CAMPUS ECOLOGY AND THE ENGAGEMENT MOTIVATIONS OF BLACK

MALES AT SMALL, PRIVATE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

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by

Tiyah Western

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DEDICATION

To those who have sacrificed so much so that I may dream, achieve my dreams,
and inspire others to do the same.

ABSTRACT

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Background/Context. Although predominantly White institutions (PWIs) promote that opportunities for positive engagement and success are provided for all students who seek them out (Bourke, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Love, 2004), Black male counterstories tell a different tale of Black male college outcomes (see Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Iverson & Jaggers, 2015; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, Solórzano, 2007; Smith et al., 2016). Small liberal arts colleges have been theorized as providing students with distinctive educational experiences when compared to other institution types (Kuh, 2003). However, Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) contended that liberal arts colleges did not offer these same results for Black males. Further, other researchers noted that, compared to their White peers, African American students and other students of color experienced their predominantly White liberal arts campuses as more racialized and unsupportive spaces (Allen, 2018; Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001; Snyder & Custer, 2017; Watson & Kuh, 1996).

Purpose of the Study. To contribute to the literature on Black male collegiate engagement and success, this study examined qualitative data, framed by the theoretical and methodological perspectives of critical race theory (CRT), to explore how Black males make meaning of their experiences at predominantly White small, private liberal arts colleges (SPLACs) and how these experiences and interactions may have influenced their decisions to be engaged on campus. Banning and Strange's (2001, 2015) model of campus ecology intersects with CRT to form a race-space conceptual framework. The

reciprocal interaction of race and campus ecology covertly promotes the racialized exclusion and "othering" of Black males on campuses (Villalpando, 2004).

Research Design. Critical race methodology (CRM) is enacted through a case study to guide inquiry with, and counterstorytelling from, Black males at Midwest Acres College (pseudonym). Data for this study were derived through semi-structured interviews with participants (referred to as co-researchers throughout the study). Data for this study were analyzed using elements of Spradley's (1979) analysis methods—domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and thematic analysis—to identify relationships and greater themes through which Black male counterstories were situated.

Results of the Study. Through the counterstories of the co-researchers for this study, four main themes emerged. The greater themes discovered were (a) experiences of being a Black male; (b), constituents of Black male bonding; (c) aids in the performance of Black male coping at a PWI; and (d) attributes of the campus ecology. Within these themes, sub-themes provided a deeper look into the co-researcher's experiences.

These themes and sub-themes not only provided valuable data on how the Black males in this study made meaning of their experiences at Midwest Acres, but illustrated how interrelated these elements are to how the co-researchers' engagement decisions were influenced by the campus ecology of their SPLAC. Their counterstories highlighted the benefits of their attendance at Midwest Acres College as well as how their Black male identities may lead to "othering" both at Midwest Acres and in the greater society.

KEY WORDS: Black males, Campus ecology, Critical race methodology, Critical race theory, Liberal arts college, PWI, Race-space framework, Student engagement.

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For I know the plans I have for you," declares the L<small>ORD</small>, *"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart*. **Jeremiah 29: 11-13**.

Without God I would be nowhere. I never would have imagined to have lived the life and arrived at the places that I have. None of this is of my own volition. It is to God I called on for guidance, protection, and my ability to Bless others. It is through God which this work and my being has been possible. It is through God that I have been Blessed with those who I acknowledge here. If I had a plan for my life, I am far from what I thought it would be, and for that, I am truly grateful.

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- Kings & Queens

Y'all, WE DID IT!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

I recall, in preparation for an equity-building workshop for men of color that I designed and hosted, a conversation that I had with one of my students—who was neither Black nor a male. I expressed my concern for the lack of engagement of men of color on campus-especially our Black males. I knew that we had Black males on campus, and I had built good and respectable rapport with some of the young men. However, when it came to Black males showing up for events and activities that were intended for them, their presence was scant, if they were present at all. My student's response to my concern was that students of color just wanted to be in places where they did not feel oppressed: they felt oppressed in class, they felt oppressed in the cafeteria, they felt oppressed in social spaces, and sometimes they just needed a break. As simple as her statement was, it made complete sense to me. At the end of the school year, I observed a larger population of students of color in the cafeteria for lunch—especially Black males—than I had seen all academic year. I wondered, then, what had motivated some Black males to be engaged on campus and what kept some Black males from being visible within the greater campus environment.

