JCAPS

"THEY CAN'T CONTROL THE STUDENTS": A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY REGARDING THE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT FOR BLACK MEN AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS IN THE MIDWEST

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This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore Black men's lived experiences at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) through a student involvement lens. This study used critical race theory to determine if the experiences of Black men align with the desired outcomes of involvement theory. Racism is acknowledged by critical race theory as maintaining racial inequality. Involvement theory explains how students develop by being involved on campus. The current study explored the experiences and narratives of seven self-identified Black men and their perceptions of involvement at PWIs in the Midwest. Findings are classified according to three themes: impact and motivation, navigating the campus community, and a lack of support from campus administrators and peers. This study concludes with a discussion of implications for future research and practice, including student leader and advisor training to support Black men, constitutional audits, increased strategic planning, and long-term engagement strategies.

Slavery was abolished more than 150 years ago in the U.S., but the impacts continue to reverberate (Garibay et al., 2020; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Okello et al., 2021; Squire et al., 2018; Whitehead et al., 2021). Black men on college campuses experience Whiteness-centered diversity and inclusion that center and prioritize Whiteness (Cabrera, 2016; Dancy et al., 2018; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Stein, 2016). Whiteness continues to impact Black students' experiences in higher education through various avenues, including diversity brochures, infomercials, admissions tours, marketing campaigns, and athletic programs (Lewis & Shah, 2021).

Institutions must begin to understand the needs of Black men beyond a source of entertainment and labor (Dancy et al., 2018; Stein, 2016; Williams et al., 2020). This study uses critical race theory (CRT) to evaluate whether involvement theory has gaps and to identify ways Black men's experiences are enhanced. Involvement theory asserts how significant it is for students to involve themselves on campus (Astin, 1984). CRT helps understand how laws can create or perpetuate racial inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Furthermore, this study seeks to understand how Black men define their involvement on campus and to determine whether the experiences of Black men align or misalign with the desired outcomes of involvement theory.

PLANTATION POLITICS

Plantation politics is an idea and concept that higher education was founded based on plantation culture, slavery, and the exploitation of Black and brown bodies within the economy. This concept and phenomenon stemmed from how plantations and universities mirror one another (Squire et al., 2018). Dehumanization and power became the basis of plantation culture and plantation life, that translates into today's higher education system. Whiteness remains invisible as institutional leaders refuse to acknowledge their responsibility associated with slavery (Cabrera, 2020; Garibay et al., 2020; Stein, 2016).

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Black men do not get the necessary attention on campus (Harper & Wood, 2016). While certain efforts give an appearance of inclusion and involvement for Black men on campus, Whiteness-centered diversity and inclusion maintain the concept and culture of Whiteness. The institution's bottom line is a priority in brochures, infomercials, and marketing campaigns instead of the experiences of Black men (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Perpetuating this bottom line does not capture the lived realities of Black men's experiences.

All Black men have not had the same experiences due to environmental variables (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Davis & Allen, 2020; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Warren & Bonilla, 2018). Environmental variables are experiences outside the classroom and campus that impact a student's academic performance (Harper & Wood, 2016). One must consider how environmental variables impact the involvement of Black men. Black men want to have a sense of belonging and space on campus but cannot help the environmental variables they navigate (Harper & Wood, 2016; Hypolite, 2020; McDougal et al., 2018; Patterson, 2020; Shappie & Debb, 2019; Tolliver & Miller, 2018; Turner & Grauerholz, 2017).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Alexander Astin's (1984) involvement theory explains how students' growth, development, and overall change is connected to their co-curricular involvement. The theory posits that involvement requires physical and psychosocial energy. Energy varies between each student, and what a student gains from involvement connects to the quality and quantity of involvement (Astin, 1984). Involvement theory centers around inputs, environments, and outcomes. Inputs focus on a student's background and experiences prior to college (Astin, 1984). Environments acknowledge a student's experiences while in college (Astin, 1984). Outcomes examines how a student is after graduation, including a student's characteristics, belief systems, and values (Astin, 1984).

