ABSTRACT

APPLICATION OF THE ZMET METHODOLOGY IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT: COMPARING BLACK AND WHITE STUDENT SUBCULTURES IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

By Matthew Stanley Vorell

The need to understand organizational cultures has increased in recent decades. Traditional research methods such as questionnaires and surveys gather quantitative data quite well but have been shown ineffective in thoroughly analyzing the qualitative data endemic to an organization’s culture. The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, a qualitative interview protocol, produces an aggregate construct map that consists of the most important constructs and relationships between constructs mentioned by a particular sample. This study used the ZMET to analyze two samples of students (one of black females and one of white females) on a midsized Midwestern college campus. The respective construct maps for each sample indicate that both groups have very different mental and emotional perceptions of their experience at the university, especially in regards to the social scene, competition for relationships, as well as feelings of attachment to the university.
Application of the ZMET Methodology in an Organizational Context: Comparing Black and White Student Subcultures in a University Setting

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Chapter One: Review of the Literature

Overview

The field of communication has borrowed ideas, concepts, and theories from other academic areas in order to build an interdisciplinary basis for its own unique research. Fields that have contributed to the growth of communication include many of the social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and marketing. In turn, many ideas from communication have also been used by other disciplines for theoretical and practical purposes. For example, the field of advertising uses principles of rhetoric to design marketing campaigns.

Not only can theories traverse scholarly boundaries but so can methodologies. Nearly every academic field involving the study of human behavior has gathered information from participants through interviews, questionnaires or observations. A relatively new methodology recently developed to study marketing issues is the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), named after its originator Dr. Gerald Zaltman. This protocol uses constructs like metaphor, story analysis, and art therapy to allow interviewees to delve into their deeper thought patterns towards a particular subject. The purpose of this current research project is to determine whether the ZMET can be productively applied to the field of organizational communication.

The ZMET protocol has roots in the concept of organizational culture. The culture of an organization is defined by the norms and beliefs that govern interpersonal interactions. This means that just like a tribe in Africa has its own social norms and ways of dealing with things, so do organizations. The ZMET’s focus on symbolism and subject perception towards an intended target coincide quite harmoniously with organizational culture. Organizational researchers focus on concepts like symbolism and subject perception to understand how a culture in a system or other collectivity come to be and the influence it has on its members.

The purpose of this study is to apply the ZMET in an organizational context and see if it yields findings of interest. In this research the ZMET was used to explore the cognitive constructs of black and white students in a university organization. The university will be treated as an organizational culture, and it will be deduced if the white and black samples differ enough from one another to be counted as distinct subcultures. Thus, the primary goal of the study is to investigate whether the ZMET is powerful enough to reveal meaningful differences between subcultures in an organization. Chapter one focuses extensively on the concept of organizational culture to explain the theoretical perspectives that underpin the ZMET protocol. Next, the
history of the ZMET is given, as well as the ways it is used in a non-marketing context. The chapter then presents research of the black experience in universities to provide context for what might be expected from the black sample in this study. Chapter two describes the way in which the research was carried out. Chapter three provides the results in their raw form, and chapter four speculates on the generalizability of the findings.

Organizational Culture

The notion that organizations possess distinct cultures has existed for the last fifty years (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Kunda (1992) implies that when applied to an organizational environment, culture refers to the commonly held rules that oversee the mental and relational aspects of association in the organization. The literature of organizational culture can be broken down by two different assumptions. The first one implies that culture is something an organization has, and the second holds that culture is something an organization is (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001).

Implying that culture is something possessed by an organization diminishes the pervasive nature of culture. Viewing culture as a construct that can be studied separately from the organization denies the ability of organizational researchers to examine all facets of the entity as cultural artifacts. This is because if culture is a neatly packaged topic that can be studied, then all extents of its influence can be neatly encapsulated as well. Thus, the study of anything that might not be clearly connected with the culture construct would not make sense and be a waste of time. It is for these limitations that the latter perspective is viewed by many organizational communication scholars (Dandridge, Mitroff, & Joyce, 1980; Bantz, 1993; Glaser, Zamanou, & Hacker, 1987) as the preferred point of view.

For present purposes, culture implies organizations do not exist without the shared values and customs of members (Dandridge, et al., 1980). Bantz (1993) posits four fundamental corollaries of organizational culture. The first implies organizational researchers are interested in all actions of organizational members and not just the “important” ones. A researcher’s task is to uncover the beliefs, symbols, rituals, and myths that hold a culture together (Glaser, Zamanou, & Hacker, 1987). Oftentimes these items become so much a part of the culture, that organizational members take them for granted and are not readily aware of them. By paying attention to all the aspects of a culture, a researcher will gain a better idea as to how members of a culture make sense of their world (Barley, 1983). Bantz’s second tenet holds that
organizational researchers define organizations as processes and not things. Cultures are dynamic by nature, and thus necessitate being thought of as constantly changing. Along these same lines, organizational members are not merely concrete fixtures in the grand scheme of the organization, but rather are active participants in the culture’s continuation (Howard & Geist, 1995). The third corollary holds that the organizational observer sees symbols and meaning as fundamental to organizational life. Symbols used between organizational members are central to the creation, upholding, and reproduction of a culture (Alvesson, 1993). Bantz’s final tenet is that organizations should be characterized as socially composed. Without people, organizations do not exist. In 1983, Barley noted that few investigations existed that could lay out how a culture existed as a system of contextually generated meanings. At that time, the use of culture in organizational studies needed a theory and method to display its secrets (Barley, 1983). This need for a methodology that establishes an organization’s culture at a certain point in time still persists today.

Different methods to understand the culture of an organization have been used over the years. Some quantitative scholars feel that they can best understand an organization’s culture through questionnaires and other quantitative means. These methods are efficient at gathering information that reflects how organizational members view the culture at a specific moment. For example, one question on a survey could ask employees to mark on a Likert-type scale the degree of agreement with the statement “My superiors support and value my suggestions for increasing the production of the company.” If an organizational researcher received an average response around or near 1 on the scale, then he or she might conclude that this particular organization possessed a relatively open and supportive culture where superiors encouraged subordinate contribution. While this information is useful, there is much that it leaves to question. If, for example, participants want to elaborate on their response, or respond to unasked questions, they would be unable to do so in the classic survey/questionnaire method.

Other organization cultural communication researchers compensate for this shortcoming in quantitative means through more personal methods. Such researchers use qualitative methods like interviews, while other use more interpretivist means through ethnographies and rhetorical studies. For example, a qualitative researcher who wished to understand the culture of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream might do so by performing an ethnography and staying with the company for an extended period time to observe or experience first hand what it was like. Such a method is
beneficial in that it provides a first hand account by the researcher as to the culture within an organization. Nonetheless, a problem still arises. While most ethnographers take many steps to be as objective as possible the fact that the organization’s culture is reported through only their eyes may bias the results. Subjectivity is a major drawback in the majority of qualitative studies, as inevitably the researcher’s own notions and prejudices affect the data.

The purpose of this research is to adapt the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) for use as an organizational culture data gathering tool to understand a subculture’s experience. The ZMET will be used to construe the cognitive construct map of black female university students in a predominantly white university and compare it with that of white female students. The goal of creating a cognitive construct map is to better understand the experience of subculture through both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The cognitive construct map lays out in detail the mental constructs a person has towards the selected topic.

The practice of viewing organizations as cultures can be divided into many different themes. This research will look in depth at the central themes of organizational symbolism, organizational cognition, and culture as climate. A firm understanding of these themes is necessary to analyze the experiences of the different subgroups that constitute any organization. By gaining a better understanding of organizational symbolism, organizational cognition, and culture as climate, the experience of members in the subculture will become clearer.

Organizational symbolism deals with the different meanings that organizational members attach to organizational aspects in order to communicate with one another the ideas, values, and attitudes of their culture (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Organizational cognition implies that culture exists as a pattern of shared assumptions, common frames of reference, or a shared set of values and norms (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Finally, organizational climate “is shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures, both formal and informal” (Schneider, 1990, p. 22).

Organizational Symbolism

Put simply, symbols are objects which stand for something else. Humans developed the ability to communicate with one another by adopting common symbols to replace different phenomena. In other words, naming an object calls it into being (Dandridge, et al., 1980). Today, symbols pervade every corner of life within a cultural context. In most Western
societies, the color red on a traffic light symbolizes to us the need to stop our cars whereas the color green tells us to go.

The same symbol can hold different meanings for different groups and organizations. Problems, however, arise when members of the same organization come to associate different meanings to the same symbol. Thus, by studying and understanding the uses of organizational symbolism within a culture, social scientists can help to neutralize any sources of misunderstanding.

The term “organizational symbolism” refers to those aspects of an organization that its members use to communicate to others unconscious feelings, images, and values that are intrinsic to the organizational culture (Mumby, 1988, p. 77). This symbolism shares the fundamental ideology and values of an organization. Symbolism considers culture as “knowledge and symbol rather than habit and behavior” (Lee & Barnett, 1987, p. 395). An example of an organizational symbol might be provided in the common “coffee break” scenario at many organizations. Over time this period of relaxation from the workday may develop into a period where company gossip might be shared. Thus, especially if some object, such as a water cooler, vending machine, or coffee machine becomes involved, the coffee break develops into an organizational symbol that company members associate with certain expectations.

The organizational culture perspective characterizes organizations as collectively constructed symbolic realities (Bantz, 1993). As a result, cultures are understood by looking at the different symbols used by their respective members. Such indicators of organizational sense would be found in organizational vocabulary, metaphors, symbols, etc. (Lee & Barnett, 1987). This section will explain a number of examples of symbolism such as semiotics, metaphor, stories, and rites and rituals.

Semiotics. Semiotics refers to the study of signs or a system of signs and how signification occurs (Barley, 1983). “Signification refers both to the processes by which events, words, behaviors, and objects carry meaning for the members of a given community and to the content they convey” (Barley, 1983, p. 394). In other words it implies the way people communicate with one another through signs (Barley, 1983). It assumes that humans make the connection between the physical and social worlds through shared understandings. A distinction should be made here between the terms “sign” and “symbol.” A sign is something that represents a fact or observation that is context bound. For example, when someone shivers the
action conveys to others that the person is cold. The act of shivering in the cold to keep warm is a naturally occurring physical reaction that transcends culture and society. A symbol is another thing or action that signifies the presence of something else, however it is contextually bound. For example, the color white in many Western communities stands for the virtues of goodness, purity, well-being, etc. whereas the color black denotes the notion of evil. In many African communities these concepts of color are reversed. Thus, what symbols reflect may change from culture to culture.

The sign represents the fundamental concept of semiotics. It is the relationship between a sign-vehicle (an expression or form such as a word, sound, etc.) and the signified (the idea conveyed by the sign vehicle) (Barley, 1983). The link a person holds between an expression and content depends on that individual’s notions (Barley, 1983). For example, a father seen wrestling with his son might be seen as a sign of affection between the two to one observer, but be perceived as a type of abuse to another onlooker.

Through semiotics, anything can be seen as a vessel of meaning. In other words, when studying a culture, we must not only pay attention to obvious symbols of meaning (such as laws and religious doctrine) but also to those of everyday symbols (like fairy tales). The use of symbols to communicate represents the physical manifestation of a person’s inner thoughts. In the context of everyday organizational experiences, members rely largely on unconscious patterns that form the formal and informal rules of interaction, the language of communication, and even knowledge and procedures. By using these patterns again and again they are made legitimate and become a cultural mechanism for interaction (Riley, 1983). The meanings of these patterns can be understood as being composed of two parts: constructs and the relations between the constructs.

Constructs are created by changing entities, actions, and events into organizationally defined entities, actions, and events. Members communicating transform general concepts into organizationally specific things that become recognizable to other members of the culture (Bantz, 1993). In fact, Kelly (1963) mentions that the terms construct and concept can be used almost synonymously. Constructs come into being when organizational members come to acknowledge and comprehend a common referent. For example, many organizations use a biweekly payment schedule for their employees. Thus, the Friday of every other week comes to be seen by the employees as the day they get paid. This association of Friday with one's check
becomes a construct within the mind of the employee, such that he or she most likely will structure a significant portion of his or her weekly activities around payday. A construct is a way for individuals to categorize some things as being alike yet different (Kelly, 1963).

Kelly (1963) describes constructs as sometimes existing in a huge system, where definite positions of subordinate and superordinate concepts exist. More important to understanding the common mentality of organizational members than constructs is the relationships that develop between them (Bantz, 1993). These relations can develop into constellations of constructs that cast light on each construct and each relationship. These construct relations represent a display of one’s environment and how it is set up (Kelly, 1963). Kelly (1963) points out that constructs and their relationships are like two way channels, on which individuals can travel back and forth in order to make decisions. As a result, humans can predict what will happen in order to meet future demands. These relationships are indeed dynamic. By understanding these relationships, organizational researchers can better understand the unique uses and purposes of symbols within the organization (Bantz, 1993).

As previously mentioned, symbols are seen as standing in for reality that exists alone (Dandridge, et al., 1980). From this perspective the role of the symbol is to predispose social actors to certain interpretations of reality, organizing attitudes, beliefs, values, etc., in a way and help to construct the relationship between social actors and the social system (Dandridge, et al., 1980). Symbolic sharing can also help to make uncertain future events seem less terrifying and unpredictable (Bormann, 1983).