Historically, a plethora of personal and institutional factors of social and academic integration have been tied to student engagement and retention (see Astin, 1985; Baxter Magolda; 1992; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Harper, 2006; Kuh, 2016; Tinto, 1987). Research has indicated that Black males integrate into, experience, and engage in the college environment differently than their racial and gender counterparts (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Sedlacek & Webster, 1977). PWIs possess

the greatest opportunity for varied environmental experiences due to the (typically) low rates of Black males on campus and, subsequently, greater opportunities for social and cultural mismatch. Black males largely experience PWIs as academically and socially unsupportive and unwelcoming (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1994; Donavan, 1984; Fleming, 1984; Pascarella, 1985; Sedlacek & Webster, 1977; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). These findings are still being echoed by current researchers, such as Brooms (2017, 2018a, 2018b), Harper (2009a, 2009b, 2012) and Strayhorn (2010), illustrating the impact that the racialization of campus spaces, academic interactions, and social interactions have had on Black male engagement on these campuses. The congruence in the previous data and current data on Black male students, as well as the data that reveals that Black males still produce the lowest rates of collegiate retention (US Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, 2015a, 20015b, 2015c, 2015d) demonstrate that there are still factors that are unanswered from our colleges and universities on how remedy these circumstances. The overall challenge, then, is ways in which PWIs address institutional factors that could help to improve the academic and social engagement of Black males.

Background of the Problem

Black students constitute approximately two million of the over 21 million college students (Strayhorn, 2017). Despite the considerable increase in college access for historically marginalized students within the past few decades (Strayhorn, 2017), current data show that Black males have the lowest rate of college enrollment, persistence, and completion (US Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d). For collegiate Black males, being engaged on campus has been reported to have a greater positive impact on college completion rates than for Black

females and White males in college (Reid, 2013). Being engaged on campus has also been argued to lead to greater economic success (Harper, 2009a) as well increase Black males' ability to overcome challenges in college (Brooms, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Harper, 2009a, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Although PWIs promote that opportunities for positive engagement and success are provided for all students who seek them out (Bourke, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Love, 2004), Black male counterstories in the literature tell a different tale of Black male college outcomes (see Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Iverson & Jaggers, 2015; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, Solórzano, 2007; Smith et al., 2016). The practices and policies of these institutions that allow Black males to experience Black misandric and microaggressive behaviors by White students and White campus faculty and staff (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; Iverson & Jaggers, 2015; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007)—even those Black males who are high achieving or in leadership positions on campus (Harper, 2009a; Harper et al., 2011; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015)—remind us that racism is endemic and ever present at these institutions and that these practices and policies impact Black male personal and collegiate performance. Thus, Black male engagement and success at PWIs will require the institutions to transform the way that institutional resources and programs are utilized and policies and practices are enacted. Two ways to initiate these efforts are by (a) assessing and addressing the campus climate and (b) engaging Black males on campus in inquiry about their points of view on institutional factors that may foster greater engagement, sense of belonging, and academic success for this group of students (Harper, 2012).

W.E.B. DuBois (1903) advocated for the *talented tenth man*—a man of natural talent, who, with the proper education and development will become a leader in his profession and to his people (Morehouse, 1896)—to be educated in the liberal arts in order to become leaders of the African American community and foster social change through education in both life and technical skills. Small liberal arts colleges have been theorized as providing students with distinctive educational experiences when compared to other institution types (Kuh, 2003), namely in areas of student academic and social engagement such as superior teaching quality and focus (Pascarella, Wang, Trolian, & Blaich, 2013; Seifert, Pascarella, Goodman, Salisbury, & Blaich, 2010) and greater interactional diversity (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). Seifert, Drummond, and Pascarella (2006) found that, specifically for African American students, small liberal arts colleges better engaged students in Chickering and Gamson's (1987) good practices in undergraduate education in comparison to research universities and regional institutions, and similar to the engagement of HBCUs. However, Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) contended that liberal arts colleges did not offer these same results for Black males in particular. Further, other researchers noted that, compared to their White peers, African American students and other students of color experienced their predominantly White liberal arts campuses as a more racialized and unsupportive space (Allen, 2018; Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001; Snyder & Custer, 2017; Watson & Kuh, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

The research is replete with tales of the social and academic alienation of Black males both on campus and off campus. For example, Strayhorn (2008) addressed the still unequal opportunities for college access and the challenges that Black males face in high

school academics such as deficit labeling, the lack of access to—and discouragement to

participate in— college preparatory activities, and the increased assignment to special

education. At the college level, research has addressed stories of the social alienation and

lack of academic and social engagement for Black males who attend PWIs (Brooms,

2017; Harper, 2012, 2013; Parker, Puig, Johnson, & Anthony Jr, 2016; Smith, et al.,

2016). These studies are examples of the vast amount of research on Black males on

college campuses and Black male collegiate engagement; however, much of the research

has been conducted at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) or larger

PWIs.

Although there is sufficient research identifying the quantitative or

operationalized data on student experiences at liberal arts colleges (see Astin, 1999; King

et al., 2007; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pascarella et al., 2013; Seifert et al., 2010;

Umbach & Kuh, 2006), very little research has been available to provide insight into

Black student experiences at predominantly white small, private liberal arts colleges

(SPLACs). Much less research has been identified regarding Black male engagement in

the campus ecology of these institutions specifically. The available research on Black

males at SPLACs has been more inclusive of Black students in general, where Black

students have reported campus environments that are concomitantly distinct in being

academically supportive, yet socially problematic (Fleming, 1984; Littleton, 2001).