Critical Race Theory

CRT challenges laws and policies oppressing underrepresented communities (Bell, 1993, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005). One of the five CRT tenets, counterstorytelling legitimizes the experiences of people from underrepresented groups by providing space for validation and affirmation (Delgado, 1989; Hiraldo, 2019; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Within the lived experiences of people from underrepresented groups (i.e., people of color) many counterstories have yet to be heard and recognized (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories are three approaches to creating counterstories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). When creating counterstories, one must utilize theoretical sensitivity, while incorporating one's professional and personal experiences to transform what already exists (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, counterstories build community amongst those who are underrepresented, challenge dominant narratives, and open new possibilities of reality (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Multiple scholars acknowledge that marginalization can also be a site for new realities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstories provide a different approach and perspective. CRT uses counterstories as a mechanism for community building and transformation among people who are often marginalized (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Involvement Theory Critique

In a study by Patton et al. (2007), CRT was introduced to show how it can be applied to both theory and practice in student affairs. Like other student development theories and frameworks, Astin's involvement theory (1984, 1996) continues to serve as a frame and foundational tool that continually contributes to student affairs practice (Astin, 1984, 1996; Kuh, 2001, 2009; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Tinto, 1998; Ullah & Wilson, 2007). However, since the theory was conceptualized, it affirms the lived experiences of students who primarily identify as White, heterosexual, cisgender, and able-bodied (Patton et al., 2007).

When students who have privileged identities are consistently affirmed, there leaves a gap for students with marginalized identities and their experiences to be overlooked. Students with marginalized identities, who are

underrepresented, such as Black men, are not centered in the foundational theories and frameworks that shape student affairs practice. Though it may not be the intent to overlook the lived experiences of Black men or not center their lived realities, this unfortunately perpetuates a cycle of marginalization (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, it is vital to listen and understand the personal stories of how involvement impacts Black men and their holistic experiences. The theories and frameworks student affairs professionals use will continue to produce an antiquated approach to developing students, until the experiences of those often underrepresented are amplified with intentionality and care.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to center the lived realities of Black men on college campuses who are navigating co-curricular experiences and identify what mechanisms of support are critical for their involvement (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Involvement theory has not considered students' multiple identities, which has created a significant gap in research in the hopes of reconceptualizing involvement theory to better understand and center the needs and experiences of students who are often underrepresented (Abes et al., 2019; Patton et al., 2007). This study aims to fill that gap and provide insight into how Black men define their involvement through two research questions: (a) Do the narratives and experiences of Black men on college campuses align or misalign with the desired outcomes of student involvement theory? and (b) How do Black men describe their student involvement experiences on campus?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative phenomenological approach informed the analysis of the involvement experiences of Black men. Phenomenology focuses on the conscious lived experiences of participants (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). Conscious experiences derive from the idea that a person has lived through or experienced something and recalled it to their memory (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). Thus, this approach aims to understand the lived experiences of Black men, assuming some commonality (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018).

To answer the research questions, seven Black men from public predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in the Midwest were recruited through snowball sampling (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). Juniors and seniors were recruited instead of first-year or second-year students due to the time the students had to get involved on campus. Gatekeepers who work with Black men in their classes, student organizations, residence halls, athletic programs, and other modalities helped to identify and secure access to Black men for participation in this study. Gatekeepers agreed to participate in this study by responding to the electronic communication and outreach. Upon sending that email response informing of their participation, gatekeepers forwarded a recruitment email template to students who were eligible based on the inclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria created a sample of students who identify as Black men who were willing to share how their social identities impact how they navigate campus and their student involvement opportunities. Table 1 presents information on the seven students who consented to participate in interviews for this study. Most of them were involved in student organizations, with some serving in student leadership roles in student organizations. No participant's primary involvement on their campus was through athletic programs. This study did not intentionally seek to exclude the experiences of Black men who are student-athletes at PWIs. Each participant signed an electronic consent form. The Maryville University Institutional Research Office approved data collection for this study.