While communication is symbolic and shared, signs are not only verbal expressions (Bormann, 1983). Issues and attitudes are understood through dance, music, gesture, food, ritual, artifact, etc. Words written on paper, even if a full transcript of a ceremony is provided, do not and cannot transmit all of the information (Conquergood, 1991). Another example of nonverbal symbolism is to express one’s identity by his or her manner of dress. For example, many Scottish clans have a distinct pattern of plaid that when worn distinguishes one clan’s members from another’s.

Metaphor as Symbol. Organizational symbols can come in many forms (Dandridge, et al., 1980). The most common are metaphors, stories/narratives, and rites and rituals. Each form has the ability to sustain certain cultures and power structures (Dandridge, et al., 1980). The culture of an organization becomes encapsulated and transmitted through metaphors, stories, and
symbols (Barley, 1983). Communication scholars need to ask how specific symbols, metaphors, stories, ideologies, and sagas come to be (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) wrote an excellent explanation as to how metaphors represent the way that humans construct their realities. In basic terms metaphors consist of two elements called the focus and the frame. For example, in the sentence “Sam is a rock,” Sam is the focus of the interaction and comparing him to a rock is the frame. The metaphor offers an alternative means of understanding the focus in relation to the frame (Bantz, 1993). As symbolic form, metaphors provide insight into the social construction of an organization. The data provided by metaphors help us infer different organizational expectations and meanings (Bantz, 1993).

Metaphors are manifestations of particular ideologies and worldviews. They are important in organizing because they aid members in the interpretation of events; they allow cues from one context to be applied to another (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987). In other words, a metaphor is created when a term is transferred from one system of use to another. It thus serves to elucidate on central aspects of the latter while at the same time shadowing others (Alvesson, 1993). Metaphor represents the bridge that connects presentational thoughts to actual spoken discourse (Alvesson, 1993). A good metaphor relies on an adequate mix of similarity and differences between the transferred word and the focal one (Alvesson, 1993).

In one sense, all knowledge is metaphorical in that it is constructed from some point of view (Alvesson, 1993). The same is true of everyday experiences, and thus it can be seen as extremely important in how people construct reality. Empirical data do not speak to the researcher; findings rely on the metaphors in the researcher’s mind to draw attention to various aspects of the research object (Alvesson, 1993). Understanding the metaphors used in a certain line of research will encourage creativity and provide insight (Alvesson, 1993).

Stories as Symbol. Stories are another key source of symbolism within organizations. Stories fulfill the job of reflecting folklore qualities, an oral history of the past, and a paradigm of human existence (Putnam, Van Hoeven, & Bullis, 1991). They can come from actual fact or fiction. Either way, they consist of a symbolic reflection of the beliefs, values, and ideologies of organizations (Putnam, et al., 1991). Stories represent a fundamental basis upon which people construct their reality. (Brown, 1990).

Stories serve several rhetorical functions for organizations. Stories reduce uncertainty for organizational members by providing information about the culture. As well, they manage
meaning by framing events within organizational values and expectations. Finally, they identify why an organization and its members are special and unique (Smith & Keyton, 2001). In other words, stories create social paradigms, provide inspiration, and help solve problems. Being able to read these organizational stories provides access to the organization’s culture (Brown, 1990).

The ability to control organizational symbols (i.e., the ability to author organizational stories) is a powerful political tool (Smith & Keyton, 2001). Stories hold a special role as covert ways to pass on underlying codes of conduct and beliefs (Dandridge, et al., 1980). The social hierarchy of a culture privileges one manner of viewpoint by punctuating and sequencing events.

*Rites and Rituals as Symbol.* Along with metaphors and stories, rites and rituals are major forms of symbolism in organizational cultures. A rite is “a relatively elaborate, dramatic set of activities that consolidates cultural expressions into one event” (Putnam, et al., 1991, p. 89). Rites usually occur within social interaction in front of a specific audience. As well, deliberate planning, careful management, and lots of rehearsal accompany them. They make public the private values and attitudes of a group (Putnam, et al., 1991). Ritual implies symbolic enactments of processes of change which include emotionality, ceremony, and a sense of the sacred (Witner, 1997). For example, within organizations several types of rituals exist. There are personal rituals, which solidify one’s identity within a group as well as inform and orient others to those identities (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). Task rituals are transcendental organizational routines. As well, there are social rituals, which perform the important task of identifying membership status within a group or organization (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). Symbols such as metaphors, stories, rites, and rituals bring to light and capture the deeply embedded power relations as well as actions that are socially acceptable (Dandridge, et al., 1980).

*Organizational Cognition*

The concept of organizational cognition centers on ideas, beliefs, and other cognitive properties that are seen as fundamental to the enigmatic phenomenon called culture (Sackman, 1991). Societies are free to organize themselves as deemed necessary. Concepts are conceptualized not because they represent how something actually is, but because our social order deems conceptualization as necessary for functioning (Shweder, 1991). From the cognitive perspective, culture refers to what people learn, what is on their mind, rather than focusing on what people do or make. In other words it is a social generation of rules that guides perceptions
and thinking. This accumulated knowledge that is shared among organizational members sets the standards for deciding what is, what needs to be done, and why things need to be done (Sackman, 1991). These conceptual designations emerge through the process of social interaction (Sackman, 1991).

Underlying the cognitive perspective is the notion that organizations spring forth from the minds of thinkers (Mohan, 1993). Along these lines, one metaphor looks at culture as a brain. This metaphor has its roots in the premise that organizational members’ behavior is most appropriately examined in terms of their cognitive capacities (Mohan, 1993). Analyzing the organization’s brain would necessitate a close inspection of thought. Bodies of research would entail looking at recurrent schemata, social system, and events (Mohan, 1993). Members of a culture oftentimes develop a common rhetorical vision. This is a unified piecing of shared cognitions that give a group a broader understanding of the culture, its role with the environment and its place in the grand scheme of things (Bormann, 1983). The rhetorical community is the people who share the rhetorical vision. Because members of an organization share a common consciousness, they can be counted on by one another to respond in kind to messages that support the rhetorical vision (Bormann, 1983). This section will explore the concept of organizational cognition by analyzing cognitive maps as well as the basic organizational constructs of values and leadership.

**Understanding Cognition through the Cognitive Map.** Researchers who view culture as being cognitively based analyze common modes of interpretation through which meaning is collectively enacted (Mohan, 1993). Cognitively based methods for studying organizational cognitions have their basis in the notion that cultures are composed of subjective constructs which can be found in the minds of organizational members (Mohan, 1993). Kelly (1963) implies that the formation of constructs involves construing which:

…means placing an interpretation. A person places an interpretation upon what is construed. He [or she] erects a structure, within the framework of which the substance takes shape or assumes meaning. The substance which he [or she] construes does not produce the structure; the person does (p. 50).

Cognitivism seeks to explicate created meaning by focusing on the mental structures and processes that underlie organizational conduct (Greene, Kirch, & Grady, 2000). Thus, if cognitions are truly at the heart of a culture, then to elucidate the situation researchers should
generate specific categories of thoughts that distinguish shared assumptions, values, norms, and artifacts (Mohan, 1993).

Inherent to the idea of cognitive, symbolic, and system-keeping elements of culture is that a distinctive conceptual blueprint guides behavior. Some researchers claim that an organizational culture can be best comprehended in learned ways of dealing with experiences that deal with sense making functions or behavioral dictates. A cognitive map represents the mixing of organizational cultural knowledge and the respective priorities to create an experientially based theory for understanding, explicating, and predicting (Sackman, 1991). Organizational members use everyday cognitive map routes for orientation and guidance. This knowledge conduit provides ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Over time, the cognitive map is filled with context directed experiences that change it into a cultural knowledge map (Sackman, 1991). These conceptual maps are used to detect matches and mismatches between a member’s behavior and the cultural expectations (Mohan, 1993). In this process, organizational members strive to achieve a balance between the demands of personal values and organizational expectations (Mohan, 1993).

Functions of the Cognitive Map. Cultural cognitions and knowledge maps have many functional attributes. They provide a common perceptual base for thinking, feeling, and action. This basis helps members to recognize, frame, and integrate meaningful alternatives from a huge number of possibilities (Sackman, 1991). This is a must for mutual understanding, communication, and effective coordination within a culture (Sackman, 1991). After being used time and time again, cognitions become associated with certain emotions and degrees of importance. Users come to like them if they yield positive results and dislike them if they yield negative consequences (Sackman, 1991). Cognitions consist of a commonly held everyday logic that gets constantly reinforced by members’ successful applications. Once such a cultural knowledge structure gets implemented, it is most likely to be further differentiated rather than being replaced or exchanged. Cultural cognitions are held simultaneously by many different organizational members. They belong to the collectivity, even if they are held individually. Cultural cognitions are durable as they go beyond the individual, outliving them as part of the culture (Sackman, 1991).

At the same time, however, that the symbolic system of culture is created through social interactions, it is imperfectly shared (Mohan, 1993). Members of cultures face similar problems
and circumstances. How they interpret and enact these orientations and purposes of the culture may vary radically and what is shared may seem vacuous (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1991). Even in the most cohesive cultures, there will be perceptual differences (Mohan, 1993). Research suggests that the sharing of a cognitive map can never be total and varies from culture to culture. In fact, due to the presence of numerous subgroups in an organization, shared realities are not always positive and understanding rules and social contexts is not on par with consensus on issues (Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1994).

As aforementioned, shared cognitive schemata form the basis of the culture of an organization. Researchers need to catalog an organization’s commonly held conceptions that are essential for group membership. In addition to the concept of shared cognitions, another important theme in cultural studies is to establish how a network of shared assumptions came to be (Mohan, 1993). This perspective consists of shared methods of discerning situations and experiences. The amount of agreement regarding organizational schemata demonstrates if an agreeable cultural paradigm exists. By charting the cognitive schemata, researchers can identify disputes between certain subgroups and hypothesize on causes for different perceptions (Mohan, 1993).

As previously stated, commonly held cognitions are socially created, maintained, and kept. In general, cognitions are neutral, planning, and acting methods held by each and every person. What makes them cultural is collectivity and emotional attachments tied to them (Sackman, 1991). They emerge through joint problem solving where meanings are negotiated. In one sense they represent recognized solutions to the absolution of tasks and disagreements. Solutions developed by a single person become cultural when other people adopt them. A growing number of people will start to utilize them as descriptors, operations, counsel, or causes for why things do or do not work (Sackman, 1991). Shared cultural assumptions make life easier, since they negate the need to constantly reassign meanings in organizations (Mohan, 1993).

A common language and common conceptual map are essential for any kind of widespread agreement to be reached. This agreement on basic concepts is necessary when it is the precondition for any communication (Schein, 1985). Groups develop language systems not only to reach consensus and survive but as a means to also distinguish themselves and to unite group members through a shared lexicon (Schein, 1985). One topic organizations need to reach
agreement on is the boundaries of the group that determines membership. This distinction is especially important for new members since they cannot effectively expect to fulfill any function if they continually wonder whether or not they belong to a group (Schein, 1985). While cultural members share common and clear understanding, they also all live with ambiguity (Frost, et al., 1991).

Inherent in the majority of social interactions is a sense of being pulled in opposite directions (Sabourin & Stamp, 1995). Communication scholars refer to this phenomenon as dialectical tensions. According to the dialectical philosophy, two concepts are inherent in communicative relationships: process (which by nature denotes evolution) and contradiction (when two opposite forces wipe each other out) (Sabourin & Stamp, 1995). At any given moment, a person finds him or herself trying to balance the demands of everyday life. For any given individual, this might include harmonizing the role of being a son or daughter with those of being a student. For example, an individual who works 9 to 5 during the day and then attends classes at night may experience great distress if he or she is also responsible for taking care of his or her elderly parents. Sabourin and Stamp (1995) point out that homeostasis is an impossibility due to the different tensions that people experience. The majority of research involving dialectical tension views their effects on people involved in romantic relationships. Individuals in relationships with the larger social order also experience these tensions. In other words, a person need not be in a romantic relationship to experience the pressures of conflicting forces. Because of the roles placed before them, people are constantly growing and adapting (Miller, Johnson, Hart, & Peterson, 1999; McPhee, 1988; Freezel & Myers, 1997). Communication scholars have identified a number of dialectical tensions. Baxter and Erbert (1999) list two specific ones: autonomy versus connection and openness versus closedness. Regarding autonomy versus connection, each person has a need to maintain his or her own independence while at the same time remaining connected to the larger community (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Along the same lines, with openness versus closedness, each individual has to balance the desire to keep certain information private and the drive to seek solace in others by sharing personal thoughts and feelings (Baxter & Erbert, 1999).

Organizational Climate

Early climate researchers felt that this concept made so much sense that they really did not feel that it was necessary to lay down a concrete definition for the term or really even a way
to measure it (Schneider, 1990). Later on, it came to be characterized as the enduring organizational characteristics that different organizational members perceive. Thinking towards this topic evolved once again when more attention was paid to the perceptions of individuals rather than organizational characteristics. The most contemporary perspective places meaning and sense making at the center of climate studies (Rentsch, 1990). This section will elaborate on this concept by delving into its history, development up to this point, and distinguish if from the concept of organizational culture.

**History.** A classic definition for organizational climate comes from Tagiuri (1968).

Climate is a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment that (a) is experienced by its members, (b) influences their behavior, and (c) can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics (or attributes) of the organization (p. 27).

Along the same lines, other theorists look at climate as a set of attitudes and beliefs that is shared by the whole organization. It is an attribute that represents the balancing of the differently held conceptions (Fink & Chen, 1995). Organizational climate can be thought of as the chief means by which the fundamental constructs of a culture come into play between different situations, when different group members interact, and even the culture itself (Moran & Volkwein, 1992). It represents an important side of organizational theory because it separates itself from other organizational concepts like structure (Poole & McPhee, 1983). Discussions of climate stress that it is a product of the immediate interactions of organizational members (Poole & McPhee, 1983).