Further marginalized are non-athletic Black students at SPLACs, who—as a smaller

subset of Black students on campus—are considered a "minority within a minority"

(Littleton, 2001, p. 19).

Two studies have been identified which have focused solely on Black males at SPLACs. Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) performed a quantitative secondary data analysis of the fourth edition of the *College Student Experiences Questionnaire* (CSEQ) to compare African American male engagement across institutional types according to three of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles of good practice. Allen (2018) framed his qualitative study in CRT and poststructuralist gender theories to give insight into how Black males at a predominantly White liberal arts university perceived the campus racial climate and made meaning of their raced-gendered socialization on campus. A third study by Littleton (2001) qualitatively assessed African American student persistence at small colleges in Appalachia, which included Black males. Finally, although Harper (2012) conducted a comprehensive study on high achieving Black male engagement, which included Black males from SPLACs, the data from this study were not delineated by institutional type and considerate of specific institutional characteristics. Harper's (2012) study also only included high achieving Black males. Thus, although all of these studies add to the literature and knowledge of Black males at SPLACS, none of the studies noted have focused solely on Black male firsthand stories of engagement within the full spectrum of the campus ecology of SPLACs. Therefore, further knowledge is to be gained about the experiences of Black males on these campuses to add to the broader research.

Purpose of the Study

Notable student engagement researchers, such as Astin (1985), and Kuh and Associates (1991), and particularly Black male engagement researchers such as Harper (2012), Brooms (2017), and Wood and Palmer (2015), urged for institutional

responsibility for Black male student engagement. To contribute to the literature on Black male collegiate engagement and success, this study examines qualitative data, framed by the theoretical and methodological perspectives of critical race theory (CRT), to explore how Black males make meaning of their experiences at SPLACs and how these experiences and interactions may influence their decisions to be engaged on campus. Banning and Strange's (2001, 2015) iteration of campus ecology intersect with CRT to form a race-space conceptual framework from which to view how the reciprocal interaction of race and campus ecology has the potential to covertly promote the racialized exclusion and "othering" of Black males on campuses (Villalpando, 2004). Love (2004) identified othering as the distinguishing and distancing of non-dominant peoples by the dominant population. Critical race methodology (CRM) is enacted through a case study to guide inquiry into, and counterstorytelling of Black males at SPLACs.

Data for this study were derived through the semi-structured interviews with participants and were analyzed using multiple methods identified by Spradley (1979) to better understand how Black males made meaning of their experiences and engagement decisions. Using Spradley's (1979) ethnographic analysis methods aided in this understanding by using them to (a) identify the narrow use of terms and concepts Black males use to explain their experiences, (b) how those terms are related to other concepts and ideas in their race-space interactions, and (c) bridging those more narrow concepts to in a broader thematic analysis to situate Black male counterstories of the whole experience of Black males within the campus ecology of SPLACs and how they drive Black males' engagement decisions.

Quaye (2007) highlighted the importance of humanizing participants in research and noted that "[w]e owe it to our participants to think about representing them meaningfully in studies and finding ways to bridge the gap between researcher and participant" (p. 7). Thus, *participants* in this study will either be referred to *Black males in this study* or *co-researchers*. Co-researchers of this study were college students who identify as Black males and were enrolled at SPLACs in the Midwest. The term *Black*, as opposed to *African American,* is used in this study to identify students who, despite nationality, identify within the Black racial construct. Participation in this study was limited to Black males who, at the time of this study, have not participated in official collegiate athletics within the academic year in order to gain more in-depth data on Black male collegiate interactions. Although Black male athletes may have similar experiences of the racialized campus climate of PWIs (Fuller, 2017; Griffin, 2017; Singer, 2005), their athletic schedules and obligations constrain how they may engage in the campus ecology in comparison to non-athletes.

Research Questions

The primary focus of this study aimed to answer the question of how Black male interactions with the various aspects of the campus ecology of small, private liberal arts colleges influence their engagement decisions. The research questions investigated were:

- How do Black males attending small, private liberal arts colleges make meaning of their college experiences (e.g. classroom experiences, interactions with other students, campus resources, interactions with physical and social environments, and other relevant campus policies and practices)?

- In what ways do Black males' college experiences, as described above, influence their decisions to be engaged on campus?

Significance of the Study

Scholarly Significance

Research on Black collegiate male engagement has largely offered the stories of Black males at larger public PWIs and HBCUs (see Harper, 2009a; 2012). This research contributes to the growing scholarship on male collegiate students of color, specifically Black males, in a number of ways. First, it extends the scholarship on Black males within the context of predominantly White small private liberal arts colleges—an institution type that is under researched—and their experiences and perceptions within this institutional context. Second, it extends the scholarship on the use of CRT and CRM in the appraisal of campus ecology, as well as in the SPLAC institutional context. Additionally, the use of CRT in the appraisal of the campus ecology extends the scholarship of a race-space framework within higher education. Finally, it adds to the greater body of scholarship on both Black male educational outcomes per the SPLAC institutional type as well as to the greater body of scholarship on student experiences at small, private liberal arts colleges.

