid being overlooked. Kayla Shine also described her fight to be noticed in design classes where she was the lone African American student.
Sturken and Cartwright have written that social relationships and meaning are negotiated through our gaze. Persons have sought to bring attention to themselves to gain recognition and influence (Sturken, 2017).

Parnell Herbert is a Hurricane Katrina survivor whose experience was recorded in the book *Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent City and Beyond*. Parnell recounted her surprise not only at the number of African Americans in New Orleans who owned large American flags, but by the number of African Americans who found it necessary to use flags as a method to signal their support of US military forces. (Ferdinand & Penner, 2009).

While the survivors could have used white sheets or bloodstained towels, African Americans in New Orleans waved their nation's flag in an attempt to counter public perceptions of them as looters. This may also have suggested a direct claim of citizenship and belonging.

While the plights of hurricane survivors and graphic design students may seem quite disconnected, there is a point of connection. Both attempted to draw attentions to themselves to negotiate social relationships and influence their circumstances.

**Students Who Have Transitioned from Other Fields to Design**

During his time as a teacher, Alan Walker was introduced to design thinking though IDEO’s book, *Design Thinking for Educators*. Alan became interested in how design and design thinking could be applied strategically in combination to provide solutions to a wide variety of issues. Given his specific expertise in the humanities, he
voiced an interest in seeing how his background could be utilized to enhance user experience design.

James Yarbrough began his undergraduate experience as a business major. He later began to feel that the he was not free to express himself in the business school environment. As a male of color, he felt he had to watch the tone of his voice and the clothes he wore, in order to keep his colleagues comfortable. He chose design because he felt that although he would still have to tailor his person, he might be more able to express himself in his work.

Maurice Cherry majored in math, and received a graduate degree in tele-marketing communications. His love for technology at a young age established a love for design, but his undergraduate school did not offer design. He continued to explore design principles on his own, and eventually began working in the field years later.

**Card Sort Methods**

To better understand what the design interview subjects prioritized when choosing a major or potential career choice, the principal investigator gave each subject four cards with four categories that they were then required to organize from most to least important. The four categories presented on these cards were Money, Diversity and Inclusion, Impact, and finally Fun and Creativity.

Money was defined as salary. Diversity and Inclusion were defined as a diverse representation of people and a welcoming culture within the core group that the subject would work or study. Impact was defined as the subject’s ability to use the vehicle of
their major or career to create social change. Finally, Fun and Creativity were defined as the subject’s freedom to be expressive and to try new things.

In contrast to the social scientist who took part in the research, 33 percent of the designers interviewed chose Money as a top priority when choosing a major or future career. 70 percent of the subjects interviewed selected money in their top two priorities, while one third listed it as the bottom category.

Among the designers, the Diversity and Inclusion category was given the lowest priority. 70 percent of the subjects interviewed placed diversity and inclusion at the very bottom of their selection, 100 percent of the subjects interviewed placed diversity and inclusion in the bottom half.

A third of the designers chose Help and Impact as a top priority, 70 percent of the designers placed Help and Impact in their top two priorities. A third placed Help and Impact on their bottom half, with only one subject choosing it as the least important subject.

Similarly to Help and Impact, a third of the designers choose Fun and Creativity as a top priority. A third places Fun and Creativity in their bottom two categories with no one placing it at the very bottom.

**Conclusion to Graphic Design Interviews**

The interview notes suggested that the subjects interviewed could be described by three distinct categories: the lifelong creative, the convert, and the stability seeker. The lifelong creative was a student who had grown up in a suburban community and received
years of formal art training. For this student, art was all they had known, and once enrolled in college they sought the most professional method to express themselves.

The convert was a student who transitioned to design while still in undergrad or re-enrolled in a graduate program to receive a master's degree in design. This student was drawn to the field of design either through experience with another designer, exposure to literature that discusses design thinking or through the perception that they could achieve more creative freedom as a designer than in their former field.

The stability seeker was a student who had experienced more financial hardships than the lifelong creative. This student may have come from a single parent home, and may also have come from a poorer section of town. The priority for this student more than anything was to find a major that allowed them to do something they enjoyed, and that would grant them financial security. The stability seeker was more likely to have had issues adapting to being “other” in a homogenous space.

In contrast to African American students who pursued a social science field, Community Impact and Diversity were less of a make or break for design students. Their pursuits were more self-benefiting and less sacrificial. While the ability to help others was not shunned, the ability to be creative or to make a reasonable living was found to be more important.