An interesting question, though, as to how climate forms is how do people who are bombarded with a plethora of different situations come to agree on a relatively similar perception of those stimuli (Moran & Volkwein, 1992)? As previously mentioned, an organization’s work setting climate is construed of the subordinates’ perceptions of events and procedures as well as their notions about processes of reward and support (Schneider, Wheeler, & Cox, 1992). As of yet, climate scholars do not agree on a theory or methodology of study (Fink & Chen, 1995). Just as an organization possesses numerous climates, on subsequent levels, there can be numerous climates for each organizational goal (Schneider, Wheeler, & Cox, 1992).

**Development to this Point.** Five elements are seen as fundamental to climate (Schneider, 1990):
1. Goal emphasis -- the extent to which management makes known the types of outcomes and standards that employees are expected to accomplish.
2. Means emphasis -- the extent to which the management makes known the methods and procedures that employees are expected to use in performing their jobs.
3. Reward orientation -- the extent to which various organizational rewards are perceived to be allocated on the basis of job performance.
4. Task support -- the extent to which employees perceive that they are being supplied with the materials, equipment, services, and resources necessary to perform their jobs.
5. Socioemotional support -- the extent to which employees perceive that personal welfare is protected by a kind, considerate, and generally humane management (p. 297).

Climate is a response which members of an organization create based on the demands and contingencies from their surrounding environments (Moran & Volkwein, 1992). One belief of climate theory is that people perceive and discern organizational policies in psychologically meaningful ways. These interpretations are seen as objective and lasting a relatively long time (Rentsch, 1990). Individuals decide upon an organization’s climate. It is expected that it will reflect those individuals’ characteristics through the processes of discernment and construct formation as well as the attitudes of the environment. At the same time though, organizational policies and parameters will be similarly perceived by members subjected to the same policies and rules (Schneider, 1990). Quite simply, climate is an objective construct of the organization’s overall structure, which personnel encounter and understand. It results from the common perceptions of members who have been exposed to the same environmental stimuli (Moran & Volkwein, 1992).

Two key ways of looking at climate are the structural and interactive perspectives. The former looks at climate as an attribute of an organization. These features are thought to belong to the organization as a whole regardless of the thoughts of individual members (Moran & Volkwein, 1992). The latter perspective does not insist that the genesis of climate originates from the organization’s features. Neither does it imply that climates are forged solely within a person. Its basic concept is that by the social interactions of organizational members in response
to their environment, shared agreement of a climate is reached. In fact some researchers define climate as the mixed effects of member personalities with the physical elements of the organization (Moran & Volkwein, 1992).

Organizations can be seen as having many different types of climate. In particular, climate theories have discussed three specific levels: psychological; organizational; and group or subsystem (Rentsch, 1990). Psychological climate refers to how each member represents the organization cognitively. This is construed as the attitudes and beliefs reflective of each employee’s notions of the dominant values and norms of the overall organizational environment (Fink & Chen, 1995). The major theoretical difference between psychological and group or organizational climates is that the former is of a cognitive schema and the latter is an aspect of a socially established reality (Fink & Chen, 1995). This perceptual approach places the formation of the organizational climate with each person. The psychological approach facilitates each member’s adaptation to organizational conditions by providing them with a cognitive map to understand everything (Moran & Volkwein, 1992). Group climate is the explanation of the organizational climate through which group members restate the organization in such a way that holds true to their personal beliefs and perceptions (Fink & Chen, 1995). Work climate perceptions represent the valuations of the environmental attributes in regards to their agreed upon meaning and significance to each and every person (Burke, Borucki, & Hurley, 1992).

**Distinguishing Climate from Culture.** Another key issue with organizational climate is the argument of its distinction from organizational culture. Many organizational theorists contend that culture and climate are commonly treated in organizational theory as if they are one and the same. They are not the same thing, and a clear understanding of both is necessary if a proper exploration of organization climate is to be achieved (Moran & Volkwein, 1992). While climate and culture are very similar in nature, the former centers on the perceptions organizational members hold. These perceptions however include the idea that meaning accompanies the perceived event. Climate theorists also note the importance of shared notions and proceed carefully about its operationalization (Schneider, 1990).

Both climate and culture deal with how organizational members come to make sense of their environments. Both are learned mainly though the process of enculturation and symbolic exchanges of group members. They are both monolithic structures with many sides. Climate and culture are both attempts to better comprehend the environment as it affects the behavior of
organizational members. Culture exists at a higher level of generalization than climate, and climate is equally a creation of culture (Schneider, 1990).

As the previous paragraph suggests, climate and culture are similar but definitely not the same thing. Climate can best be understood as a creation of culture. Culture consists of a deeper set of meanings that organizational members hold so close, that they are unaware of them. There is, of course, great overlap between the two especially when they are viewed as reciprocal processes with one giving way to the other (Schneider, 1990). Organizational climate is a relatively enduring trait of an organization, but it pales in comparison to how deep culture pervades the collectivity. Culture develops slower than climate. This is because the reach of climate in an organization is shallow when compared to culture (Moran & Volkwein, 1992).

**Summary**

As this chapter implied, the concepts of organizational symbolism, organizational cognition, and organizational climate all underlie the metaphor of looking at organizations as cultures. In turn, these concepts also provide the basis for the culture’s subcultures. Conrad and Poole (1998) define subcultures as “groups of people whose shared interpretation of their organization helps bind them together and differentiate them from other groups of employees” (p. 117). They are also smaller social segments of the organization that share many but not all of the larger culture’s characteristics. A universally accepted method to analyze cultures has yet to be identified. If such a methodology were to emerge, it would not likely utilize standard quantitative research methods as its primary method to process data. The reason is because the complex details of cultures can most effectively be explained by an in-depth analysis of the thoughts and words of organizational members. For example, using a Likert scale or other quantitative measure could answer how the members of a subculture feel regarding an aspect of an organization, but they will not reveal in the participants’ own words why they feel the way they do or allow participants to identify other aspects of the organization that are important to them.

As organizational communication researchers, it is sometimes necessary to think outside the box (in this case standard research methods) in order to expand the overall body of knowledge on this topic. For example, in regards to the endeavor to find some effective method through which to understand organizational cultures better, this investigation will borrow from the discipline of marketing. Applying marketing concepts to organizational communication
research is logical since marketing may also be a form of communication. Both marketing and organizational researchers have depended heavily on focus groups and questionnaires. One researcher has looked to move beyond the surface information provided through predominantly quantitative methods to better comprehend the marketplace. Gerald Zaltman has refined his Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) to answer the question why people feel the way they do instead of what they feel (Zaltman & Higie, 1993; Zaltman & Coulter, 1995; Zaltman, 1996). The following section of this research will explain the background behind the ZMET, explain the relevance of applying a marketing concept to the realm of organizational communication, and give a conceptual overview of the method.

**Development of the ZMET**

Zaltman believes he has developed a method that will provide a deeper understanding of customers’ inner cognitions with his Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET). At the core of ZMET is Zaltman’s conviction that a customer cannot just tell you how he or she really feels about something. Such fundamental reasons lie too deep cognitively to just bring up on a whim, and often are subconscious (Eakin, 2002). Zaltman realized this and took ideas from fields such as cognitive neuroscience, neurobiology, art therapy, literary criticism, visual anthropology, visual sociology, semiotics, the philosophy of the mind, and psycholinguists to better understand customers’ unconscious thoughts (Zaltman, 1996). Many of the tenets upon which ZMET is based share a striking similarity with the themes of organizational culture mentioned previously. Zaltman advises that for a product to succeed we need to better understand the voice of the customer (Zaltman & Higie, 1993). In the same respect, organizational researchers need to better understand the voice of organizational members.

The question is how does the ZMET do what it does? In a nutshell, ZMET uses consumers’ visual and other sensory input plus qualitative research to understand the underlying mental configurations that drive consumers to act the way they do (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). ZMET is designed to map the customers’ mental models through metaphor (ZMET Research Process). The ZMET is a qualitative method that uses personal interviews to explore participants’ minds. Due to its reliance on aspects of nonverbal communication as well as its similarities with the organizational culture themes of symbolism and performance, organizational cognition, and culture as climate, the ZMET can be modified to uncover the true feelings of a subculture’s members towards the organization.
Seven key assumptions underlie ZMET (Zaltman, 1996).

1. Most social communication is nonverbal. Different aspects of nonverbal communication include facial expressions, physical gestures and space, attire, scent, touch, as well as aspects of paralanguage like pitch, timbre, and rhythm. These nonverbals are communicated as symbols from one organizational member to another. By understanding the role of an organization’s symbolism, researchers will be more able to see the values of the organization.

2. Thoughts occur as images. Most of the images we think of are not words. When verbal language is connected with nonverbal information, communication comprehension is greatly increased. Signs are not only verbal expressions. They appear in the forms of simple symbols, stories, metaphors, ideologies, rituals, rites, and sagas. Again, by understanding both verbal and nonverbal symbols, that pattern of how organizations become socially constructed becomes more lucid.

3. Metaphors are central to cognition. On average we use about six metaphors per minute we speak. Thus, by listening and analyzing the metaphors different people use, we can learn more about them. Organizational cultural communication scholars discern what key metaphors a culture holds and what role they play. These metaphors represent specific organizational ideologies and world views.

4. Cognition has its basis in somatic experiences. The information that the senses detect and interpret from the environment serves as raw data for the mind to understand and comprehend.

5. There is a deep comingling of reason, emotion, and experience. During the cognitive process, each of these types of information influence one’s reactions and thoughts.

6. The deep recesses of thought can be reached. Cognitive processes are often so complex that the average person is unable to call upon them without serious reflection. These thoughts are still accessible through methods listening to the customer’s inner voice.

7. All customers have underlying thoughts. Through understanding their fundamental metaphors, bridges of reason can be established between what organizational members feel at their core and how those feelings manifest themselves in external actions and attitudes.
The ZMET is actually the first patented U.S. research tool (Eakin, 2002). Since its inception, ZMET has had over 6000 participants, and has been used in over 20 different countries by 25 different companies (ZMET Research Process). Past customers include AT&T, Eastman Kodak, Coca-Cola, General Motors, Lifetime Television, Monitor Co., Pacific Gas and Electric, Polaroid, and Reebok (Zaltman, 1996).

**Black Experiences in Universities**

One example of a subculture in organizations that has been gaining more attention is that of blacks. In numerous and diverse settings, blacks and their experiences are becoming the focus of research topics so that their perspective is better understood. Understanding the black perspective in organizations is important both on a societal level as well as at the level of organization under study in this research (referred to as University X). The chance that organizational members will encounter colleagues of different racial and ethnic groups increases every day. Perhaps an effective means to ensure that such encounters run smoothly would be to continue increasing the body of knowledge of how such factions think and perceive the world. An increased comprehension as to how a minority group, such as blacks, thinks could possibly result in fewer cases of accidental racism and racial intolerance. This reduction would come about as workers become aware of what things could possibly be seen as offensive to members of minority groups, but often go undiscussed and thus overlooked.

Whether it is on the job, in relationships, or in education, blacks have frequently been on the outside trying to break into the organizational structure set up by the dominant majority. This is especially true in the university setting. By envisioning the university setting as an organizational culture, a racial minority (as is the case in the majority of universities across the United States) such as blacks can be viewed as a significant subculture. In regards to the black perspective on University X, a better understanding of the concept in this environment can possibly explain why black students have reported high levels of dissatisfaction. Organizational researchers should seek to better understand the experience of blacks through qualitative means. Since stereotypes frequently serve to guide ones thoughts and actions, the beginning of the following section will first identify major stereotypes involving African Americans and how they play into the black experience institutions of higher education.

Stereotypes allow people shortcuts when it comes to deciding things quickly. They are usually simple in nature, resist evidence to the contrary, and often are approached
unquestioningly (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). When this happens, stereotypes can lead to strong forms of discrimination (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). In-groups form stereotypes towards another group that are based on social, ethnic, or racial characteristics that often place the out-group in a subservient position due to ethnocentric biases (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). This focus of power gives the in-group the perceived right to envision and treat the out-group inhumanely or unfairly. It is considered logical that when someone holds a favorable outlook towards something that they will treat it with respect and vice versa (O’Keefe & Delia, 1981). Attitudes that guide stereotypes are perceived as a person’s general disposition of an object, and attitudes are strong indicators as to how someone will act.

A prominent example of the effects of stereotypes and attitudes is the view many whites hold toward blacks. When white individuals hold negative stereotypes of blacks, these beliefs act as an obstacle to progress such as neighborhood and workplace integration and educational opportunities for minorities (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). One study examined how two-thirds of black participants perceived whites as harboring negative stereotypes of blacks as violent, lazy, dumb, immoral, undisciplined whiners who abuse drugs and alcohol and would rather live off welfare than work (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). More so than whites, Jews, Southern whites, Asian or Hispanic Americans, blacks are most likely to be seen as possessing negative attributes (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997).