Educational Significance

Often, research regarding students, especially historically marginalized students, problematizes the people and rarely the places and systems in which they exist. Noting that Black males are under-engaged or disengaged only tells part of the narrative: the deficit narrative. Addressing the various environmental factors that influence student behaviors places the onus on the institutions for the engagement and educational

outcomes of young men of color, regardless of the young man of color's personal factors, as Harper (2009b) suggested.

Theoretical Frameworks

In his idea of the school as a special environment, John Dewey (1916) suggested: "We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference" (p. 23). Following, through research, Rudolph Moos (1986) determined that "the arrangement of environments is perhaps the most powerful technique for influencing human behavior" (p. 4). In higher education, the presence of spaces such as campus commons, quiet study spaces, and multicultural affairs offices, as well as programs such as admissions visit days and new student orientations, are all designed with ideas of how students will interact with these elements within the campus ecological system. However, these spaces and programs are designed under the assumption that space is neutral (Wilkins, 2007) and do not take into consideration that students who are not of the dominant campus culture experience space differently and at different times (Cuyjet & Meriwether, 2016; Samura, 2016).

Adopting a race-space framework aided in exploring how Black males may encounter the ecology of predominantly White collegiate space as PWIs are manifestations of American values and educational priorities circumscribed by the systemic beliefs of the dominant culture (Delaney, 2002). Banning and Strange's (2001, 2015) iteration of campus ecology serves as the basis for the consideration of spatial interaction. CRT serves as the theoretical perspective through which to view how the campus ecology and the everyday artifacts, values, interests, and ideas within and around

it are steeped in machinations of American racism (Delaney, 2002; Neely & Samura, 2011; Wilkins, 2007). Engaging this framework, I seek to explore how this race-space relationship may affect how Black males take place and interact within the campus ecology of small private liberal arts colleges and how these institutional ecologies contribute to these men's academic and social engagement decisions.

CRT

Developed by legal scholars in the mid 1980's, CRT identifies racism as endemic to American society—indoctrinated by historical racial choices that have shaped ideologies of social racial construction, law, privilege, and subordination—as well as the need to work toward dismantling the institution of racism (Matsuda et al., 1993). In education, CRT addresses how endemic racism is to the structural and cultural aspects of education and how racism perpetuates privileged and subordinate positions in and out of the classroom (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT draws from multiple disciplines to examine how race and racism permeates and functions in various forms of subordination, historically and contextually, across various modes of thought and process (Delgado Bernal; 1998; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993; Yosso & Solórzano, 2002; Villalpando, 2004). There are a variety of principles by which CRT is defined (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993; Solórzano, 1997). Yosso and Solórzano's (2002) iteration of CRT tenets for education, and Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) application of Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) are imparted for this study as interconnected elements by which to analyze Black male place-making within the campus ecology at PWIs.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) communicated that CRT in education has at least the following five tenets that shape its foundation: (a) race and racism are endemic and intercentric with other forms of subordination; (b) the challenge to the majoritarian ideology of educational institutions toward neutrality, meritocracy, colorblindness, and equal opportunity; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the recognition of the experiential knowledge of People of Color as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racism; and (e) the analysis of race and racism in historical and contemporary contexts and through the use of various disciplines that challenge and rectify ahistoricism. When applied to the campus ecology and the interactional relationship between race and space, these principles seek to (a) explain how the campus ecology is steeped in the machinations of American racism and create a raced-gendered space for Black males, (b) challenge the view that campus ecology is racially neutral and rather is one that frequently "rewards and perpetuates White-normative behaviors" (Muñoz, 2009), (c) address ways in which campuses can commit to create socially just spaces for Black males, (d) empower the voices and experiential knowledge of Black males and their race-space interactions at their SPLACs, and (e) analyze Black male interaction in the campus ecology through the areas of study such as education, psychology, sociology, architecture, and geography and add to the accuracy of campus racial contemporary and historical contexts.

Complimentary to Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) foundational CRT tenets, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) addressed the intersection of race and property as a central construct in understanding CRT in education and discussed how Harris's (1993) "property functions of whiteness" (p. 1731) can apply to education. First, Whiteness as

property is alienable (transferable) (Harris, 1993). Whiteness is rendered alienable (transferable) in education when certain student performances are rewarded for conformity to White-normative practices such as speech patterns and styles of dress (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Second, Whiteness affords the right to use and enjoyment and can move from being "a passive characteristic as an aspect of identity to an active entity that…is used to fulfill the will and to exercise power" (Harris, 1993, p. 1734). In education, Whiteness affords the right to enjoy all that institutions have to offer without limitations and the right to access an academic and social curriculum embedded with White cultural normative behaviors and representation (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Third, Whiteness is a form of reputational and status property (Harris, 1993). Thus, to damage someone's reputation is to damage some form of his, her, or their personal property. In education, to identify a school or a program outside of White-normative language risks damaging the reputation or status of that program. Finally, Whiteness affords the absolute right to exclude (Harris, 1993). In education, exclusion has been a part of the inception of American colleges and universities, including the segregation of schools and exclusion from parts of, or whole, institutions. Whiteness also affords the right of exclusion of other cultures and ethnicities from the curriculum, the design of the college, and other aspects of the campus ecology. Thus, in higher education, the property of Whiteness permeates, and is a defining factor of, PWIs which lend themselves to the alienation of Black males at these institutions.