Table 1. *Study Participants*

Pseudonym	Midwest State	Academic Year	Involvement
Bryen	Michigan	Junior	
	Student Organizations, Academic Clubs, Residence Life Employment		
Ed	Iowa	Senior	Academic Clubs, Fraternity & Sorority Life
Jay	Illinois	Senior	Academic Clubs, Residence Life Employment
Jayant	Indiana	Junior	Fraternity & Sorority Life, Athletics
Ke'von	Illinois	Senior	Student Organizations, Academic Clubs, Campus Employment
Omar	Michigan	Junior	Cultural Organizations, Residence Life Employment
Trevor	Iowa	Senior	Cultural Organizations

Procedures

All interviews followed a semi-structured and open-ended format, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded for accuracy. An interview protocol was followed, but one benefit of semi-structured interviews is the capacity for conversations to engage organically in the desired direction (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). Students were asked explicitly about their social identities as Black men, how they might have shown through their student involvement opportunities, and how they chose to engage.

DATA ANALYSIS AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Given the nature of the study, establishing trustworthiness was vital at the onset of data collection and throughout data analysis. Trustworthiness is a process ensuring the quality of the study through the procedures and criteria used, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). To increase the reliability and validity of the study, Dedoose software was used to organize and analyze information gathered from participants in the semi-structured interviews. Inductive or open coding named what happened without empirical research, data, or prescribed themes (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). Open coding allowed for codes and themes to develop as the data analysis process continued, although the process did take a considerable amount of time (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018).

Open coding occurred in three phases. In each phase, total reads of each interview transcript occurred. The full reads of each interview transcript ensured connectedness with the data. Open coding occurred within each interview transcript, allowing for involvement theory and the experiences of Black men to remain at the forefront. Themes emerged from the finalized codes.

Member checking was incorporated after each semi-structured interview. Interview transcripts were sent to each participant to validate and check for accuracy (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). Upon verifying the participants' interview transcripts' accuracy and validity, the data went through three inductive (open) coding cycles. To further improve the validity of the overall study, peer debriefing was incorporated, allowing for several peers who are not personally involved in the study to review and evaluate the literature review, methodology, transcripts, and initial findings for any biases, vague descriptions, and overemphasized or underemphasized points. Peers consisted of experienced colleagues, leaders, and scholars with practical knowledge and expertise on Black men in higher education or student involvement.

FINDINGS

The participants' narratives reveal critical information about how Black men navigate their college experiences and campuses. Through comprehensive data analysis, three themes emerged from those narratives. The first was impact and motivation. Participants reported how they became involved and maintained their involvement through intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation, such as family or chosen family, creating space for future generations of students, and the long-term benefits of networking and connecting across campus. The second theme that emerged was navigating the campus community. Each participant expressed their impact and motivation for involving themselves on campus. However, each participant also expressed how navigating clubs, organizations, and self-governed spaces can be cumbersome.

The third and last theme was the need for more consistent campus support. Each participant expressed how the campus community encourages student involvement by offering various involvement fairs and recruitment initiatives for student groups. Moreover, participants shared that because of the lack of continuity, consistency, and accountability, these Black men had to take the initiative to create community amongst themselves and connect with other students who share similar identities.

Impact and Motivation: "Loved Ones Motivate Me…Peers Impact Me"

Participants shared how their involvement experiences connected to impact and motivation. Several participants mentioned how life experiences impacted their drive and motivation to involve themselves on campus. Moreover, participants shared how experiences on campus empowered them to leave a lasting impact on the larger campus community and protect other students from navigating similar experiences. By using their salient identities and experiences to guide what engagement and involvement opportunities to participate in, participants exercised agency in their involvement choices.

All students shared that they chose to get involved and remain on their campuses for various reasons. Some participants attributed their willingness and consistency to their loved ones or chosen family. For instance, Jay, a fourth-year education major, shared that their mom motivated them to get involved on campus. Jay stated, "It was mainly my mom. She always told me as I was packing up and getting ready to go to college, she's like, don't be dumb, don't just be in your room, playing that game all the time." Interestingly, Jay has been involved as a resident assistant in their housing and residence life department and spoke to how constantly interacting with new people keeps them involved.

Some participants acknowledged how their nontraditional approaches to college drove them to involve themselves. Trevor, a nontraditional student, shared how they took a gap year to work and focus on themselves, but Trevor had other loved ones who attended the college they were attending. Having that inside information from their loved ones gave Trevor an idea of the campus culture when they transitioned to campus. Trevor mentioned that what motivated them to get involved was the community. Specifically, Trevor shared, "I was searching for community. I got active in multiple clubs and orgs to create more diverse communities and help bring more people into those communities. I was searching for communities within those communities."