Stereotypes not only affect how whites come to view blacks, but they also strongly determine how this minority comes to see themselves. Racial identity can be defined as the attitudes and beliefs that people hold about themselves (Mitchell & Dell, 1992). The dominant stereotypes of a society determine how a people come to identify themselves racially. Racial identity should be thought of more like an attitude than anything else (Mitchell & Dell, 1992). The Africentric approach to racial identity focuses on placing black cultural ideals at the center of one’s identity development. The first aspect of developing a personal identity reflects how well someone is able to secure a sense of his or her social order (Fleiming, 1981). The development of a strong racial identity has been seen to have many consequences for blacks. In particular, those in the role of college students need this sense of self since it is at this point that many young men and women develop the values and beliefs that guide them for the rest of their lives.
In the entering of minorities to colleges and universities, the number of black students has declined in recent decades (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). Black males in particular account for only about 3.5% of total college enrollment in the U.S. (Davis, 1995). At the same time, however, these same students are disproportionately represented among those forced to leave college because of financial difficulties, negative experiences, and low academic performance (Davis, 1995). The number of blacks graduating is rapidly declining as well since there is such a high dropout rate of black students from predominantly white institutions (PWI) (Adan & Feiner, 1995). This decrease in graduates will carry out to affect the number of African American representatives at the graduate level and in other professional schools (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991).

There is a vast amount of sociopsychological research that says black students at PWI’s suffer from classic identity crisis which adversely affects their academic performances in the form of lower grade point averages (Davis, 1995). Many African American students report negative relationships with their peers as well as their instructors at PWI’s. These relationships are so poor that many black students report avoiding any sort of interaction with these people outside of the classroom. Likewise, black students at PWI’s report rarely attending any activities put on by black organizations and are not socially active overall (Davis, 1995). These students supposedly experience many forms of social alienation that come from a desire to hold onto their cultural beliefs as well as balance the social values and philosophies of their predominantly white university (Chavous, 2000). This alienation is an example of dialectical tensions. Black students at PWI’s have to balance the demands of autonomy versus connection and openness versus closedness (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Like many minorities, black students at PWI’s must live with the pressures of maintaining their racial identities while also fitting in with their white surroundings. Also, black students may have a hard time opening up to white students due to a lack of familiarity and trust.

Blacks at PWI’s will have more adaptive problems than their peers attending predominantly black institutions (PBI). Most research indicates that blacks at PBI’s receive more supporting and nurturing educational environments (Davis, 1995). Another primary determinant to a black student’s experience at a college or university reflects the characteristics of their previous racial environment. Specifically, black students with prior interracial educational experiences adjust much easier to PWI’s than those who did not have such
experiences (Adan & Feiner, 1995). On the other hand, students with little or no prior interracial experiences had easier adjustment issues at predominantly black institutes (Adan & Feiner, 1995). In sum, the stronger the environmental and social congruence between one’s present and former environments the greater one’s experiences of adaptation to the college experience (Adan & Feiner, 1995).

Research reveals that two salient factors dictate why black students report overall more success at predominantly black institutes than at their predominantly white counterparts 1) a perceived lack of social support and 2) perceived discrimination by faculty and other non-black students at PWI’s (Davis, 1995). Indeed, it is the experience of open and hidden racism in their classroom relationships that lead black students at PWI’s to report higher levels of rejection and incompetence (Fleming, 1981). At the same time, black students who perform well academically at PWI’s report better relationships with professors and peers overall (Davis, 1995). Instead of being the best years of an African American student’s life, the college experience is more stressful than relaxing.

The Black Experience at University X

Like all colleges and universities, University X is an institution that must work to match its changing social environment if it wishes to maintain a competitive edge. “Diversity” has been a catchword at University X for some years now. One of University X’s main concerns regarding diversity focuses on the experience of its minority students, in particular blacks. As a whole, University X has been making great strides to increase and improve its policies towards these students. The following statistics, which were all gathered from the university website, reflect these strides.

Since 1990, the enrollment of minority students at University X has increased by 80%, with the number growing from 750 students in 1990 to 1,361 in the fall of 2001 (University X website). The number of black students in particular increased by 60% from 411 to 666 in the same time period (University X website). University X’s goal is to have minority students represent 10% of the overall student body by the fall of 2003. In the fall of 2001 the percent stood at 9.6% (University X website).

The university also boasts an impressive retention rate of minority students, with 88% of minority freshmen returning for their sophomore year. The national average of returning minority students for their sophomore year is only 78% (University X website). Regarding
blacks specifically, their graduation rate at University X is the highest of any public university in its state with 56% finishing in six years or less (University X website). The university almost tripled its minority scholarships in the past five years. Diversity scholarships for the 2000-2001 school year were estimated at $4.1 million, up from $1.6 million in 1995-1996 (University X website).

The university has also taken steps to improve the experience for minority students in the classroom. Throughout the curriculum there are a number of courses that focus on issues of diversity (University X website). Students can also experience multiculturalism through the University Steel Band, the African Dance and Drum Ensemble, and the Global Rhythms Ensemble (University X website). University X has also worked to improve the living experience of on campus students. One notable bright spot is a certain program started in the 1997-1998 school year. It involves first year volunteers who live in the same residence hall and meet with instructors in house every week to discuss issues such as how to communicate honestly and to grow in skills such as empathy and concern for others. At University X, female students (black and white) outnumber male students about 55% to 45% (University X website). University X institutional research indicates that black females report higher levels of dissatisfaction with the school experience when compared to their male counterparts. For these two reasons, black female students were chosen to represent the black sample. In order to eliminate gender variation, white female students were selected to represent white students.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to apply a qualitative method based on ZMET research to an organizational context, specifically the study of culture and subculture. In this research, the ZMET was used to explore the cognitive constructs of black and white students in a university organization. The university was treated as an organizational culture, and black and white students were seen as possibly distinct subcultures. The ZMET allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of how the subculture perceives and discerns its place in the organizational culture. The overarching research question posed was:

RQ1. Do the cognitive construct maps of black female students differ from the cognitive construct maps of white female students?
Chapter Two: Methodology

Participants

Seven black female undergraduate students and nine white female undergraduate students were recruited to participate in this study. Students were drawn from a basic communication class subject pool, and announcements of the study were made during class by the individual instructors. Students enrolled in the courses were given course research participation credit for volunteering, while other students not in these classes were recruited and given small tokens of appreciation for their participation.

Research Team Demographics

The research team included an experienced white male faculty member, a white male graduate student (the author of this thesis), and a white female undergraduate student.

ZMET Procedure

Data collection began by having each student take ten to fifteen photographs representing their thoughts and feelings about University X (Zaltman & Higie, 1993; Coulter, Zaltman, & Coulter, 2001). After being given their initial instructions and the camera, a personal interview was scheduled approximately seven to ten days later.

The photographs participants brought in were metaphors that allowed researchers insight into their cognitive processes and served as a focal point for much of the interview. Requiring participants to supply their own images for the interview puts them in charge of the stimuli used to guide the conversation. A variety of prompts and probes used in art therapy are employed to draw out verbal descriptions of the attitudes and feelings the photos represent. The guided conversation allows the researcher to learn not only about the participant’s initial thoughts (similar to that collected through more traditional means such as surveys and focus groups) but also about his or her deeper cognitive conceptions of their university experience. This one-on-one interview style can produce more valid, reliable, and relevant findings than those elicited from the traditional means of gathering data (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The interview sessions were video taped.

Two interviewers handled the one on one session in this research. The first interviews were done by an experienced faculty member of the communication department. The secondary interviewer (the author of this thesis) trained by watching the initial interviews from an observation room. After two or three viewings, the secondary interviewer sat in on one of the
sessions and observed first hand. Soon after he handled the interview with the primary interviewer sitting in on the session to offer assistance if needed. From then on, the secondary interviewer handled all subsequent appointments.

**ZMET Steps.** The ZMET interview uses several steps to bring guiding metaphors and constructs to the surface in order to determine their governing relationships. These steps include: [1] storytelling, [2] missed images, [3] sorting task, [4] triad task, [5] expand the frame, [6] sensory (nonvisual) metaphors, [7] the vignette [8] mental map (For a full overview of the interview protocol see Appendix A). Each step provides a different chance for identifying and better comprehending the participant’s guiding cognitive metaphors (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). Nearly all subjects report enjoying this process. Also, every application of the ZMET steps varies since different situations call for different configurations of the sequence of steps (Zaltman & Higie, 1993).

In the first step participants were asked to describe how each picture related to his or her impressions of University X (Coulter, Zaltman, & Coulter, 2001). Human memory revolves around story telling. Most subjects came to the interview with a definite story they wished to tell about the pictures and images they had collected (Coulter, Zaltman, & Coulter, 2001). Participants were encouraged to imagine themselves in the picture to explain what was going on and then describe what that person or thing was (ZMET Research Process). It was of utmost importance that the researcher refrained from interpreting any of the pictures in order to not influence or limit the participant’s explanations. These stories revealed visual metaphors and were rich in information (Coulter, Zaltman, & Coulter, 2001).

The second step had the interviewer ask the participant if he or she had become aware of any images that he or she wished had been collected. The researcher explored what the images might have been. The researcher marked this on a posted note and included this missing image in with the others (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). This was important because all pertinent images must be covered (Coulter, Zaltman, & Coulter, 2001). This step allowed the participant to add anything he or she may have forgotten to take a picture of or anything that may have come to mind in the storytelling process.

Step three had the participants sort the images into their own meaningful piles and to provide a label or description for each. There were no restrictions on the piles. This step was important because it helped to establish the constructs relevant to the participants about their
feelings toward University X (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). If participants were unable to make any distinguishing construct piles, then the interview moved on accordingly to the next step. The fourth step had the interviewer shuffle the images and then pick three images while being careful not to look at them. The participant was then asked to indicate how any two photographs were alike, but different from the third, with regards to his or her thoughts and feelings towards University X. A student might say that two pictures were similar because they expressed a feeling of trust. The interviewer would then question the respondent to find out what led to trust and what consequences trust may have had within the context of the study. The fifth step had the interviewer randomly select another photograph and asked the student to widen the frame of the picture and describe what else might enter the picture that reinforced the original idea developed in step four. In step six, the interviewer asked participants to express their ideas using various sensory images. For instance, participants were asked what was (and what was not) the color, taste, smell, touch, and sound of University X. Each answer was then further explored to uncover deeper dimensions of the individual’s thoughts (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). In step seven, the interviewer asked participants to create a movie or one act play that expressed important ideas about the topic. They may be asked to create a 30-60 second mind’s eye video of the important ideas that have been discussed thus far to uncover further dimensions of the individual’s cognitions (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). The eighth step had the interviewer review all the constructs that had been recorded. They were checked for accuracy and the subject was again asked if there were any missing constructs. Participants were asked to create a diagram of key concepts. The student printed each construct on a posted note and indicated the relationship between each concept. When they finished, they were asked to walk the interviewer through the map.

Data Analysis

After all of the interviews were completed, the research team (e.g., two other communication knowledgeable researchers) reviewed each videotaped interview to identify key themes or constructs. A construct is an abstraction created by the researcher to capture common ideas, concepts, or themes expressed by participants. The constructs represent the important features of the mental map of participant minds (concepts, ideas, emotions, values, thoughts, and feelings). Although individual constructs have meaning, their real importance lies in the
relationship between them (ZMET Coding Guide). Researchers analyzed how many times construct pairs occurred across subjects to create the consensus map (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). Aggregating the mental models of participants can show the areas of consensus among them. A consensus map may depict a network of up to 30 interrelated constructs (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). A construct should be mentioned by at least a third of participants and a relationship should be indicated by at least a quarter of them to be considered important enough to be included in the consensus map (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). In the present research, the black sample consisted of seven participants whereas the white sample had nine. This study used two levels of generalizability that were based on Zaltman’s standards established in previous research. Given Zaltman’s recommendation (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995) for at least a quarter of participants mentioning a concept to consider it meaningful, it made sense in both samples to exclude any construct that was not mentioned by at least three people. Once this guideline had been established, two levels of generalizability were formulated to reveal constructs and relationships that were agreed upon as most central by the greatest amount of participants. The secondary level of importance came about as a way to flesh out the construct maps, but also as a means to deal with those constructs mentioned by more than a few participants. The finished maps were made of both solid lines and dotted lines. The former represented the constructs and relationships mentioned by 5 or more participants, while the latter denoted the constructs and relationships mentioned by at least 3-4 of the participants.

On average, the consensus map represents 80% of all constructs mentioned by participants (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). The map represents a flow chart showing the linkages among constructs. For example, two possible constructs that minorities might feel are part of an organization are racism and ostracism. To minority members in an organization, the relationship between these constructs might be that the racism they feel from the organization causes them to be ostracized from really belonging. Direct and indirect connections represent the thought processes for how one idea leads to another (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995).

Each of the three research team members independently content analyzed each interview. When the team met, the individual maps for each person were viewed one at a time to provide a single individual map acceptable to each coder. If a discrepancy arose between research members on a particular construct or relationship then the research team reviewed the videotapes of the interviews in order to settle the disagreement. After each individual map for all members
in both samples was completed, the primary researcher took each map and tallied on a list how many times each construct was mentioned. For example, if five members of the white sample mentioned the construct of academics, then a five was marked down next to this construct on the list. The same measure was done with all of the construct relationships. For instance, if four members of black sample mentioned that competition led to stress then this relationship (denoted as competition $\rightarrow$ stress) received a four after it on the list. After all of the frequencies had been marked, then those relationships that received a numerical mark higher than two were placed on the general construct map. When a construct was mentioned within two different relationships, then a chain was created. For example in the black sample construct map the perceptions implied that academics led to stress (academics $\rightarrow$ stress) and that stress led to meaningful interactions (stress $\rightarrow$ meaningful interactions). The resulting construct map portrayed academics $\rightarrow$ stress $\rightarrow$ meaningful interactions. The layout of the construct maps for the samples were created with maximum simplicity in mind, though at times they became complex. At times, microcosms of relationships appeared that did not connect to the major matrix. This disconnection caused no alarm since sometimes people’s thoughts are not all connected. After a consensus map was created for both African American students and white students, both were content analyzed to distinguish what and where distinctions lie.
Chapter Three: Results

The research question asked if the cognitive construct maps of black female students differ from the cognitive construct maps of white female students. This is a broad question, and can best be answered by viewing the concepts and relationships gathered from both samples.