The differences in what these students prioritized when deciding on a major could be key to understanding why design fails to attract more African American students.

The average subject interviewed received more exposure to creative fields during primary and secondary school than they did the social sciences. It’s possible, then, that
the lack of diversity in design fields could reflect a failure to show how design principles could address issues that interest this particular community. It is possible that this explains why African American students are better represented in social science occupations.

Per the Bureau of Labor Statistics, African Americans represent roughly 22 percent of working social and human service assistants, 19 percent of all community and social service occupations, 20 percent of working counselors, 23 percent of working social workers, but only 5 percent of working designers.
CHAPTER V

Surveys

Introduction

The purpose of this portion of the study was to verify or debunk the information gathered during the interview process. This survey asked more specific questions about the subjects’ background information in addition to questions about attracted them to their field. The survey concludes with a card sort which requested that each subject prioritize what mattered most to them as they decided upon a major.

Students who were unable to participate in the initial round of interviews were given the social science survey and, were also asked to share the survey with others within their networks.

Other groups surveyed included: first year typography students at Kent State University, and first year design students at Cuyahoga Community College. The design survey was also opened to white design students in order to understand how priorities and backgrounds varied between African American and White design students.

Kent State University - Freshmen Graphic Design Students

Out of 15 students, eight grew up in middle-class households with incomes ranging from $100-000 - $149,000 annually. Five out of 15 students grew up in working class households, with incomes ranging from $32,500-$60,000. Eight of the 15 students grew up in the suburbs, three of the 15 grew up in rural communities, four of 15 grew up in urban settings. Nine out 15 of these students surveyed were White; three of the 15
were Black, two of the 15 were Hispanic/Latino. Ten of the 15 students were male; the remaining five were female students.

All the students surveyed had taken art classes in high school. On average, each student received 4.8 years of art training. Seven of 15 students received fewer than 4.8 years, three of the 15 received three years or less experience, while three separate students noted that they had received more than 4.8 years of art training.

When considering a major, nine of the 15 students prioritized the ability to be creative or expressive. Three of 15 chose the ability to facilitate impact for in-need communities as their top priority, and two chose salary potential as their top priority. Six of the 15 students chose salary potential as their second leading priority, six of 15 chose the ability to be creative or expressive as their second leading priority, and three of 15 chose capacity to facilitate impact for in-need communities as their top priority. Eight students chose the ability to facilitate impact as the lowest priority when considering a major.

Of the Black students, one grew up in a middle-class household with income in the range of $100,000 - $149,000 annually. The two remaining students grew up in working class households with incomes ranging from $32,500-$60,000. On average, each student received five years’ worth of art experience before college, with one student receiving art classes throughout primary and secondary school, and the remaining two receiving two or fewer years of experience.

When asked what major they would consider other than graphic design, the students listed Pan African studies, fashion, and computer science. When considering a
major, two of three students prioritized the ability to facilitate impact for in-need communities, one of three prioritized the ability to be creative or expressive as the top priority when considering a major. Two of three students selected the ability to be creative or expressive as their secondary priority; and all three students chose money as their lowest priority.

**Cuyahoga Community College - Freshmen Graphic Design Students**

Out of 11 students, four grew up in working class households, with incomes ranging from $32,500-$60,000. Four out of 11 students grew up in lower class homes, with income of $23,050 or less for a family of four. One student grew up in a middle-class household with an income ranging from $100,000-$149,000.

Seven of the 11 students grew up in the suburbs, three of the 11 were raised in urban communities. Eight out 11 students surveyed identified as White; one student out of eleven identified as Black, one of eleven identified as Asian, with the final student identifying as other. Seven of the eleven students identified as male, three students identified as female, one student identified as non-binary queer.

Nine out of ten students received formal art training before college. Of these nine students, five received art training solely from their school's art program, one student received art training only from a community center, and three students received art training from both. When asked what other major or field they had considered while in college, they listed TV/Film, illustration, interactive media, and web design.
60 percent of the students listed money as the top priority factoring into their choice of a major, creativity as the second highest priority, and the ability to assist or impact a community as the lowest priority.

The sole Black student in the class was raised both in an urban and lower class household with an annual income of $23,050 or less for a family of four. He received no formal art training before college, and the only other major he considered was animation. When asked what his top priorities were when choosing a major, his answers were identical to his classmates. Salary was the top priority, followed by creative freedom, and ability to impact communities in need.