An idea shared amongst participants is how they choose to involve themselves can benefit others. Some Black men are involved in clubs and organizations, either academic or non-academic, but what keeps them involved is what they can provide to others. Bryen, a third-year Theatre and Fine Arts major, shared a goal of being a producer in the entertainment industry and getting hands-on experience. Bryen stated, "I love the stories that I put up. I see myself bringing those stories to an audience. That's what motivates me and my work. I see it more like storytelling."

Engaging in clubs, organizations, and groups allows students to constantly remind themselves why they choose to engage and be consistent with their involvement endeavors. Black men understand how their involvement impacts others, and knowing who is connected to them, whether chosen family or friends, will increase their sense of community and motivation (Hussain & Jones, 2021). Moreover, remembering why you choose to remain involved is essential when navigating and combatting anti-Blackness, lack of socialization, and isolation that may resonate within PWIs.

Navigating the Campus Community

As Black men navigate the culture and campus environment of predominantly White institutions (PWIs), it leaves a lasting impression on how they engage. At PWIs, Black students experience challenges impacting their involvement (McDougal et al., 2018). Such challenges are primarily due to microaggressions and expectations of speaking on behalf of the Black students on their campus (McDougal et al., 2018; Mills, 2020). However, everyone navigates the campus community differently, depending on their interests and environmental variables (Mills, 2020; Wood et al., 2016). Examples of environmental variables include familial responsibilities, financial support of others, and other circumstances outside of an institution that affect how a student succeeds within an institution.

Jayant, a third-year student, talked about how he navigates environmental variables while remaining involved as a student. Jayant shared, "I am not attentive to the meetings and stuff, but I am in the group chats. I work at a child development learning center on campus. I do participate in the basketball league, however. I think I am involved." However, when no environmental variables are in play, Black men are assumed to have unlimited opportunities to involve themselves on campus. Unfortunately, when Black men excel on campus in these organizations, even pursuing student leadership, they are often overburdened and tokenized (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Ke'Von, fourth-year women, gender, and sexuality studies major, shared, "It is not my responsibility to be everywhere. I have started to step back and let the people around me lead because I need to teach others when I need to recover."

With environmental variables and feeling overburdened with student involvement opportunities, another layer of complexity lies in the impact that Black men feel simply existing in these spaces. Black men must remain cognizant of where they are, who they are, and their actions within the culture of PWIs. Ed, a fourth-year aerospace engineering student, shared an experience in a student club on campus:

> A club is allowed to 3D print guns. As a Black male here in a predominantly White institution, there is no way I would go to a club where they are printing guns, like if anything was to go wrong, I would be the first one on the chopping block. I feel that as a Black man, there are just certain things that I'm not going to gravitate to because I understand the impacts if something were to go wrong.

As Black men navigate PWIs, it can be challenging, especially when advocating for others and not being taken seriously while dealing with trauma and harm (Foste & Johnson, 2021). Jay shared an experience as an RA where they had to step in and advocate for Black women who experienced being called a racial slur:

> As an RA, a racial slur was posted on another student's door. Another RA was very nonchalant with talking to the affected Black women. I had to check her because it's like, what do you mean it is not a big deal? The students who did this are telling them they do not belong here. When working with someone who does not look like you, sometimes they get too comfortable in that, and they tend to like blow off issues. I tried to check them like, you probably did not mean it like that. But at the end of the day, that was the wrong choice of words to use against someone who just had a racial slur posted on their door.

Black men navigate through significant experiences on their campuses. Throughout the interviews, many participants shared how self-identifying as a Black man impacts how they navigate the campus community and, specifically, what they choose to participate in. Bryen shared how they felt when they were peer pressured to express interest in an Interfraternity Council organization when they felt more comfortable with the benefits a Black Greek Lettered organization could have for them (Miller & Bryan, 2020), "There weren't any Black Greek Letter fraternities, so I felt like out of place. There were many moments where it felt like organizations were predominantly White; it was not a space made for me to be there."