Table 1 reveals the constructs that are specific and shared by both samples. One can see that the number of constructs that are unique to each sample is far greater that the number of shared constructs. The same trend can be noticed in Table 2. After the presentation of these tables, chapter three will continue by providing quotes from participants that exemplify the individual constructs and the relationships they share. The black sample will be reviewed first as examples of statements given by respondents for each construct and relationships will be given. The actual construct map for the black sample will follow these qualifications. The same pattern will be applied to the constructs and relationships of the white sample.

Table 1: Constructs Mentioned by the Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs Specific to the Black Sample</th>
<th>Constructs Specific to the White Sample</th>
<th>Constructs Common to Both Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Greek Life</td>
<td>Social Scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Niche</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Professional Choices</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful Interactions</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
<td>Positive Feeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Campus Resources</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body Image</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereotypes of Students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Diversity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University X Physical--</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment and People</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University X Bubble</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Construct Relationships Mentioned by the Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Construct Relationships Specific to the Black Sample</th>
<th>Construct Relationships Specific to the White Sample</th>
<th>Primary Construct Relationships Common to Both Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Scene → Competition</td>
<td>Friends → Social Scene</td>
<td>Social Scene → Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics → Personal and Professional Choices</td>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Academics → Positive Feeling</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress → Meaningful Interactions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful Interactions → Personal Growth</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary Construct Relationships Specific to the Black Sample</th>
<th>Secondary Construct Relationships Specific to the White Sample</th>
<th>Secondary Construct Relationships Common to Both Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement → Importance of Niche</td>
<td>Greek Life → Social Scene</td>
<td>Competition → Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics → Competition</td>
<td>Organizations → Positive Feeling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal and Professional Choices → Meaningful Interactions</td>
<td>Diversity → Positive Feeling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Campus Resources → Academics</td>
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<td>Body Image → Stereotypes of Students</td>
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<td>Lack of Diversity → University X Bubble</td>
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<td>University X Physical Environment and People →</td>
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<td>University X Bubble and University X Bubble →</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University X Physical Environment and People</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Operationalization of Black Constructs**

**Involvement.** This term refers to being or becoming active in some organization on or through campus.

Participant 1 operationalized involvement as “getting more involved on campus.”

Participant 2: “Everyone should be experiencing the whole like thing of the college life, the campus and everything.”
Importance of Niche. The black sample stated that it was important to possess a feeling of belonging while at the university. This construct was manifested through the label of the “Importance of Niche.”

Participant 1: “I don’t think there is a solution to the problem here on this campus, as far as what African Americans can do socially. It’s frustrating.”

Participant 2: “The women’s center has almost been like a second home to me…The people are really nice…I feel like I really know them…It is just a really good experience.”

Social Scene. This concept was largely described as activities done by students to relax. This term often involves venturing off campus to go to a bar or house to engage in socialization. Black students viewed this construct differently than their white counterparts. Due to their minority status, black students typically stated that the university social scene was definitely more geared to and dominated by whites.

Participant 1: “To hang socially…with whites…their scene is to go to frat parties, drinking is involved, like…you know a crazy night.”

Participant 2: “Parties uptown you know bars, stamps on the hand, ID cards.”

Interviewer: “Who goes uptown?”

Participant 2: “The majority are Caucasians…Parties African Americans go to…[University X] cops, metal detector…majority are black people.”

Competition. By and large this construct represented the urge to prove one’s superiority over some opponent. Black females reported both social competition among themselves and with white females. As well, the black sample noticed competition among students in the academic setting.

Participant 1: “It is just easier for a female to have [non-romantic] male friends…You don’t have to worry about competing…Females compete all the time…All females feel like they need to compete to be Greek.”


Academics. Of all the constructs mentioned by both sample groups, this was the most common. The main thought the majority of students associate with their time at an institution with the academic reputation of University X is their school work. Students are well aware of...
University X’s academic reputation and duly reflect a sense of pride at attending a challenging institution of higher education.

Participant 1: “[University X] has a great academic reputation…We are always studying.”

Participant 2: “Classes…grades… [University X] is rated pretty high academically.”

**Personal and Professional Choices.** This construct was unique to the black sample and means the ability to choose one’s pathway. In other words, the black sample perceived that University X provides a greater opportunity for one to take charge of his or her destiny.

Participant 1: “There has to be room for growth where if I decided that I wanted to get married and have a kid, that they would be flexible with that. Something that has a good work, work/life balance.”

Participant 2: “Being at [University X] has introduced me to all of these different opportunities and all of these different organizations I can get involved in…In all of our lives we search for the truth.”

**Meaningful Interactions.** This construct refers to the ability to develop and cultivate interpersonal relationships that may either be lasting or rather more ephemeral in nature.

Participant 1: Meaningful interactions shouldn’t be forced…Which sometimes I think we prohibit…If the end goal is diversity, you’re gonna have to force people to have meaningful natural interactions.”

Participant 2: “When I studied with Shelly…one thing that I like is…she’s just really open and like she took interest in me and wanted to learn about me…I was really glad…to meet new people and branch outside the black community.”

**Stress.** This construct refers to the internal or external pressure felt by individuals to accomplish some pending goal. It is implied that stress can be either positive or negative, based on the purpose it serves. Such tension is good when motivational but bad when overwhelming or paralyzing.

Instructor: “Is there a lot of stress at [University X]?”

Participant 1: “At times it seems like one week I have all this stuff to do, and as soon as I get through it I still have all this stuff to do again.”

Participant 2: “She [participant’s roommate] was extremely stress, she hadn’t had any
sleep from constantly being in classes, whether it was meetings, meetings with professors…I hear a lot of students say that.”

**Personal Growth.** Overall, this concept refers to the internal development of one’s character and mental abilities.

Participant 1: “One person will stand up and say I feel this way and one person will get up and say no that is wrong, because of this. I feel this is how growth occurs…”

Participant 2: “We have to go outside the color barrier and just try to make it outside of that environment.”

**Operationalization of Black Construct Relationships**

Along with operationalizing the constructs, it was necessary to communicate how the different relationships between the constructs were construed. It is the relationship between the constructs that is most important in the development of construct maps. While it is tempting to state that these relationships represent clear causal relationships, one must resist such inclinations and remember that these linkages indicate only the perceptions of the respondents. From these pathways, however, researchers are more informed as to how different concepts may affect each other.

*Involvement ➔ Importance of Niche.* This perceived relationship implies that one’s involvement with the university, some organization, or with friends, leads to a sense of belonging.

Participant 1: “Feeling comfortable at [University X]…is finding your niche and for me being a part of those organizations is me finding my niche…or a little bit of happiness here.”

Participant 2: “I like being around, I call it my family because we all support each other, we are all there for each other; we know what we are all going through.”

*Social Scene ➔ Competition.* This perceived relationship implies that the black sample perceives the social scene at University X as a competitive environment. Competition was deemed to mean rivalry between girls as to who can look the most attractive as well as who can gain the most attention from males. Different participants in this sample mentioned that different aspects of the social scene led to competition. One participant implied that the greatest
competition came from white females, while another said the greatest rivalry came from other black females.

Participant 1: “We [black females] view each other as competition in terms of men.”

Participant 2: “There are so many more girls than guys…If there are potentials, then they already have girlfriends…You don’t come to [University X] for the social aspect.”

**Academics ➔ Competition.** Black students implied that they see the academic aspect of their experience as a major source of competition.

Participant 1: “I am very competitive in the classroom…I have a GPA to worry about, so sometimes it creates conflict.”

Participant 2: “[University X] is hard…you have to keep up on the ball as far as studying…”

**Academics ➔ Personal and Professional Choices.** The majority of participants in this sample perceived that the lessons learned from University X’s academics allowed them greater freedom to make choices in future interactions.

Interviewer: “And why are academics important to you?”

Participant 1: “Because that’s the whole reason you go to college.”

Interviewer: “And if you have good academics, then where is that gonna lead you to?”

Participant 1: “A good job…when I graduate if there are jobs…but also to make yourself like a better person.”

Participant 2: “I think the outcomes are good. You actually…learn something. Here at [University X]…you actually…have to try but most of the time you will have a good outcome of it…I am here to find my career.”

Participant 3: “Education is what I need to succeed in the future.”

**Competition ➔ Stress.** In this implied relationship, the competition felt from different sources such as academics and relationships results in stress. This relationship is not uncommon as many individuals report an added amount of pressure during times of struggle.

Participant 1: “Competition goes into everything.”

Interviewer: “Because of the competition, you need the stress relief?”

Participant 1: “Yep.”

Participant 2: “She [white females] can do all of this stuff I can’t do…or it would be
questionable because of my race…White sorority girls rule this campus.”

Personal and Professional Choices ➔ Meaningful Interactions. This perceived relationship indicates that one result of certain choices made at the personal and professional level can be personal interactions that contain a deeper meaning. One may conclude from this relationship that the black sample seeks to gain something more intrinsic and perhaps related to character development from the choices they make at the university level.

Participant 1: “I get involved on campus…that is a big one for me.”
Interviewer: “What are you doing?”
Participant 1: “A feeling of purpose, I feel I get to use my talents, form relationships with people that I probably normally wouldn’t on a normal basis.”

Participant 2: “There are two paths here… [University X] is what you make out of it…
Interviewer: “You can choose a meaningful interaction?
Participant 2: “Mmhmm [Head nodding meaning ‘yes’].”

Stress ➔ Meaningful interaction. Many different avenues can be utilized in order to deal with stressful situations. This implied relationship indicates that members of the black sample choose to deal with stress through the development of deeper relationships with other individuals.

Participant 1: “Whenever we have finals and stuff is getting crazy, I can just go to church and we will pray about it and everything is gonna be okay.”
Participant 2: “Feeling welcome helps you to adapt to the new place…especially if you are new.”

Meaningful Interactions ➔ Personal Growth. This perceived relationship reflects that the ultimate goal in dealing with stress for the black sample is an internal advancement. This growth can be emotional, academic, or spiritual.

Participant 1: “You can’t grow without interaction. You can’t grow without stepping out of your comfort zone.”
Participant 2: “I feel…your outcome…does have something to do with the crowd you hang around with. I consider myself a pretty determined, motivated person.”
Many of the same constructs were mentioned by the white sample and the black sample. On the whole, however, the relationships are very different. Again it must be noted that these constructs and especially their relationships represent the perceptions of the respondents and not actual causal linkages. These differences still reveal, however, many insights about how the two races differ in their perceptions of the university experience.

Operationalization of White Constructs

Greek Life. This construct refers to the presence of fraternities and sororities on campus. The majority of the white sample hinted at the dominant presence of the Greek community on campus. The white sample reported an appreciation of Greek life as a source of opportunities for friends, relationships, leadership, etc.

Participant 1: “My sorority?...I am like obsessed…I am getting more involved with it this year…to make new friends and meet new people…Rush was a weird process.”

Participant 2: “Greek life is so big on this campus…There is just such a large percentage
of the campus that is involved in Greek activities...It is one of the most popular ways to get involved.”

Participant 3: “I think that the Greek community is huge here...Over 20% of the people here will rush...The majority of the people here are involved in Greek life.”

**Organizations.** This construct refers to different collectivities of individuals that meet due to some common interest. Greek life was separated from this broad concept due to its widespread influence warranting it to be represented by a separate category. The majority of the white sample made mention of the great variety of organizations that are present at University X.

Participant 1: “I am on the skating team...that is the biggest part...it takes up the most time...I love it to meet new people and get involved...We do everything together.”

Participant 2: “I spend a lot of time with the speech team...It is hard work...Being on speech team will help me to perform in front of people.”

**Diversity.** This construct referred to the variety of people on campus. Some participants saw diversity as being represented primarily by different races, whereas others saw diversity as consisting of different perspectives and viewpoints.

Participant 1: “I wanted to be able to walk down the street and see people that I’d know but see someone everyday that I’d never seen before.”

Participant 2: “I try to surround myself with as many different kinds of people as possible...The more people you get to know, the more experiences you get to have, the more you grow as a person...different cultures, different interests.”

**Friends.** This construct refers to the closest individuals that people confide in, look to for support, and usually engage in some sort of social activity together.

Participant 1: “I am better friends with some, but I know all [my housemates]. [Friends are] a group of people to hang out with.”

Participant 2: “Roommates...We think the same things are funny and we are both flexible people...We like to do spontaneous things.”

Participant 3: “I am excited to get off campus and live with my good friends...There was a tight knit group of 8 of us...We are just excited.”
**Social Scene.** This construct refers to participating in some sort of social engagement for enjoyment with other people. Examples of such activities mentioned by the white sample include going out to bars, parties at friends’ houses, and hanging out at fraternities and sororities.

Participant 1: “If you cross campus… over here (Uptown) is my social life…I go out on Thursday…sometimes I go to the Beta house…go uptown and hang out or we go to apartments or houses.”