**Comparative differences between Kent and Cuyahoga Community College Design Students**

On average, Kent State University students had received more art training. The average student surveyed at Kent State University had received almost five years (4.8 years) of art training, while the average student surveyed at Cuyahoga Community College had received fewer than two 1.5 years. The average Kent State University student grew up in a wealthier household. 53 percent of Kent State University students surveyed were from a middle-class household with incomes ranging from $100,000 - $149,000 annually. 73 percent of Cuyahoga Community College students grew up in either lower class or working class homes.
Cuyahoga Community College students cited money as the top priority in choosing a major, while Kent State University students selected creativity. Both classes gave money the lowest priority when considering a major.

The differences in household earnings as well as level of art training prior to college was almost as dramatic between White and Black Kent State University students as it was between Kent State University students and Cuyahoga Community College students. On average, the African American students at Kent State University came from poorer households, and individually had received less training than their White peers had prior to college.

**Social Science Survey - Various Colleges**

Seventeen students from social science fields participated in the survey. Out of 17 students, 11 grew up in middle-class household 2 with incomes ranging from $100,000 - $149,000 annually. Four out of the 17 students grew up in working class households, with incomes ranging from $32,500-$60,000. One of the participants grew up in an upper-class household with an annual income above $150,000; the final participant grew up in a lower-class household with an annual income of $23,050 for a family of four or less.

Twelve of the 17 students grew up in urban communities, one of the 17 grew up in rural a community, and four of 17 grew up in a suburban community.
Three of the 17 surveyed identified as Hispanic/Latino, 12 identified as Black or African American, two identified as other. Ten of the 17 participants were male; the remaining seven were female.

Students had done or were doing their undergraduate coursework at the following colleges and universities:

- Daemen College, Buffalo, NY
- American University, Washington, DC
- Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH
- Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH
- Ohio University, Athens, OH
- CW Post, Greenvale, NY
- University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH
- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC
- University of Georgia, Athens, GA
- Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH

Students did their undergraduate coursework in the following majors:

- Urban Studies
- Chemistry & History
- Sociology/Criminology
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Political Science
• Social Work
• Sociology
• Psychology
• International Studies & Political Science

Students had done or were doing their graduate coursework at the following colleges and universities:

• Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH
• Tiffin University, Tiffin, OH
• Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, Cleveland, OH
• Fisk University, Nashville, TN
• Mercy College, Youngstown, OH
• Tulane University School of Law, New Orleans, LA
• Buffalo State University, Buffalo, NY
• Hunter College, New York, NY

Students did their graduate coursework in the following majors:

• Juris Doctor/MBA dual degree
• Clinical Psychology
• Psychology
• Organizational Leadership
• Law
• Social Work
• Management
Students had considered the following majors and fields:

- Acting
- Finance
- Pharmaceutical studies.
- Medicine
- Economics
- Law
- Engineering
- Social Work
- Law School
- None
- Political Science
- Law and Urban Studies
- Health Administration
- History
- Counseling
- Business and Accounting

When asked what it was about the major that interested them, students replied as follows:

- The application of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- The potential to have a positive impact on society and to improve the lives of minorities.
I have an interest in advocacy, which both medicine and law afforded me. With medicine, the thought was that I could make an impact in poor communities by offering quality healthcare. With law, the idea is to end up in public policy so as to have a greater impact on the policies that have a negative impact on poor communities.

Being able to make direct impact in laws and policies that positively impact underserved people and communities.

When considering a major, six of the 15 participants prioritized the ability to facilitate impact for in-need communities, five of 15 chose earning potential as their top priority, and four participants prioritized the ability to be creative or expressive as the top priority. Seven of the 15 participants chose money as their lowest priority when choosing a major.
CHAPTER VI
Ethnographic Study

In 2000, the University of Wisconsin began designing its admission collateral for prospective undergraduates (Chang, 2016). The initial cover photo proposed for their brochure featured a picture of students at a home football game. The African American vice chancellor quickly voiced concern to the admissions director since the image in consideration featured only White students. This began the search for a more diverse image (Chang, 2016).

Instead of locating a more inclusive photo, the staff settled on a 1993 photo of White Badger fans at a football game, as well as a separate photo of a broadly smiling African American student (“Doctored Photo Stirs Controversy at University of Wisconsin”, 2000). The office then cut out the head of the African American student and pasted the head into the picture behind two white female students. The photo was a shot of a collection of students at a football game — but the African American student, named Diallo Shabazz, had never attended a football game at the University. This doctored image, intended to establish the illusion of diversity, was then approved, printed and distributed to 100,000 applicants (Chang, 2016).