Additionally, Black men navigating spaces find dissonance in wanting to be in spaces to engage, but not if it means compromising who they are and how they physically present themselves. A third-year student, Omar, shared, "Even though I do not talk often in meetings, I feel comfortable. I do not have to sit straight or fix my dreds in a bun. I can be myself. In these instances, navigating the campus community and conflicting with yourself, your values, and your interests is challenging and requires a significant amount of energy, where sometimes it appears the alternative is to remain disengaged and isolated."

"Too This or Too That"

Astin (1984) asserted that the energy a student invests in their curricular and co-curricular involvement, there is a greater likelihood that they will achieve their goals. However, when students, specifically Black men, experience a lack of support and understanding from other students when wanting to join or participate in activities, it makes it difficult to involve yourself. Furthermore, a lack of support and underrepresentation impacts how Black men choose to engage in activities at predominantly White institutions. Participants shared that they often felt their salient social identities conflicted depending on the space they entered. Trevor offered:

> I can honestly say that there still was a divide even in certain black spaces. Your identity changes depending on what space you go into. If I was going into the Black Student Alliance, I think I would be African American, Black male. But if I were going into the African Student Association space, I would be an African American in that space. Or if I go to an international student space, I'd be an African American male. It varies on the space itself.

When the identities of Black men conflict with each other depending on the culture of an organization, it makes Black men question why they are there and what they will gain from the space. A participant shared how being a Black man has contributed to particular challenges they experienced on campus. The participant said, "The hardest thing for me is identifying what I want from a certain space. Who do I feel is like me? What community will accept me? Or how can I create a community?"

Some students found it challenging to get involved and feel belonging simply because they felt they were too much for a particular space. When asked how being a Black man impacts what they choose to participate in on campus, they shared that they perceive themselves to be "too black" based on behaviors from others. Black men conform to certain prescribed and unwritten expectations of organizations, and the students within damage their sense of belonging. Ke'Von said:

> I do not think everybody gets it right. I do not feel affirmed because of how my queer identity interacts with my identity as a black man, which is tough. However, I have been trying to build up a community of people that affirm my unique position, which is like individual people I have pulled. It is not necessarily the whole campus. So that is a hard thing to navigate.

There are added complexities to navigating the campus community and involvement, primarily when affiliated with organizations at the intersection of Blackness and queerness (Travers et al., 2018). Ke'von went on to say:

> So many people around here don't want to work with us. They don't put in the effort to work with us, because we're the main LGBTQ arc here on campus. And in some ways, when trying to work with other Black leaders, and like Black higher ed professionals around campus, sometimes I feel like, because I lead with both my Blackness and my queerness, that they don't often feel like I'm sort of like Black enough to know what I'm talking about. And that makes it harder to do the work I want to do.

Black men must be free to exist in student organizations and involve themselves in being their whole authentic selves. Choosing which identity to suppress or water down in spaces is not conducive to Black men's success and sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions.

"Where's the Help?"

The functionality of what the campus provides, or lack thereof, was discussed. In addition to discussing what the campus provides for Black men to remain involved, the students talked about the importance of creating spaces amongst themselves because of the inefficacy of campus support mechanisms. Black men become self-reliant to create their own experiences and find their own ways to engage. Trevor shared:

> I realized, like how hard it is to find a space or figure out what it means. Navigating all these clubs and orgs, it's still a process, because you can find a certain community of individuals, and you would hope to have some things in common, but then you cannot find people that are like you, or people that like you.

However, there are times when collaboration can occur and students feel supported, but there remains a disconnect. Ed shared, "The campus does a good job providing a safe space, but they can't control the students and that's where problems lie. Other students don't understand the experiences of students of color and there's

not much the university can do." Institutions and stakeholders must look beyond Black men as numbers, but as human beings that desire involvement. Staff who support Black men must understand their unique needs and humanize their experiences (Chung et al., 2020).