Campus Ecology and Person-Environment Theories

Lewin (1936) first contended that the "experimental investigation of needs, of action, or of emotions cannot be carried out without taking into account the characteristics of the person, his momentary state, and his psychological environment" (p. 17) and that whole situations, or behaviors, are functions of both persons and environments. Conceptualized by Banning and Kaiser (1974), the ecological perspective of student development focuses on the transactional relationship between students and their environments. The ecosystem model was developed as a way to help institutions of higher education to construct environments in which this transactional relationship will optimize educational growth and development (Banning & Kaiser, 1974). This transactional relationship, according to Banning and Kaiser (1974), is based on the belief that the environment and the people within the campus community are mutually effective upon each other. Further, there is the assumption that within this transactional relationship, Banning and Kaiser (1974) propose, that "different people respond differently in different types of environments and that there should be an optimum fit between people and their environment for growth and development" (p. 374). Driven by the notion for constructing optimum environments with those who live and function in them (Moos, 1986), and by theories and concepts such as social ecology and climate (Moos, 1979, 1986), environmental press (Murray, 1938; Pace & Stern, 1958; Stern, 1970), and personality types and model environments (Holland,1966), Banning and Strange (2001) developed a model on the impacts of four types of campus environments on student involvement: (a) the physical environment; (b) the human aggregate

environment; (c) the organizational environment; and (d) the socially constructed environment.

The physical environment considers the impact of the built environment and the material culture on functional and symbolic behaviors (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015). The physical environment exerts its influence by conveying non-verbal messages through encoded messages of a specific behavior setting, proximal zones of social interaction, campus physical artifacts, and traces of behavior—or missing behavior—in a space (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015). For example, a cultural center that is located on the outskirts of campus may inadvertently convey to students that this space is not of great importance to the college. Banning and Bartels (1997) noted that physical artifacts can communicate one of four messages of campus multiculturalism which include belonging, equality, safety, and their roles on campus and can have either a positive or negative effect depending on how the artifact is depicted. These artifacts may often portray the expectations of traditional and stereotypical roles (Banning, 1993, Banning & Bartels, 1997). For students of color, images and relics on campus can affect the experiences of inclusion or marginality in campus spaces (Banning & Luna, 1992). For example, on the same campus, marketing materials that only include images of White students for student activities may further make students of color feel excluded from the campus culture.

Of important note to physical space is the idea of sense of space (Banning, Clemons, McKelfresh, & Gibbs, 2010) in creating student belonging. Informal spaces identified by students—whether on or off campus—serve as supplemental social spaces and informal learning spaces. Two such spaces that Banning and Strange (2015) noted, "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989) and "restorative place" (Staats, 2012), are special spaces

where students may retreat for comfort, community, and safety. Third place is defined as a setting beyond home (first place) and work (second place) where students can regularly relax and commune with others. Similar to third place, restorative places are defined as places where students can to unwind and get away from stressors and are more like a secret getaway.

The human aggregate environment consists of the collective typical characteristics of the participants of the environment (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015). These characteristics "influence the degree to which people are attracted to, satisfied within, and retained by those environments" (Banning & Strange, 2001, p. 35). Information from this environment type provides data on the dominant structures of personalities, learning styles, preferences, strengths, and types of engagement (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015). Subcultures, or like-groups of students, also influence the aggregate. Congruence in this environment occurs if one's characteristics, or "type", are similar to that of the dominant group (Banning & Strange, 2015). A lack of congruence leads to dissatisfaction and instability and may be remedied by (a) seeking a new, more congruent environment, (b) remaking the present environment, or (c) adapting to the dominant characteristics of the present environment (Banning & Strange, 2015, p. 75). Aggregate environments that encourage positive involvement are those in which students are a part of a group or provided with opportunities to group with like minds and interests. Of particular interest to students outside of the dominant culture are specialized offices and organizations that serve their needs (Banning & Strange, 2001).

The organizational environment is constructed by the institution's organizational structure, policy, practices, resources, and dynamics (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015).

Banning and Strange (2015) note the importance of understanding how this environment contributes to the forces often associated with successful educational experiences. Small-scale organizations tend to have a greater opportunity for encouraging positive morale and attitudes (Banning & Strange, 2001). The organizational environment also influences participants' decisions of the degree to which they will become involved in the college setting. If practices and policies do not give students and other members of the campus environment reasons to be involved, perhaps in an attendance or grading policy, then they have fewer reasons to be present (Banning & Strange, 2001).