The doctored image came to light when a reporter at the university paper, The Daily Cardinal, noticed the direction and intensity of the sunlight hitting Diallo Shabazz impacted the image of his face far differently than how it had impacted the white faces pictured around him (Chang, 2016).
During an interview with the Washington Post, sophomore Anna Gould stated, "I thought something looked funny. It looked like the sun was gleaming off his face and everyone else was in the shade" (Claiborne, 2000).

When Shabazz and other African American students who attended the University of Wisconsin learned of the doctored image, they were extremely confused. Shabazz explained in his interview with National Public Radio (NPR) that the admissions department and the multicultural center were separated by two flights of stairs within the same building. He suggested there was no true need create false diversity when the ability to access the real thing was as simple as taking a trip up or down stairs (Prichep, 2013).

A 2008 study of 371 college and university viewbooks discovered that African and Asian American students were overrepresented by 50% in photographs in comparison to their actual presence in the student body (Jaschik, S., 2008).

A sociologist at Augsburg College studied the viewbooks of several hundred four-year institutions, excluding historically black colleges and universities. The study took inventory of the racially identifiable student used in photographs and gathered data on the actual student population (Jaschik, S., 2008).

The study found that African American students were only 7.9 percent of students at the colleges investigated, but accounted for 12.4 percent of the students utilized in the viewbooks (Jaschik, S., 2008). This raised a fair question: who these images intended to entice? Minority students who were often underrepresented at these institutions? Or white students and parents who wished to send their children to institutions that were both elite and inclusive?
During the 1980's, schools like the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Michigan championed the idea diversity and excellence (Chang, 2016). By the beginning of the millennium, the display of diversity by various institutions suggested excellence, and the appearance of excellence suggested diversity. The scholar Nancy Leong named this impulse to overstate diversity, either through Photoshop or through an aggressive presentation of diversity, "racial capitalism" (Leong, 2013).

In a 2013 article written in the Harvard Law Review called “Racial Capitalism”, Nancy Leong argued that White individuals and predominantly white institutions reaped "social or economic value from associating with individuals with non-white racial identities" (Leong, 2013). While any racial group could obtain value from the identity of another, since White Americans were a majority in America, the practice of racial capitalism more often involved a non-ethnic individual or a predominantly white institution deriving value from non-white racial identity (Leong, 2014).

One could have questioned the sincerity of the image used by the University of Wisconsin. For one, the image cut out the head of Diallo, and placed him into the background. His face was the only one in the image with discernible features, and without a body. For that reason, the sole African American in the image was unable to participate in the gesture being performed by all other students attending the game.

If the original image documented a sea of students rallying in unison, then the partially cut off smiling face served no real purpose to the narrative told in the photo. The value of the face was that it was both African American and happy. It is hard to imagine this image being used to interest students of color, but very easy to imagine this image
being utilized as an attempt to brand the university's culture as welcoming to all. While the image use may not have been ideal for attracting minority students, the appearance of inclusion could have been leveraged for capital gain.

Leong also wrote that "in a society preoccupied with diversity, non-whiteness is a valued commodity. And where that society is founded on capitalism, it is unsurprising that the commodity of non-whiteness is exploited for is market value (Leong, 2013).

**How Design Institutions are Utilizing Images via Social Media**

Leong's research, in addition to Augsburg College’s viewbook study motivated my review of how design schools use images on their Instagram channels. Instagram images were selected for review as that social media outlet was typically utilized to provide snapshots into the lives of whomever owned the profile. The Instagram accounts of five design institutions (The Cleveland Institute of Art, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Kent State University, The Ohio State University and Carnegie Mellon University) were selected, and their images were separated into two main folders: photos with minorities, and photos without. Subfolders were later placed within the two folders to mark trends.

Cranbrook Academy of Art had 167 identifiable images of students. One-hundred and four (or 62 percent) did not include any ethnic minorities, ten images (9.6 percent) were group shots with five or more individuals, eight images were shot from behind the subject or at an angle that obstructed the identity of the person being photographed. Sixty-three out of 167 (37 percent) images included minorities, 18 out of 167 images (11 percent) only included minority students. Five out of 63 minority images (8 percent)
showcased minorities with features so abstracted that they could only be identified by their hair texture. Five out of 63 images of these images included minorities, but placed them on the outside of the camera's focal point.