Participants collectively shared how difficult it can be to maintain engagement beyond the beginning-of-year orientations or student activities fairs. Trevor shared, "Actually trying to get other people that join is hard because if you miss those freshman orientations, it is hard to find those other students." Black men shared how those specific events are the only actual times where events and opportunities to engage with Black men cause a significant gap in the sense of belonging. However, Black women are significant partners in the involvement gap. A participant offered:

> The hardest thing about being in a leadership position or a leadership role was that not enough Black men were trying to do the same thing. It is a strong disconnect sometimes because we are trying to reach out to the entire community, but it is only pushed like everything is only pushed by the Black woman because they have always been the trailblazers. It has been hard to steer Black men in that direction to help the community, be in those spaces, talk to people, and be more than what they are.

Black men cannot simply partner with other students to reach a broader audience and engage other students. Faculty and staff must provide quality leadership development to lessen the gap in student connection, engagement, and belonging for Black men.

DISCUSSION

In this study, Black men experienced and navigated significant challenges and environmental variables beyond their control. Nevertheless, when they want to engage and position themselves in the campus community, they cannot control the campus community and the behavior of others. Black men navigate the transition to college with inputs and environmental variables pertinent to their experiences (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Furthermore, it is vital to determine how institutions might reframe the mechanisms of support that guide the retention, sense of belonging, and engagement of Black men (Ottley & Ellis, 2019).

Black men sustain themselves by discovering a sense of liberation in who they are, how they express themselves, and how they want to show up on campus. However, there appears to be a perception from higher education administrators and leaders that the self-sufficiency of Black men equates to administrators supporting and ensuring they feel a sense of belonging and integration into these student clubs, organizations, or activities. Two specific elements of plantation politics, structural and processual, are highlighted with particular emphasis on recognizing the parallels in higher education spaces and systems for Black men.

The structural elements of plantations consist of sentiment, goals, and sanctions (Squire et al., 2018). Sentiment describes the superiority and hegemony enslavers displayed, allowing enslaved people to express resistance and powerlessness (Squire et al., 2018). Sentiment parallels placing numerous rules and regulations on underrepresented students' spaces (Squire et al., 2018). Goal informs how slave labor equates to profit. Goal parallels with athletics and how Black men frequently exist in campus brochures and tokenized booklets (Dancy et al., 2018; Squire et al., 2018). Sanctions parallel how Black students deemed "good" are constantly promoted and tokenized (Squire et al., 2018).

Processual elements include boundary maintenance, systematic linkages, social control, and institutionalization (Squire et al., 2018). Boundary maintenance protects the system and stops enslaved people from running away from the plantations they were on. Boundary maintenance parallels how higher education administrators will attempt to remove those who cause trouble and take away freedoms for student-athletes and scholarship recipients, who are predominantly Black men (Squire et al., 2018).

PWIs in which Black men exist have similar characteristics to plantations (Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). Black men share a code and language understood by other Black men, like how enslaved people had slave codes (Durant & Knottnerus, 1999). Nevertheless, Black men choose to involve themselves primarily based

on the culture of that institution, including competency of student leaders and advisors, a curated sense of belonging, and if that institution is ready to accept Black men at all intersections. However, participants shared that progress can be slow-moving, spaces may be removed or not exist on campus, and campus administrators cannot control the students themselves (Hypolite, 2020; Squire et al., 2018). What remains to be determined is where students receive instructions to isolate and dehumanize Black men.

Institutionalization focuses on organizational stability and the processes that plantations keep up. An example of institutionalization is how task forces on diversity and equity are established, including social justice strategies that do not work (Squire et al., 2018). From the participants' narratives, colleges and universities sometimes lack in considering the environmental variables Black men navigate to remain involved and engaged (McCoy, 2014; Wood et al., 2016). Some studies highlight the need for Black men to have directed and focused educational opportunities and activities, including but not limited to leadership development opportunities, counterspaces, and culturally affirming curricula (Brooms et al., 2021; Davis & Allen, 2020; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Ottley & Ellis, 2019).

This study aimed to explore how Black men at PWIs in the Midwest experience and describe their involvement and whether those experiences align with the desired outcomes of Astin's involvement theory. The Black men's narratives and experiences speak to how everyone navigates institutional spaces differently based on the impact, motivation, and who and what exists in the campus community to support and humanize those lived realities. Moreover, the narratives and experiences shared by the participants highlighted that their social identities as both Black and man mattered in how they experienced and navigated student involvement opportunities on campus, whether social or academic. The findings from this study have significant implications for working with Black men at predominantly White institutions, including humanizing the experiences of Black men and evaluating current systems, ways of knowing and standard practices.