Participant 2: “Anything non-academic…I spend all my time at his fraternity house…College life is education but also social…All that we do is hang out at Varsity [a local college bar]… This is where my social time is spent.”

Participant 3: “A lot of people are into drinking…This is a party school.”

**Positive Feeling.** This construct refers to a collective term for a number of other constructs that all describe some sort of enjoyable emotion.

Participant 1: “Everyone is really friendly…Feeling comfortable, friends, fun.”

Participant 2: “It is fun to go up to the bars, hang out, just for fun…It is just fun to get away from studying for that half hour.”

Participant 3: “My perception of [University X]…is…feeling comfortable, not intimidated…the atmosphere is so nice here…You are not worried about crime because the campus …is so safe…watching TV, relaxing.”

**Campus Resources.** This term refers to the different amenities that the university offers to its students. Some participants mentioned having specific needs such as learning disabilities that required special services, whereas others implied that this construct referred to more common aspects such as the library, teachers, and the residence halls.

Participant 1: “I don’t mean just Wal-Mart…I mean like all resources, things, people, technology…Resources are central…it is not necessarily the most important of these it is you just need this for everything you do.”

Participant 2: “Teachers, I had just the greatest teachers of all. They all know my name…They are very willing to help you and accommodate you…Recreational sports…we do a great job with that.”

**Academics.** This construct refers to the formal and informal learning aspects of the university. The white respondents were well aware and proud of the university’s academic reputation. They felt that such high standards, while taxing at times, will pay off in the future.
Participant 1: “I have four years to get phenomenal grades and then I can stop doing all my homework.”
Participant 2: “I wanted to portray the fact that the school is very academic and it is very important to do well in school and stay competitive.”
Participant 3: “Academics is having help with school work and stuff.”

Stress. This construct refers to pressure felt by someone based on some internal or external source. The white sample felt stress could be either bad or good based on how it was dealt with. Good stress motivated, while bad stress sabotaged. Stress could come from anywhere. Some participants reported that it came from social relationships, whereas other indicated that it came mostly from the classroom setting.
Participant 1: “It can be good and it can be bad. It pushes me and drives me…I don’t like it because it stresses me out…If I get really stressed out I call my mom…I work harder.”
Participant 2: “The stresses of school…it keeps me motivated…Exams and stuff…one exam weighs so much on my grade…mainly school work.”
Participant 3: “Girls fighting…Everyone tries to be better than someone…It puts pressure on you to be in that loop of trying to find someone…There is a lot of pressure to find the person you are going to marry here.”

Competition. Whites saw competition in all aspects of their University X experience. It would seem that since competition plays such a prominent role in the lives of the students, perhaps University X attracts individuals that are rather competitive by nature.
Participant 1: “I work better under pressure…I feel wherever I go to college there would be the issue…of competition…I am a very competitive person in soccer…I am academically competitive.”
Participant 2: “I think pretty much in everything [there is competition]…College is about academics…It is competition for me to make sure that I don’t fall behind…”
Participants 3: “[University X] is a big thing about having to care about your appearance…It is hard to compete. There is a lot competition, not just with looks, academically it’s a big competition too.”

Success. The white sample largely equated success with material achievement such as a good job and enough money to live comfortably.
Participant 1: “To find a career that I love…finding a fulfilling life in general like finding my comfort zone.”

Participant 2: “Someone who is smart, future, prospects, is going into a successful area…Prepare for a career.”

Participant 3: “I would to think that when I walk out of here with a degree it will say something…One of my biggest goals besides getting a degree and a good education is finding a few people that I can walking out of here say that they were my real good friends.”

*Body Image.* This construct communicates the notion that the white sample saw their University X experience as placing an emphatic focus on one’s physical appearance. Different participants noted this construct as referring to the clothes that someone wore to the way their body appeared. Some participants noted the prominent role that institutions such as the university recreation center and local tanning facilities played in the lives of University X students.

Interviewer: When you say very conscious, what are they [University X students] conscious of?”

Participant 1: “How they look, what sort of situation they are going to be in, and that guys will be there going to the bars uptown.”

Participant 2: “There is a pretty heavy concentration at least from the girls on brand names and stuff.”

Interviewer: “Is there a lot of stress for women and men on how they look?”

Participant 2: “I’d say so, more probably for girls than boys.”

Participant 3: There is constant comparing each other to everyone else who is around you…Body image is a source of competition.”

*Stereotypes of Students.* The prominence of this construct leads to the notion that a definite stereotype of what a University X student is and is not exists. These stereotypes are known both by University X students as well as other students. While some are positive and other are negative, that is not the issue. The important aspect is that stereotypes exist that serve to distinguish the University X experience.

Participant 1: “A lot of people at [University X] are very interested in finding their soul mate here.”
Participant 2: “Students are too concentrated on themselves…Everyone wears brand names and has those Coach bags.”

Lack of Diversity. This construct represents the operationalized opposite of diversity. A generalizable amount of participants noted that the overwhelming homogeneity of the university was disturbing. The same amount also noted that the lack of minorities seriously deprived them of a valuable exposure to other perspectives.

Participant 1: “The majority is white people at this university…The diversity issue.”

Interviewer: “How would you like me to write that down on a piece of paper?”

Participant 1: “The lack of it.”

Participant 2: “The atmosphere is not very diverse. Most people fit into a certain category, and that affects almost everything.”

Participant 3: “There aren’t like minorities here…I have heard that there are more Katies than minorities on this campus …It makes me feel bad…that they aren’t accepted if they wanted to come here.”

University X Bubble. Just as there was a generalizable presence of student stereotypes, there are stereotypes of the university as a whole. The one most noted by students was the “University X Bubble.” This metaphor describes University X as a separate microcosm unattached to the happenings of the outside world. A generalizable amount of students listed this metaphor, and some were satisfied with it while others saw it as a shortcoming.

Participant 1: “We live in our own world…There is no other world outside of [our campus]…We live in the [University X] Bubble.”

Participant 2: “The image of [University X]’s campus, you’ve got that red brick everything looks the same…Everything is supposed to make you happy that you are in a pretty place…Making a good atmosphere for learning and meeting people makes everyone more comfortable.”

University X Physical Environment and People. This construct is the broad term that refers to the individual people of University X as well as the physical environmental aspects such as the buildings and natural components.

Participant 1: “The dorm…is my home away from home.”

Participant 2: “I just think that it’s kind of cool that there are quotes on the side of the
building…The buildings are just more unique…I think just the way the campus looks is really, is real pretty. All of the buildings kind of just go together, they kind of flow.”

Participant 3: “This is who you have to know…Stereotypical Abercrombie model type guys…are [those] stereotyped to go here.”

**Operationalization of White Construct Relationships**

**Greek Life ➔ Social Scene.** Given the prominence of the perception of the Greek system on University X’s campus, it is not surprising that this perceived relationship exists. Quite simply the white sample sees involvement in the Greek system or in its activities as a primary means to enjoy the social scene at the university.

Participant 1: “What I gained from it [her involvement in the Greek system]?…Many more friends…many more opportunities I would say around campus…and I met so many more people.”

Participant 2: “A lot of the social life here revolves around Greek life.”

**Organizations ➔ Positive Feeling.** This implied relationship indicates that a central reason students participate in organizations on campus is that they receive a positive feeling from such interactions. These feelings include such emotions as relaxation, fun, happiness, etc.

Participant 1: “When you are with people every weekend for an entire semester…I know I can go to them for anything.”

Participant 2: “It [the University X experience] has all been helping me to meet more people… I love being involved in different things…I get to know what is going on campus.”

**Diversity ➔ Positive Feeling.** This perceived relationship was interesting in that it seems contradictory with the overall sense of what makes University X comfortable to white students. While this construct emerged consistently, a number of other subjects mentioned that one of the main reasons they feel comfortable here at University X is that they feel they fit in due to their similarity. Perhaps, the majority feels so secure in its hold on the University X experience, that as long as it does not feel its power is threatened, it will be willing to encourage the increase in the importance of diversity.

Participant 1: “Diversity is more than race…Everyone adds to diversity…I am comfortable with how it [level of diversity] is here.”
Participant 2: “We are just like different people thrown into this hall together and we
ended up being such good friends and like all of our differences kind of evened
each other out.”

*Friends ➔ Social Scene.* The ability to develop friends allows one the option to go out to
the bars or to parties, however, another type of social scene might also be just to go to a bar or
house party and dance. Regardless of what type of recreation is chosen, this relationship
between constructs implies that having friends is a precursor to enjoying the social atmosphere at
the university.

Participant 1: “Sometimes we [my friends and I] will make a day of it and go to the
mall…I have fun with my friends uptown.”

Participant 2: “I go out with guys…I like to roam…I have found a good group of people
to hang out with.”

Participant 3: “Throughout my next few years at [University X]…they’re [my friends]
gonna be there the most.”

*Social Scene ➔ Positive Feeling.* For the white sample it seems that a lot of things lead
to positive feelings. It makes sense that as whites are the majority, much of the social scene is
developed to meet their expectations. As a result, they find pleasure in engaging in the social
activities offered in and around University X.

Participant 1: “Without friends, I wouldn’t be having fun or doing the best that I could.”

Interviewer: “What do you do for fun?”

Participant 2: “Hang out at a friend’s house…Sometimes we don’t want to spend money,
so we just don’t go uptown…I think that people like to party and have fun…There
is not much to do here, people like to go out and party and do something.”

Participant 3: “Whenever I am sitting on his [my boyfriend] couch doing nothing I have
no stresses. I am relaxed, I don’t have to worry about homework, I just enjoy my
time with him….Excited, happy…it is just my happy place…It is just a sense of
being comforted…Having social participation makes me feel comfortable.”

*Campus Resources ➔ Academics.* In this perceived relationship the white sample felt
that the university offered adequate resources needed to achieve their academic goals. One
student mentioned having a learning disability, and her academic success was directly attributed
to the special services the university provided her.
Participant 1: “Resources are connected to everything…You obviously need resources for academics.”

Participant 2: “I have a much better shot at getting classes that I want to take at the times I want, with the teachers I want, which just makes the overall academic part of it so much easier.”

**Academics → Positive Feeling.** The majority of students in this sample felt that the main reason for being at University X was to engage in the academic experience. University X has high expectations for the students that it admits, and as a result, many of these students take great pride in achieving high marks. This implied relationship demonstrates that white students associate the academics of the university with some sort of a positive feeling whether it be pride or a sense of accomplishment.

Participant 1: “Schoolwork is not a bad stress…The hard work will help us later on.”

Participant 2: “It’s important to study, that the other reason I’m here…Getting good grades are my main reason for being here.”

Participant 3: “My political science classes are unbelievable…I love coming…and learning something I will enjoy…Once people realize what they want to do it makes them want to learn.”

**Academics → Stress.** While achievement in academics can bring positive emotions such as pride, failure in them or the preparation they require can be the perceived cause of great stress. Many University X students were at the top of their class in their high school academically, however at the university level everyone comes with about equal credentials. In order to stand out, students need to raise their game. This new pressure, especially for first year students is perceived to cause great stress. Participant 1: “Those are really the only things that cause me stress, mainly homework.”

Participant 2: “I don’t want to be in school for 10 years…Going to school and just learning would be horrible.”

Participant 3: “I have a couple of friends who are pre-med, and they work really hard…The expectations are to perform well…Coming here, this is going to be a challenge.”
Academics → Success. This implied relationship indicated that white females saw their academic endeavors as eventually paying off in some sort of reward. The white sample valued physical results such as a good job, higher salary, and new car.

Participant 1: “Being challenged academically is the only thing that is going to help you prepare for a career…Hopefully good grades and therefore good jobs in the future.”

Participant 2: “Education is the main thing in my life…You can’t go anywhere without education.”

Participant 3: “Good academics goes into a good future.”

Competition → Stress. Many students reported a perceived sense of competition with other students in many different areas. Participants reported a sense of struggle with their peers in the classroom as well as to win the attention of a certain male. This need to outdo one another leads to the perception of stress. Something to note is that while many different constructs lead to stress, there is no outlet indicated to reduce the stress in the white sample.

Participant 1: “Stress connects to everything…Everything leads to stress…Competition leads to stress.”

Participant 2: “Competition happens among all girls…competing with each other for guys…I’m a pretty competitive person…When someone picks someone over you, you start wondering why…If they’re [other females] finding someone, maybe I should find someone.”

Body Image → Stereotypes of Students. There is a story that pervades the current classes of students at University X that Playboy, “the gentleman’s magazine,” listed University X very high on a list for having the most attractive female students. This notion is one of many that demonstrates the importance of having a certain body image at this university. Other pervasive ideas state that University X has one of the highest rates of eating disorders among female students. While the validity of these statements can be argued, the majority of white females interviewed reported that they feel a certain amount of pressure to maintain a certain image. In turn this image shapes the expectation of current and future students.

Participant 1: “Everyone wants to look the same…People here are more concerned with how they look…Body image feeds into materialism and clothing.”

Participant 2: “It’s what they feel in their own minds is success, popularity, [and]
beauty. A lot of people tend to follow what the whole does.”

Participant 3: “You want to look as good or better than the people you are spending time with…There is pressure for guys as well…Body image is important and that is maintained by working out…I come here and I knew I was going to have to work harder…I have never had anyone focus that much on body image.”

Lack of Diversity → University X Bubble. This perceived relationship relates that the stereotype of the University X Bubble is in part due to the lack of diversity at the university. As mentioned, white participants had mixed feelings on this issue. Some stated that they like the feeling of security offered by the university while others felt that it only stood in the way of adding diversity to the University X experience.