Finally, the socially constructed environment consists of the collective perceptions of the individuals within it that constitute a measure of (a) environmental press, (b) social climate, and (c) campus culture (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015). These perceptions influence the direction of behavior within the environment (Moos, 1986). Different people make meaning of the environment in various ways, and environmental attraction and satisfaction is partially a function of how one makes meaning of the environment (Banning & Strange, 2001). Environmental press, as defined by Stern (1970) is the self-reported cultural norms. These identified presses may or may not correspond to the various needs of students or the "organizational tendencies that seem to give unity and direction to a person's behavior" (Stern, 1970, p. 6). Social climate, as modeled by Moos (1979) is comprised of three domains: relationship, personal growth and development, and systems maintenance and change, which describe students perceived environmental personalities. Campus culture consists of the artifacts, perspectives, values, and assumptions held by the participants in the campus environment (Kuh & Hall, 1993) and inform the campus community what it means to be a member

and how to function within the environment (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015).

Institutions that are most successful at inspiring a culture and tradition of involvement

among students are distinctive in that they create an attractive and powerful atmosphere

(Banning & Strange, 2001).

The Racialized Campus Ecology and Black Male Students*.*

Researchers such as Samura (2016), Neely and Samura (2011), and Wilkins

(2007) positioned space as a social construct that plays a reciprocal role in the

development and performance of race, racial identity, and social formations. Delaney

(2002) argued that the way that race is regarded is done so because of its spatial

expression, making space an enabling technology through which race is produced. One's

place, or spatial membership in relation to another, further mechanizes the production of

racial and spatial identity as place is constructed in relation to an "other" (Neely &

Samura, 2011; Wilkins, 2007). Taking *place* seriously, Delaney (2002) argued, means

also taking seriously the race-making event of displacement and dislocation seriously, an

event that is afforded in the property of Whiteness (Harris, 1993).

Samura (2016) identified *college space* as the connected existing and past

practices, norms, environments, relationships, and interactions established by institutional

policies and campus culture. This space is inclusive of the physical concrete

environments and the social relationships among people or places, which are often

closely interrelated and interacting. For PWIs, this college space is comprised of not only

the compositional representations of White students in comparison to students of color,

but also the historical and evolved representations of power relations and the

embeddedness of White institutional presence that presents these institutions as neutral

and monocultural and student success and performance as meritocratic (Bourke, 2016; Gusa, 2010). Within these institutions, the pervasiveness of Whiteness renders a campus ecology and campus racial culture through which space and race intersect to create experiences for Black males that differ socially, culturally, and developmentally than those of their peers of other races and ethnicities (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Brooms, 2017; Fleming, 1984; Strayhorn, 2013) and sometimes even those of Black women (Fleming, 1984). For Black males at PWIs, as in society, race and space possess a reciprocal relation by which Black males are identified, defined, and socially engaged (Fanon, 1967; Wilkins, 2007). Wilkins (2007) argued that, for Black males, the historical privileging of space and place has always positioned the Black male body against the dominant discourses of masculinity. In his counterstory of being a Black male, Fanon (1967) stated that "not only must the [B]lack man be [B]lack; he must be [B]lack in relation to the [W]hite man" (p. 82-83).

Banning and Strange (2001, 2015) explicated that although inclusion and safety are distinct concepts, they mutually reflect campus conditions imperative for student development and learning and that an absence of either condition could potentially create a hostile environment for social and academic engagement. Addressing issues related to each of these concepts involves both physical and psychological aspects. For Black males, the campus ecology—whether overtly or covertly—produces experiences that do not promote the elements of inclusion, safety, or positive engagement that Banning and Strange (2001, 2015) impart as imperative to positive campus ecological experiences (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012). For example, physical artifacts on campus representing White men with nooses

not only represent a history of exclusion, but demonstrate a history of physical and psychological harm and oppression to Black men (Brooms, 2017). A more popular example is a mural at a University of Indiana classroom that depicted a Klu Klux Klan rally and a burning cross. Despite the artist's intent, this image caused discomfort among some students as it depicted a violent and exclusive history (Adams & Hays, 2017). Further, exclusion of Black males from campus spaces by White members of the campus community—where other students are allowed to freely participate and even create restorative spaces—may also create sentiments of a denial of the same standards of safety provided to other students on campus (Allen, 2018; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, & Allen, 2016). For example, Black males in Smith and Colleagues' (2016) study were forced to end their game of football by campus police under the basis of causing a disturbance and removed from a space where White students and other student identities were allowed to congregate freely.