Home is…

First, students shared how impact and motivation were meaningful when they decided what they wanted to get involved in and what kept them involved. Those experiences on campus empowered them to leave a lasting impact on the larger campus community and protect other students from navigating similar experiences. Some participants attributed their willingness and consistency to their loved ones or chosen family. Specific individuals connected to the participants were keenly aware that the collegiate experience could be isolating, causing their student to lose their sense of self, so they encouraged them to get involved. The culture of plantation politics taught by White colonizers and settlers was rooted in stripping the enslaved from all their identities and isolating them from their ways of knowing, culture, or loved ones (Williams et al., 2021).

Students from historically underrepresented groups at PWIs deal with a lack of belonging, connectedness, and isolation (Williams et al., 2021). The Black men who participated in this study used their experiences and linkages to wherever and whomever home is to inspire their involvement. Institutions that desire to build transformational relationships and long-term engagement pipelines with Black men should not supersede or generalize their individual lived realities and experiences. Humanizing and celebrating how Black men approach involvement is essential, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Experiences Become Power

The second and third findings, describing how Black men navigate the campus community through involvement and lack of campus support, connect to existing research and scholarship. Research posits that Black men's lived realities and experiences are often monolithic and generalizable (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper & Wood, 2016; Williams et al., 2020). Given the challenges that Black men encounter at predominantly White institutions, they need spaces and interactions with people who humanize their realities and combat the anti-Blackness they encounter (Brooms et al., 2021).

According to the students' narratives, they needed to know who they were, why they wanted to get involved, and what kept them involved. Scholars have asserted that student engagement is about how much energy students put into their collegiate experiences (Kuh, 2001, 2009). Astin (1984) initially suggested that the more involved

a student is, the more successful they will be. From the findings of this study, Black men desire to be engaged and energized through their campus involvement. However, these students navigated additional circumstances, such as work, home life, biological family, chosen family, and a lack of support from administrators and other students. These factors, including others, influenced the experiences of these Black men. However, they were only sometimes inherently a detriment to their experience.

Higher education must examine how implicit biases show up in the experiences of Black men and how those biases impact their ability to thrive in spaces they are required or encouraged to be in (Williams et al., 2020). Implicit biases in higher education coupled with the unacknowledged impact of Whiteness decrease the desired outcomes of involvement theory. These factors lessen aspirational capital acquired by Black men while navigating during their time navigating the intricacies of college campuses (Yosso, 2005). Thus, higher education must examine how implicit biases diminish involvement.

Campus administrators, student affairs professionals, and those in leadership cannot control the actions and behaviors of students themselves. However, suppose Black men cannot find belonging in building community, skills, and agency within their PWIs. In that case, they will create the spaces themselves in their backyards. A backyard is a created space that caters to what an individual wants and desires. Backyards are spaces where humans can share, be vulnerable, and control who and what enters the space. Backyards serve a unique purpose as a counterspace for Black men (Brooms et al., 2021). In most cases, whoever has access to a backyard uses it as a multi-purpose space. In reflecting on how Black men navigate PWIs, the backyard exhibits a different function and purpose for each of them.

As Black men navigate the campus community wanting to experience freedom in what they choose to involve themselves and whom they feel connected to, it will sometimes create a self-started space. When a Black man enters a backyard, they must feel comfortable enough to create the space that allows a sense of liberation and empowerment. Furthermore, Black men must identify the role of their backyard in maintaining and building networks, a sense of belonging, and leadership development. The backyard only works for Black men if they can cultivate a purposeful and intentional space customized to their needs, wants, and outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of this study is that it is not representative of or generalizable to the experiences of all Black men at PWIs in the Midwest or elsewhere. This study did not include Black men in their first or second years, those in graduate school, or nontraditional Black men, which can further affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, this study did not include findings from Black men who attend other institutions, such as HBCUs and community colleges. Lastly, this study focuses on the experiences of Black men and not those of Black women. However, this study intends not to exclude the experiences of Black women's experiences at predominantly White institutions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

In this study, Black men sought experiences that allowed their social and salient identities to align with their involvement. Campus involvement and student activities professionals should consider how to create a holistic organizational culture and leadership development amongst students to create inclusive spaces. In addition, professionals on campus should seek creative ways to engage and build relationships with Black men at their institutions.