Participant 1: “I wish I could have the academic reputation of [University X] and diversity.”

Participant 2: “Typical [University X] student: Caucasian and upper middle class…Minorities are definitely not typical students…It’s important to have diversity of opinions…concentrating mostly on race…may not be the best way to get a diversity of opinions but it definitely helps…I can definitely tell it’s probably not as diverse as the like the University of Michigan just from stereotypes of the two places.”

University X Physical Environment and People → University X Bubble and University X Bubble → University X Physical Environment and People. The reason these two relationships are presented together is that they possessed the only reciprocal perceived relationship. By this, it is meant that just as one construct was implied to cause the other, the opposite rang true at the same time. In examination of the first part of the relationship, the white female participants reported feeling that aspects of the physical environment of the campus as well as the student body contribute to the microcosmic metaphor of the University X bubble. At the same time, the perception of University X being a world unto itself, guides the university and students in determining what is acceptable.

Quotes supporting “University X Physical Environment and People → University X Bubble: Participant 1: “It [structure on campus] adds character to our campus but it makes for a nice atmosphere walking all around campus…It’s a beautiful campus and people are friendly.”
Participant 2: “I am astonished at the amount of people that get up at 5 in the morning and begin knocking on the doors at the [Recreation Center] to get in because they have to work out everyday…Since I have been here I get up and do my hair and put my make up on everyday…It became important to me…Some of the girls are like, wow, they are overdoing it.”

Quotes supporting “University X Bubble → University X Physical Environment and People”

Participant 1: “A lot of the time, people look at fraternities solely as different labels…Part of it is we live in a small college town…secluded from large cities…I like it.”

Participant 2: “I was almost afraid of coming to [University X] because I thought it was too preppy and I didn’t want to be in an environment that was too like straight-edged…When I got here I realized that it was a…lot more than just that you can see inside the dorm rooms…going on beneath the surface.”

Graph 2: White Construct Map

White Construct Map

Greek Life — Organizations — Diversity

Friends — Social Scene — Positive Feeling

Campus Resources — Academics — Stress — Competition

Academics — Success

Body Image — Stereotypes of Students

Stereotypes of Students — Lack of Diversity — University X Bubble

University X Physical Environment and People — University X Bubble

Graph: White Construct Map

Legend:

- = (3-4)
- = (5-9)
Chapter Four: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to apply the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) in a university setting to compare subcultures for white and black students. The ZMET is a tool designed to help understand the construct maps governing how black students and white students perceive their university experience. This chapter will first review the theoretical implications of research results from the following three organizational culture perspectives: organizational symbolism, organizational cognition, and organizational climate. Discussion will then turn to a comparison of black and white subcultures, some limitations to generalizing these research findings, and finally, suggestions for future research.

Organizational Culture

Organizations possess cultural characteristics that distinguish one from another (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). For present purposes the theoretical perspectives used to understand these cultures include organizational symbolism, organizational cognition, and organizational climate. Cultures often develop complex symbolic systems through which their members communicate with one another. The primary forms through which these methods of symbolic interaction occur are metaphor, stories, and rites and rituals. The next perspective of understanding organizational cultures is organizational cognition. This refers to the viewpoint that culture refers to what people learn and what is on their mind, rather than focusing on what organizational members do or make. Underlying the cognitive perspective is the notion that organizations spring forth from the minds of thinkers (Mohan, 1993). Finally, the concept of organizational climate refers to the enduring organizational characteristics that different organizational members perceive. In other words, organizational climate can be thought of as the primary way the fundamental constructs of a culture come into play between different situations, when different group members interact, and even the culture itself (Moran & Volkwein, 1992).

Symbolism

One may come to understand an organization’s truth by looking at the metaphors, symbols, rituals, and stories passed on and perpetuated by organizational members. Each human being is a collector of information of the culture he or she lives in. Symbols pervade every aspect of human existence. Also, symbols can hold different meanings for different people. As a result, different individuals in the same organization can look at the same symbol and come
away with totally different meanings. These fundamental tenets held true for students who participated in this study. The main forms symbols manifested themselves in this research were in the traditional forms of metaphor, stories, and rites and rituals.

Metaphor. This term refers to the practice of increasing one’s understanding of something by comparing one thing to something else that is more common. Many different examples of metaphors were mentioned by both black and white participants. The most generalizable finding involving metaphor, however, came through the white sample’s perceived construct of the “University X Bubble”. This comparison of the University X to a bubble is meant to convey that the university experience for white female students encapsulates their entire scope of life. There is little awareness of what else is going on in the world as though nothing important exists beyond the boundaries of the University X community. To review, in the white construct map (See Graph 2), two other constructs in particular were seen as contributing to this bubble metaphor. Those constructs were the lack of diversity at the university as well as its physical environment and people. The university’s perceived lack of diversity and its unique physical facilities and people strengthen the comparison to a bubble. White participants mentioned that a defining feature of many University X buildings was similarity in architecture and façade. This finding is not surprising because there are uniform construction standards designed to contribute to an architectural homogeneity on campus. In like manner, the white females also stressed that the vast majority of University X students dress the same way and hold similar beliefs about personal physical appearance. Although not as formal as building codes, these standards were widely known and complied with by students. Thus, the bubble promotes a common stereotypical perception of a homogeneity homeostasis by maintaining a degree of sameness with its boundaries that attracts students who also value that quality. Uniform aesthetics in the physical environment seems to contribute to a measure of uniformity in personal aesthetics and values by self-selection.

Stories. This method of symbolic interaction played a prominent role in the data gathering interviews with every study participant. The first step of the ZMET protocol encouraged participants to tell their unique stories about the photographic images they created. Regardless of whether stories are based on fact or fiction, they always reflect some of the values and beliefs of the culture of the storyteller. The storytelling typically accounted for about half of
the time participants spent in the interview and consequently contributed much of the data that appears in the construct maps.

*Rites and Rituals.* These forms of symbolic interaction include elaborate sets of activities that come together to fulfill some larger sense of expression. For example, a gathering of family, the presence of a minister, and the expression of vows are all elements seen by some cultures as necessary to complete the ritual of marriage. Many participants in this study, black and white, indicated that going to college in itself was completing an important rite of passage in their lives. Examples include moving into and living in a dormitory, rushing a sorority, going to a bar to celebrate a twenty-first birthday, study for exams with friends, and attending parties. By obtaining a degree from University X, students felt that they would be credentialed and accepted by society. This rite of passage was thought to ensure a successful transition into the next stage of life.

*Organizational Cognition*

This theoretical perspective refers to the cognitive properties that are basic to the development of organizational culture. In other words, how organizational members think about their larger collectivity plays an important role in defining how the entity grows in terms of cultural norms and rules. The greater the number of organizational members that share similar cognitions toward the organization, the stronger the unity of the culture. When different groups of individuals share vastly different cognitions towards an organization, this can be seen as evidence of the existence of different subcultures.

The dominant cognitions of an organization can be interpreted through an analysis of the constructs mentioned as important by organizational members. In this study there is an observable difference in the number and nature of the constructs and the construct relationships that emerged between the black and white samples. The black sample listed a total of 9 constructs and 8 relationships, while the white sample listed nearly twice as many constructs (16) and more relationships (13). Black students have reported less of a sense of connection to University X, and the fact that the white sample has a greater number of constructs in its map than the black sample reflects this notion. The different construct maps of black and white female students indicate that these two subgroups are indeed subcultures that possess diverse cognitions towards the University X experience. Additional findings supporting existence and describing the nature of the black subculture will be discussed in a subsequent section.
Organizational Climate

This concept refers to relatively dominant characteristics of an organization that are experienced by organizational members and influences how they behave. If enough organizational members reach agreement on a particular notion, then over time this aspect defines the organization’s climate. For example, if employees see themselves in zero-sum competition with one another for resources or rewards then the climate of the organization will most likely be perceived as cutthroat or non-collaborative. In this research, participants identified many different important aspects of the University X climate. The white sample in particular noted that the importance on “Body Image” was so firmly rooted in the organization’s psyche; it became a dominant defining stereotype for University X students that influenced who chose to enter the “bubble.” Thus, the climate of University X places pressure on students to conform to a certain physical appearance.

Subculture

The theoretical perspectives of symbolism, cognition, and climate are all different means by which to identify cultures. This research sought to ascertain whether or not black students differed from white students on these levels to such a degree that they could be classified as a distinct subculture. An important feature of the ZMET is the emphasis placed on identifying the relationships found between the constructs. Other research methods aimed at describing an organization’s culture, such as questionnaires and focus groups, may also yield constructs contributing to a culture. If a researcher, however, were to compare two or more subcultures according to these more traditional methods, then he or she would be only able to speculate about the construct relationships between constructs the different groups held. The ZMET data analysis expressly seeks to empirically identify such relationships. For example, an organizational researcher using a questionnaire might obtain similar results that both black and white female students hold academics, the social scene, competition, and stress as important aspects of their University X experience. Using ZMET the researcher’s analysis would take these findings further and demonstrate that while both subcultures exhibit these constructs, the only common construct relationship for blacks and whites is competition leads to stress.

While the ZMET, as was used in this research, was intended to bring attention to the difference between the two samples, a note should be made about the variance within each sample from one participant to the next. For example, in the black sample opinions varied
greatly towards many issues. One black female reported disdain for the white females on campus because she viewed them as partly responsible for her unhappiness. This individual preferred to spend the majority of her social time with other black females. At the same time another black female reported animosity towards other black females. She was raised by a white family as a child, and as such grew up differently from many other black students. She reported that in high school she tried to act “black” so that she would be accepted by the other African Americans in her class. By the time she reached University X, this participant grew tired of being something that she felt she was not. The respondent reported that just as in high school, black females told her that she was not acting “black” enough. Instead of conforming this time, she shunned the black community and decided to socialize mostly with white friends. Within group variance also appeared in the white sample. As a member of the University X culture, the main researcher in this study entered the interviews with stereotypes about the typically University X girl, that is to say she would be concerned mostly with appearance, enjoying the social atmosphere, and oblivious to issues of racial or ethnic diversity. While some white respondents fit this mold, the majority did not and was well versed in problems that the university faced.

The analyses of the black and white construct maps leads to the conclusion that there is a distinct black subculture. A more in-depth analysis reveals the importance of answering how blacks as a subculture are different and what implications this might hold for them in their experience at University X as well as for their future beyond college. The following section of this chapter will identify similarities between the two samples and discuss implications. Then, the major differences will be analyzed and their implications will be discussed.

**Similarities**

As a whole, both samples mentioned four of the same constructs and one shared relationship (See Tables 1 and 2). The former included social scene, competition, academics, and stress, while the latter was competition leads to stress. The fact that both subcultures identify these similar concepts makes sense since both operate within the same overarching environment of University X, and as such are bound to share some things in common. One might go a step further and state that the average University X student, one who would be representative of the overall University X organizational culture, is concerned primarily with these four thematic areas and construct relationship. Past research involving the ZMET has
produced results that have proven generalizable to the larger public (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). As one participant noted there are basically two aspects to the college life: academics and one’s involvement in the social scene. Another key similarity between the two subcultures revealed by the ZMET is that both groups felt University X communicated to them symbolically and this in turn influenced their mental processing of the University’s culture and climate.

What does it mean that the two samples share these constructs and relationship? These commonalities represent the basis of what the white and black students hold in common. They reflect the notion that black and white students at University X think that the basic levels of the college experience, academics and socialization are important. Important in what respect, however, is different as will be discussed later. Both groups experienced the relationship of competition leading to stress. Thus, these shared constructs and relationship are the main messages reflecting the University’s cultures that are communicated to the student body. The implication that students found the college experience to be competitive and ultimately stressful is not surprising as the same relationship exists in other contexts. It is up to University X leaders to decide if this is a desirable characteristic of its culture.

**Differences**

The limited number of shared perceptions implies that black and white students think and feel differently towards their University X experience. Both subcultures reported that University X’s larger culture emphasized competition that resulted in stress. A key difference, however, between the two subcultures resides in the perceived source of the competition. The white sample reported that no other specific construct led to a sense of competition, yet it was mentioned frequently enough to earn a place on the map. While many participants mentioned feeling competition in specific areas, there was not sufficient agreement for those areas to emerge as a separate construct. Perhaps, this indicates that the white females feel competition equally from many different areas involving their University X experience such as academics, Greek life, organizations, diversity, etc.

Similarly, the results of the black sample indicate that the key symbols reflecting the competitive climate at the University are from academics and the social scene. As aforementioned, University X is a school known for excellent academics and educational opportunities for its students. This cultural cognition represents an added expectation of what a student at University X should be. Since the black sample mentioned the relationship between
academics and competition specifically, they feel a greater amount of pressure to live up to the expectations of University X students.

While both samples mentioned the prominence of the social scene to their University X experience, this construct was seen to lead to totally different things for black students then for whites. The black sample indicated that University X’s social scene led to a feeling of competition, whereas the white female sample saw the social scene of campus as leading to positive emotions such as fun and relaxation. Black participants implied that they felt competition from both black females as well as white females. The competition had two primary goals in relation to the social scene, these being to look better than other females as well as to attract the attention of black males. A double standard seems evident for black females. In an interview one black female mentioned that it was okay for black males to date black females or white females, while it was not deemed appropriate for black females to date white males by black males. Thus, there is a kind of in-group regulation on the black females by the black males. In a sense, if a black male does not find a suitable partner among the black females on campus, he feels free to choose from the white population as well. On the other hand, black females feel pressure to choose romantic partners from the small number of black males on campus (note: there are substantially more black women than black men on campus). Given the relatively low number of minority students on campus, this is a major hindrance for black females and ultimately a major source of frustration. White females on the whole reported staying within their racial group when dating, but if they choose, white women could court a minority suitor. This explains the difference in how the two samples perceive the social scene at University X.