The exclusionary practices above occur as a result of what Wilkins (2007) labeled as *spatial profiling*, "the physical and material process of locating social relations and social practices in space based on historical, political, cultural, and economic exercises of hegemonic power" (p. 22). Due to spatial profiling at PWIs, Black males may not find the same spaces on campus, or in the surrounding community, that serve as the third place or restorative space that Banning and Strange (2015) noted. Rather, third place and restorative place are likely to occur as what Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000), referred as *counter-spaces*: spaces in which positive collegiate racial climate could be constructed and preserved and where Black misandric and other deficit notions of Black males, and other People of Color, could be confronted. Academic counter-spaces are spaces where

Black males are "allowed to foster their own learning and to nurture a supportive environment wherein their experiences are validated and viewed as important knowledge" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 70). Social counter-spaces are spaces outside of the classroom where Black males could vent their frustrations and commune with other Black males, Black females, or other students of color who shared their experiences of microaggressions or macroaggressions. These counter-spaces are places where Black males can regain their sense of place at PWIs.

Fanon (1967) asserted that the Black man is seen only as a Black man in a "White world" (p. 86), and by his appearance is how he takes place in the spaces that he occupies. The race-space relationship creates a racialized campus ecology in which Black males' interactions within the PWI campus ecology are "othered" against Whiteness. Thus, raced-gendered needs, experiences, perceptions, and stories differ from that of other students within these institutions. Banning and Strange (2001) highlighted that the distance between student needs and campus environmental press can inhibit student growth. Campus spaces embedded in Whiteness were built on endemic racism and espouse the values of Whiteness that do not provide an ontology that permits the understanding of Black maleness (Fanon, 1967) and thus, may not directly meet the needs of Black males. Harper (2009b) encouraged institutions to assume the onus of engaging Black males on campus by cultivating an environment in which they can thrive. Changing the campus environment and engagement of Black males can contribute to a greater culture of engagement for the college through greater the elements of inclusion and safety called for by Banning and Strange (2001, 2015).

Definition of Terms

Alienation: the dissonance between one's socially constructed self and one's desire for authenticity and self-authorship due to the social construction of the academic domain by those in dominance and power.

African American: U.S. born persons of African descent. This term is sometimes used interchangeably with, or instead of, *Black* throughout this study according to the terminology referenced by the respective author(s).

Black Misandry: refers to "an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors" (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007, p. 563).

Black: persons who, despite nationality, socially identify within the Black racial construct. This term is sometimes used interchangeably with, or instead of, *African American according* to the terminology referenced by the respective author(s). However, when research is synthesized and various terms are used across the research, the term *Black* will be used.

Campus Ecology: the transactional relationship between students and their surrounding collegiate environmental characteristics (Banning, 1978).

Campus Ecological System: the collective, interrelated components that all human environments include: physical condition, design and layout (physical environments); collective characteristics of the people who inhabit them (aggregate environments), organizational structures related to their purposes and goals (organizational environments); and collective perceptions or social constructions of the

context and culture of the setting (socially constructed environments) (Banning &
Strange, 2001; 2015).

Campus Racial Climate: "the overall racial environment" (Solórzano, Ceja, &
Yosso, 2000, p.62) of the institution cultivated by the campus racial culture, "the
collective patterns of tacit values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms that evolve from an
institution's history and are manifest in its mission, traditions, language, interactions,
artifacts, physical structures, and other symbols, which differentially shape the
experiences of various racial and ethnic groups and can functions to oppress racial
minority populations within a particular institution" (Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012, p.
32).

Counterstory/Counternarrative: story told by non-dominant group members that
challenges the stories, policies, and practices of the dominant group and presents a
counter-reality for non-dominant groups.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): an interdisciplinary theory that recognizes that
racism is endemic in American culture, challenges dominant historical storytelling and
dominant ideologies of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy; asserts
the recognition of the experiential knowledge of People of Color; and works toward
eliminating racial, and all forms of oppression (Matsuda, et al., 1993).

Engagement: the time and effort students invest behaviorally, cognitively, and
emotionally in purposeful academically and socially developmental experiences.

HBCU (Historically Black College or University): American collegiate
institution type with the principle mission of the education of Black Americans.

Involvement: refers to students' participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities and does not necessarily predicate engagement.

Liberal Arts College: American collegiate institutional type that is characterized by its focus on academic programs in arts and sciences and aims to prepare students for civic responsibility.

Majoritarian Stories: assumptions and shared cultural understandings generated by persons of the dominant group that maintains the subordination of non-dominant groups (Delgado, 1989; Love, 2004). Majoritarian stories are accompanied by justifiable ontologies and axiologies of dominant group members that cause these "stories" to be espoused normal, natural, and ordinary and are presented as the status quo, policies, practices rules, and regulations (Delgado, 1989; Love, 2004).

Meritocracy: The premise that "all people—no matter the race, class, gender, or sexual orientation—get what they deserve based solely on their individual efforts" (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002, p. 171).

Microaggression: covert, verbal and non-verbal—whether conscious or unconscious—messages of oppression aimed at persons of non-dominant groups.