Of Kent State University’s 149 Instagram posts, 22 included people of color (15 percent), 16 of the 22 images (72 percent) included recycled images of the same four minorities. Two of the four were current graduate students, one a current professor, and the fourth a staff member of the department. Only three of 22 images (14 percent) included minority students only. Twenty-six of 149 images were solely of white students.

Of the Cleveland Institute of Art’s 250 posts, 160 posts included people, 55 of which were students of color. Seven out of 55 images (13 percent) only included minority students. Eleven of the 55 images (20 percent) included minorities who were in the back of the composition, or outside of the main focal point of the image. Four out of 55 images were images that gave White and minority students equal level of on-camera presence.

A large percentage of the images which included minorities were either group photos (five or more people) or images which placed less importance on the arrangement of the minority student in the composition of the photos. These same institutions had a much higher percentage of shots that emphasized the individuality of their white students versus their minority populations.

With that said, it would be fair to question whether the images shared were intended to entice a universal gaze or that of a white population. The placement of minority students in a significant number of the Instagram images could be summed up
nicely in a Ralph Ellison quote. In the opening passage of his book *Invisible Man*, the author states,

> I am an invisible man…I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me (Ellison, 1952, 30).

The lack of images showcasing the individuality of minority students leaves room to wonder if diversity and inclusion are a cultural reality on the campuses in question. There were a handful of images posted which included minorities with features so abstracted that their hair texture was the only notable feature which identified their ethnicity. Considering that Instagram captured and froze the gaze of the subject, these types of images communicated that that the presence of the minority population was an afterthought, that wasn’t given the same level of consideration as their white peers.

**How Information about Majors is Communicated via Print and Web**

During the interview process, both subjects who chose social science as their field of study, as well as those who chose design mentioned that they did not have a guidance counselor to guide them toward a specific major. Most subjects who chose social science
as their field of study described researching their university’s web pages and course 
catalogs to find classes that aligned most closely with their interests.

This study will explore both how some universities describe their social 
science and design programs. In addition, it will evaluate descriptions of the types of 
classes offered. We will then compare the written descriptions to the priorities listed by 
the social science students.

Cleveland Institute of Art - Graphic Design Print

In the Cleveland Institute of Art’s graphic design major, you'll explore both 
innovative and traditional methods of communication design, including print and 
web design, package design, signage, social design and publication design. You'll 
explore experiment with the forms, methods, media and concepts crucial to 
creative development.

Our Graphic Design Program emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving and 
user experience. We try to get inside the heads of our consumers as we organize 
information for publications, design exhibitions, websites, wayfinding, and 
marketing and advertising campaigns (“Graphic Design”, n.d.).

Maryland Institute College of Art - Graphic Design Print

Graphic Design at MICA explores the commercial, social, public and political 
aspects of design. You will gain the creative, technical and intellectual skills to 
become the design visionaries of the future while shaping the form and content of 
media - from magazines and books to websites and social media applications. 
You will study digital imaging and photo manipulation, typography and layout 
animation, DSLR photography and other techniques for communicating and 
shaping culture (Carr, n.d.).
Savannah College of Art & Design - Graphic Design

As a graphic design student at SCAD, you'll become fluent in the visual language that defines today's powerhouse brands and top-flight organizations. Our holistic graphic design degree program doesn't just cover the fundamentals of design; it delves into product packaging, entrepreneurship, mobile technology, interface design and user experience. The result? An award-winning professional portfolio, real experience working for industry giants, and the opportunity to make a lasting mark on the ever-changing global visual landscape — all before you graduate (“Designed for the Future,” n.d.).

Cranbrook Academy of Art - 2D Design Department Philosophy

The 2D Department is the graduate graphic design department of Cranbrook Academy of Art. The department is actively pursuing work at the intersection of design and art. Traditional forms of design, activities where the designer acts as a conduit for the communication of a third-party message, and non-traditional forms of design, activities where the designer’s agency is foregrounded, are explored in the program. In both of these approaches to design, the emphasis in the department is placed on the experimental. Work being produced in the department falls on a continuum from book, poster and letterform design, through installation, social practices and contemporary art. The results of these investigations often exist at the threshold between design and art. In our conception, the designer is a powerful cultural agent able to seamlessly engage in many forms of cultural production (2D Design, n.d.).