Another major difference reflected in the construct maps is in the manner black and white students relieve their stress. The white map indicates that white students really have no release for stress, even though both academics and competition feed into it. Perhaps, white students on campus have so many other avenues to release this stress that result in positive feelings (e.g., organizations, diversity, and social scene) that stress is managed without much thought being put into how. The black sample implies that meaningful interactions (with peers, professors, or other individuals held in high esteem) are a premeditated method for dealing with stress. In other words, instead of relieving stress by going uptown or drinking, the black sample saw the main way as to interact with others on a deeper level. Perhaps, by speaking to admired individuals,
black students find a comforting method to resolve their stress. Meaningful interactions happen, at least in part, because of their perceived connection to personal and professional choices made by black students. While black students could choose to engage in a number of activities, because of their focus on academics at the university, they feel that their time is best spent interacting with those people they hold in high esteem. An explanation for this finding might come from the sentiments expressed by several participants who disclosed that they never imagined that they would ever have an opportunity to attend a university with the academic reputation of University X. They now seek to make the most of their opportunity by developing close and meaningful relationships and developing their character. At the same time, many of the white students at University X have not had to live with the improbability of attending a prestigious university, or even attaining a college education. Thus, the development of deep personal relationships and individual character may not be as pertinent to them because they have had perceived access to networking and character development opportunities previously. Black students feel that personal growth comes about from meaningful interactions. Some professors suspect that students only care about what grade they receive rather than what they actually take away from the class. This relationship implies that on the other hand, the black sample interacted with others they held in respect in order to grow in character.

A major difference between the two samples is found in how the black subculture differs from its counterpart in regards to involvement and belonging at University X. Both groups indicated an importance in the University X culture to belong to something. This represents yet another aspect of the larger organizational culture that is reflected in both samples. The experience of involvement and belonging as seen through the construct maps differs. The black subculture indicated that involvement at the University was to fulfill a sense of belonging to something bigger. Black females did not indicate a specific construct that they would get involved in. This might be reflective of thoughts that tell them they should belong to something as a University X student, but to exactly what they do not know. Again, this implies that black females do not feel that they belong at the University outside of academics.

Regarding the white sample, participants mentioned numerous constructs that reflect a sense of involvement and belonging. The white sample stated different options for involvement or a sense of belonging such as the Greek life at University X, different organizations, and friends. White participants reported that involvement in an organization resulted in a positive
feeling. As with other construct relationships, this one makes sense that if students are to dedicate a major amount of their time to an activity, then they are most likely to gain some reward from the exchange. In this case, the reward gained is a sense of pride or other positive experience. The notion that fraternities and sororities were deemed a separate construct from both “Friends” and “Organizations” is just a sample of how big a role they are seen to play in the white university experience. Also, the relationship between Greek life and social scene also points out that the major reason the white female sample saw for joining in the Greek system was for social reasons rather than engaging in charitable causes or gaining leadership experience.

Another major difference between how the two subcultures view the larger University culture is revealed in the white samples’ mentioning academics being aided prominently by campus resources. In other words, the white females in this study felt that University X offered aid in terms of facilities, professors, technology, etc. that resulted in high academic achievement. The omission of such a generalizable construct and relationship by the black sample indicates that black students do not share the perspective that University X provides its students with an abundance of the resources that might be needed to succeed.

The final difference between the two subcultures centers on the white sample’s focus on body image. In other words, instead of perceiving the average University X student as a high academic achiever, he or she is identified best as being concerned with maintaining a particular body image. The females in the white subculture stated that the stereotypes of University X students mostly revolve around how they look (i.e., how much they weigh, what kind of clothes they wear). This issue did not emerge on the black construct map. Perhaps, a cognitive boundary exists for the black subculture related to the social scene at University X that precludes them from sharing the construct with the dominant culture. This may have a positive implication as it indicates that black female students do not feel the importance of meeting a certain body type and are thus less likely to engage in unhealthy eating habits (note: eating disorders are a prominent concern at University X).

While the black construct map makes no mention of such construct relationships, their white counterparts go into great detail describing the complex connections involving body image and other constructs. On the surface, it would seem that the white female sample perceives the University X physical environment and the student body to account for the perception of the university as being its own little world or “bubble.” At the same time, as students become
comfortable with the University X Bubble, this metaphor becomes their reality. This relationship is the one that has proven to be most interesting. The white female sample has noted that there is an emphasis on the student body to maintain a certain body image in order fit in with the stereotype of the typical University X student. A possible source for the pressure to have an ideal body image comes from the focus the university puts on itself to maintain its own idealized image. Uniformity and similarity in the building structures at University X are evident throughout the campus. The vast majority of buildings are constructed of the same shade of red brick reflecting the same Georgian influence. Also, the university invests enormous resources to maintain its grounds. Constant planting of flowers and trimming of trees happens year round so that visitors and students will feel secure in this created haven. The white sample perceived that the University X Bubble causes the University X physical environment and the physical appearance of the people here suggests that part of the student focus on body image might emanate from the university’s emphasis on aesthetic appearance. In another sense, the symbols of idealized beauty are used equally by both students and the university to convey the importance placed on aesthetics. The enduring connection between physical attributes of the university and student body reinforce the metaphor of the University X Bubble.

Limitations

Readers should be cautious in generalizing this study’s findings. The relatively small sample sizes of only female participants gives reason to pause until replication or complementary studies confirm results. Nevertheless, the sampling in this study is consistent with previous qualitative studies using in-depth interviews in general and those using ZMET in particular.

Another possible limitation of the research came from the method in which participants were chosen. The larger part of both samples was recruited from females taking a required basic communication course. The vast majority of students in these classes are business majors. As a result, the perspectives of this study’s participants may reflect values important to trade and commerce such as the ability to make connections with others, focusing on the bottom line in a situation, etc.

The ZMET as used in this research was intended to identify major points of difference between the two samples. While the methodology achieved this goal, in its generalizations, a host of information from within sample variance was lost. Just because the respondents belonged to a particular sample, it must not be forgotten that each was an individual that
possessed unique and valid thoughts and experiences towards the university. Another potential limitation was the closeness of the main researcher to the material. All the members of the research team belonged to the University X environment, thus an unintentional bias may have been present.

The final limitation to this study came from the unequal size of sample groups. It is possible that if both samples had equal numbers of participants that more constructs and further relationships would have been found.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This research has demonstrated that when modified, the ZMET can describe how organizational members really feel about their organization’s culture. For scholars, the linkages between constructs on the consensus map represent reasoning processes that are of primary concern when developing additional research hypotheses for future research about mental models. The ZMET approach can complement other research methods on this topic to increase our understanding of the relationships suggested by the consensus map findings. For the pragmatist, the consensus map is useful for developing and implementing a marketing strategy to recruit new students or a management strategy to retain those who are already at University X. It would also be illuminating to compare the ZMET results with the findings generated from other applied or marketing studies of students or potential student attitudes and perceptions. It is expected that the ZMET results will offer unique insights that may be of particular interest to decision-makers in student affairs.

It should be noted that this research occurred on a college campus due to convenience of access to research participants. In regards to educational background, a number of modifications involving the ZMET would further unravel what educational cultures look like. The first natural extension of this research would be to include male participants to see what construct maps would look like with a masculine influence. The ZMET should be used on other universities outside the Midwestern setting of University X. It would be interesting to see how the construct of black students at a predominantly black university would compare to the one generated by those at University X. Also, aside from subcultures that might differ along race, other demographics could be taken into consideration. Future research might investigate how construct maps of other minorities appear in comparison with those of the dominant majority. Perhaps, after a sufficient number of minority construct maps have been created then a meta-
analysis might reveal how an inclusive construct map for different minorities would compare with one of the dominant subculture. On an even larger scale, if a construct map that covered the majority of primary college student categories were created, then different companies could use such information when designing marketing campaigns that targeted students of that age.

Another natural extension would be to use the ZMET in a noneducational organization to see how it would work. It would be interesting to analyze the cultures of different organizations to see how organizational members felt or thought towards constructs such as leadership style, motivation, and the flow of communication through the company. Through several more applications in different settings the generalizability of the ZMET findings might aid our understanding of organizational culture and subcultures.
References


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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. In the storytelling step of the interview, the interviewer asks the respondent to relay the story of each image she collected. For example, one participant produced an image of the University X landscape through the grating of an iron fence. When she was asked to tell the story behind this image she stated that it represented her feelings of being trapped in the university setting. This stage of the interview lasted until the respondent had made it through the entire collection of images.

    Collected images included photos of the classroom, prominent buildings or landmarks on campus, friends, student housing, etc. As the respondent went through the stories of the images, the interviewer took notes. Along with writing down what was said, the researcher highlighted key ideas that might serve as important constructs towards the creation of the individual construct maps.

2. After the respondents finished with the images, the interviewer asked if they were any images that had come to mind through the storytelling processes that the participant wished she had taken a picture of. If such a mental image came to mind, the researcher wrote a descriptive term on a posted note and included these in with the pile of actual pictures. Participants varied in how many missed images came to mind, as some recalled none and other had as many as six to eight. The respondent explained each of the missed images to the amount of detail she deemed sufficient.

3. Next, the interviewer asked the participant to put all of the images (including the missed images that had just been placed in the pile) into smaller piles according to themes that made sense to her. After each of the piles had been finished, each was labeled by the participant according to what its governing theme was. The number of piles varied from respondent to respondent, as some had as few as four piles and other had as many as nine. The important thing though was participants felt free to have as many or as few piles as they wanted. The interviewer stated explicitly that the only restriction to the amount of piles was what made sense to the participant. Common themes arose among both samples. These overarching concepts included social scene, academics, feeling comfortable. At the same time, a healthy amount of individuality in the types of themes also arose, as some participants devised totally unique labels no one else thought to use. The interviewer reviewed each pile with the respondent and asked why they were labeled as they were.

4. After the sorting task, the interviewer gathered all of the images (at this point, the missing images written on the posted note were removed), and began shuffling them. Then the investigator, while being careful not to look at the images, chose three at random (hence the name of Triad task) and placed them in front of the respondent. The researcher then asked the respondent which of the two images were most similar and different from the third. After the division, the researcher asked how the two were similar to each other and different from the third.

    By this time in the interview protocol, common themes and constructs may begin to emerge. These patterns will become evident through the participant’s responses. For example, if
during one of the earlier tasks the respondent revealed that an important aspect of the University X experience was its social life, then this might be seen again in the triad task as a the reason the two images were similar yet different from the third.

5. For the next step, the interviewer placed the three images back into the larger pile once again and started shuffling. As before, the interviewer made certain not to look at the images. After the pile was sufficiently shuffled, one image was again chosen at random. If a picture was chosen that had been used in the previous task, it was still used in this step of the protocol. The interviewer asked the participant to think of the picture as a window and to describe what was happening in the scene just outside its boundaries. If the participant had trouble understanding the directions or coming up with anything, the researcher could ask probing questions that fed of the subject material in the photograph such as, “Are there people? What are they doing? What do they look like?, etc.” The point of this questioning was to encourage the respondent to delve into her thoughts about the university and use them to describe how she usually thought about it.

6. The next step did not involve using the pictures, so at this point they were set aside. The interviewer asked the participant to describe University X according to one of the following sensory metaphors: taste, smell, color, feel, and sound. Specifically, the interviewer asked the participant, “If University X were a taste, what would it taste like?” For further information, the researcher would then ask “What kind of taste would University X not be?” Each of the sensory images was placed into similar questioning phrases. Responses from both samples were unique. For example, as a sound University X was described as laughter, as a color it was described as red, as a feel it was described as sandpaper.

7. This step was a review of sorts. The interviewer instructed the respondent to create a 30-60 second movie from the perspective of the mind’s eye that reviewed all of the major constructs that had been discussed. All the videos actually took far longer than the prescribed 30-60 seconds. The interviewer did not stop the respondent for going over time in order to get greater detail. The content of the vast majority of the videos took a very descriptive form of a regular school day beginning with breakfast in the morning, attending classes, and then some sort of socializing later in the day. One of the black participants recalled an interpretive video which reflected the dominant role of white students at University X.

8. The previous seven steps culminate the in final production of the individual construct map. The interviewer first instructed the participant to list off the primary constructs that came to mind during the discussion. As each construct was listed, the interviewer wrote each one down on a posted note. If the participant could neither continue listing her own constructs nor come up with any at all, then the interviewer reviewed his notes and made suggestions. The researcher based suggestions on what seemed to be important constructs during the interview. Before any suggestions, were made however, the interviewer reminded the respondent that she had final say if a construct was important enough to write down. After each suggestion, though, the interviewer checked to make sure that the construct truly made sense to the participant. If it did not, then it was quickly disregarded. After all of the important constructs had been written down on posted notes, the interviewer then asked the participant to arrange the sheets of paper into causal relationships as she perceived them. Participants were informed that one construct could relate with another or
many others and that similar constructs could be listed together. For simplicity sakes, the interviewer requested that the respondent put the constructs in a flow chart formation that read from left to write. After this construct map was created, then the interviewer asked the participant to walk through the construct map one relationship at a time. As this was done, the interviewer sketched out the construct map as a flow chart and then showed it to the participant. This was done as a validity check, to see if the map made sense to the participant.