Again, recruiting juniors and seniors is due to the amount of time the students had to get involved on campus. Students in this study spoke extensively about how continuous engagement and support are necessary for effective learning, growth, and development. Suppose leaders within higher education spaces and institutions make Black men feel a sense of belonging beyond trying to fill a quota or goal. It will create a more holistic and effective partnership.

Constitutional Audits

Student affairs professionals requiring audits of constitutions and bylaws for student organizations and student groups are recommended. Constitutions are foundational in establishing structure, guidelines, policies, and procedures by which an organization can function smoothly and orderly. In a constitution, student organizations should include topics such as duties of officers, advisors, purpose, and, most importantly, membership information. Student organizations should not be discriminatory based on a protected class. In addition, constitutions should include information regarding membership recruitment.

This recommendation is based on participants' experiences navigating the campus community, specifically student organizations. Participants shared how they felt they had to choose between social identities and campus engagement. Additionally, participants reflected on how students have agency and cannot be controlled in student organizational culture. However, higher education professionals responsible for student engagement, student activities, and any involvement opportunity impacting Black men can require a bi-annual constitutional audit of documents that govern each student organization to ensure compliance and inclusiveness unless the organization is specifically designated for a specific gender or racial identity.

Leadership Development and Advisor Training

Student affairs professionals requiring leadership development training and advisor training are recommended. The findings of this study assert that Black men want to be involved and engaged on campus, but no one can predict how they will be received by student leaders already invested in these organizations. Furthermore, students elected to serve as officers of any organization, club, or group, regardless of an academic, social, or service classification, must participate in bi-annual leadership development training. Student affairs educators must inform and provide foundational training and competency building for any student to ensure they know how to effectively lead organizations, being mindful of their own implicit biases and how to navigate those to not cause harm to any student who chooses to involve themselves.

For additional accountability and ownership of student clubs and organizations, advisors must stay informed of what is happening in the student groups they are responsible for. Advisors should be accessible to students and be informed of student organization happenings, including constitutions, to effectively provide and influence the organization's culture to provide critical and intentional options to engage students who choose to participate. Any advisor must also participate in bi-annual training for foundational knowledge and competency.

Long-Term Engagement after the first six weeks and first year

Student affairs professionals requiring long-term strategic planning and engagement after the first six weeks and the first year for Black men are recommended. The findings of this study arrive at the idea that campuses encourage student involvement through avenues such as orientation, involvement fairs, recruitment fairs, and electronic communication sent to students. While initial outreach and communication within the first six weeks and first year set Black men up for success, long-term strategic planning and engagement models are vital to maintain involvement for these students and to ensure that any student who has yet to get involved and has the energy can get connected.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the experiences of these students, there are several ways to extend and close the gaps in the body of knowledge for Black men at the direct intersection of student involvement and engagement. First, the students' experiences collectively spoke to how navigating the campus community looks different for each student, depending on their pathways and interests. Scholars could examine the effectiveness of specific trends and pathways to student involvement and how those can be increasingly transformative. Also, identity resonated in each finding. Researchers could examine precisely how the concept of othering occurs in spaces for LGBT-identifying Black men, Black men who are nontraditional students, and Black men who identify as international students.

Conclusion

This study sought to answer how Black men define their involvement on campus—by employing a qualitative phenomenological methodology, navigating the campus community, and lack of support and resources by the campus surfaced. Black men used their social identities, experiences, and existing networks to make meaning and determine their involvement. It is important to support Black men at PWIs in unpacking their own involvement experiences by advocating for more resources and support. Allocating more resources and support will decrease restrictions and pathways to access, opportunity, and belonging, which contributes to anti-Black racism. Future research should consider the intersectionality of social identities for Black men and how that shows up in what they choose and how they engage.

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