Kent State University Visual Communication Design

VCD provides a comprehensive and superior professional design education. The Bachelor of Fine Arts is an in-depth study of graphic arts. The degree places greater emphasis on upper-level studio course, which allows you to build expertise in a chosen area of the visual design field. Visual Communication Design starts, ends and continuously thrives on the thing that binds us - our people. To us, a community is personal. It commands respect, provides care and supports the individual and his or her interests. This program expects students to become thoughtful designers, purposeful teachers and permanent members of the visual communication design community (Kelly, 2014).
How Design Schools Describe their Programs

Each of these programs suggest that they can provide their students a challenging education that would impart them with the latest innovations of professional design practices. Three out of five of the institutions made no mention of community, nor the ability to effect change. These institutions led with their ability to build professionals, only to close with the types of artifacts the students would learn to create. The two remaining institutions mentioned that designers had the ability to be change agents, but neither in their program or course descriptions did they provide and additional explanation of how design could be used to effect change.

Social Science Field Descriptions

Cleveland State University - What is Urban Affairs

Urban Affairs is an interdisciplinary field dedicated to understanding urban communities, economics, environment, and governance. The Masters of Science in Urban Studies is an interdisciplinary degree program designed to broaden and extend the student's knowledge and expertise to actually engage in urban problem-solving (Lithwick, 2017).

Harvard MBA/MPP & MBA/MPA-ID Programs

The HBS/HKS joint degree programs serve a growing need of critical importance to global society: their mission is to develop leaders, skilled in management and the shaping of innovative public policy, who will assume positions of influence spanning business, government, and nonprofit organizations, through which they will contribute significantly to the well-being of society ("MBA/MPP & MBA/MPA-ID Programs," n.d.).
Cleveland State University

The subject matter of Sociology includes a wide variety of topics including social inequality, deviant behavior, criminology, gender, race and ethnicity, mental illness, non-western societies, law, corrections, aging, sports, and interpersonal violence. Sociology majors develop research skills and the ability to understand and connect individual lives with wider social forces ("Majors and Minors SOCIOLoGY," n.d.).

Stanford Public Policy

The Public Policy Program to develop in students the skills necessary to assess the performance of alternative approaches to policy implementation, evaluate the effectiveness of policies, understand the political constraints faced by political makers. Public policy analysis requires students to understand tools and principles taught in political science as well as economic and to integrate that learning to pursue goals and values based on moral and political philosophy ("Stanford Public Policy Program," n.d.).

Yale - Sociology

Sociologists are interested in understanding the causes and consequences of processes such as the social construction of groups and identity; the evolution of culture, inter-subjective meanings, intergroup relations, hierarchies, and social norms. Sociological research involves the study of individual behavior and outcomes, such as educational attainment, jobs and careers, religious commitment, and political involvement; of interpersonal process, such as intimate relationships, sexuality, social interaction in groups, social networks, and behavior of organizations and institutions; causes and consequences of group differences and social inequality; and social change at the societal and global level ("About Us," n.d.).
Conclusion to Ethnographic Study

Compared to design fields, social science fields did a much better job of defining communities and individuals they were interested in impacting. These majors also offered a better articulation of the areas they were interested in influencing and why.
CHAPTER VII

Thesis Conclusion

If the fight for equality and recognition is a motivating factor for students when selecting a major, and if graphic design tends to be apolitical, seldom touching on socio-political issues or providing strategies for how to solve them, then we can conclude that that apolitical stance places design at a disadvantage in recruiting African American students to its cohort.

If African American students view the ability to impact in their communities as a top priority when choosing a major, the field of design will have to consider how its tools and principles could be leveraged to effect change. Design's political neutrality places it at a direct disadvantage when attempting to attract African Americans. For this reason, it is recommended that designers better use their strength to contextualize information for social issues in addition to commercial endeavors.

While the theory of introducing African American students to the field of design at an earlier age to boost recruitment has some validity, it still does not address why more African American students select social-serving majors despite the fact that they have received more art education than social science education before college.

A 2006 national study performed by Michael DeCesare surveyed 598 random schools. DeCesare found that roughly 38% of high schools nationwide offer a sociology course. (Garcia, 2012) This study helps us to understand that the existence of sociology in high school is definitely not universal and varies state by state (Garcia, 2012). In the 2009–10 school year, a study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that
visual arts instruction was available in most elementary schools (83 percent). Eighty-nine percent of secondary schools also offered visual arts instruction to their students (Parsad & Speigelman, 2013).

The fact that more African American students are selecting social science fields once in college could be due to those majors being more closely aligned with student priorities and interests post-college. If this is true, then the key to boosting diversity within the field of design could be less about how much exposure students have had to it, and more about what they can do once they are a part of it.
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