Niggering/Niggered: "the process by which stereotypes about Black boys and men shape people's low expectations for their success in schools and society" (Harper, 2013, p. 191).

Onlyness: "the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group" (Harper, et al. 2011, p. 190).

Othering/Othered: the distinguishing and distancing of non-dominant peoples by the dominant population) (Love, 2004).

PWI (Predominantly White Institution): an institution of higher education that reflects both a higher composition of White students than students of color as well as "an ongoing social practice according to which whiteness maintains a place of supremacy" (Bourke, 2016, p. 15).

Racial Battle Fatigue: "the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost of fighting against racism" (Smith, 2009, p. 298).

Racial Primes: racialized ideologies and messages that have been passed on to White children—directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously—that "conditions White children to engage in color-conscious racialized actions throughout their lifespan while believing themselves to be color-blind" (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007, p. 560).

Racism: institutional system in which one racial group deems itself superior to others and has the power to carry out racially discriminatory behaviors while reaping positive benefits of these behaviors, which conversely negatively affect other racial/ethnic groups (Yosso & Solórzano, 2002).

SPLAC (Small Private Liberal Arts College): private liberal arts colleges that are typically small in size and are residential in nature-requiring that most of their students live and commune on campus. For this study, SPLAC refers specifically to those institutions that are predominantly White.

Stereotype Threat: sense of a threat of the possibility of confirming, and being judged and treated according to, a negative stereotype associated with one's social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

White: American persons of European descent.

Whiteness: Conventional ideology associated with the dominance of being White, though not a direct referent for White people.

Delimitations and Assumptions

As a case study, this study is delimited by the narrowness of the institutional and participant selection. By narrowing down small private liberal arts colleges—an already small percentage of institutions—to only those which are highly residential, and to those centrally located to the researcher in the Midwest, creates a significant constraint. This study focuses on only two institutions. The focus on Black males who are non-athletes limits the pool of participants available for the research. Second, the location may provide a unique institutional context. Thus, this delimits the generalizability and transferability of the data from this study.

A possible limitation of this study is that it assumes the presence of Black males as a collective group and does not emphasize the various nationalities and masculinities of the individuals in the group, which could play a role in how the campus ecology is perceived. Yet, doing so would alter the focus and scope of the current study. Each of the delimitations and limitation may serve well in extending this research in future studies.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction, framework, and overview of the dissertation. Chapter Two offers a review of the literature relevant to this study. This chapter provides a synthesis of literature related to student engagement and alienation, Black male collegiate experiences at PWIs, and Black male collegiate engagement. It also provides a synthesis of the literature on

Black male collegiate experiences and engagement in SPLACs. Chapter Three covers the

methodology, data collection, and analysis methods that drive this study. It defines

Critical Race Methodology and the use of case study, justifies the site and participant

selection for this study, and elaborates on the diary method as data collection used to

bring to light Black males' counterstories through multi-method data analysis. Chapter

Four presents findings and counterstories obtained from interviews as outlined in Chapter

Three. Finally, Chapter Five extends a discussion and overview of the findings from

Chapter Four with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications, study limitations

and opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Harper (2014) suggested that, in recent years, Black males have been the most researched student group—even above White males and Black women. Although some Black males in the research have reported experiences of positive safe campus environments (Brooms, 2017; Parker et al., 2016) as well as high achievement at their PWIs (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2012; Smith et al., 2016), the research heavily illuminates stories of still unwelcoming and racially challenging campus environments at PWIs (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2011; 2012; Reid, 2013; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith et al., 2016; Strayhorn, 2013). Black students have still been reported as entering a racially primed environment that allow for the racial stressors and potential academic and social hurdles described by previous researchers (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; Smith et al., 2016; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; 2013).

Previous and more recent research agree that predominantly White college attendance has a stressful effect on Black males. The benefits of HBCUs in comparison to PWIs as well as the psycho-social stressors of Black males at each of these institutional types have been highlighted in the research. Black males at PWIs have reported less welcoming and culturally supportive environments than their HBCU peers (Allen, 1992; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984). Moreover, researchers such as Davis (1994) and Reeder and Schmitt (2013) revealed that Black males at PWIs produced lower grades and were less academically integrated into their institutions, on average, than their HBCU peers, despite typically entering college with greater resources and higher college entrance scores (Davis, 1994; Reeder & Schmitt,

2013). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) stated that it is rarely institutional type that affects student learning but rather the supportive social-psychological context manifested by the institution. Illuminated in the research, however, is the benefit of supportive environments and smaller college campuses, as well as the way in which Black males manage their stereotypes on campus (Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Griffin, Hurd, & Hussain, 2019; Harper, 2009a; Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2018) in the success and sense of belonging of Black collegiate students, specifically for Black males.

Research has positioned liberal arts colleges as institutions that promote good practices of undergraduate education (Pascarella et al., 2004) and provide students with higher experiences with diversity than other institutional types (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). Seifert and Associates (2006) found that HBCUs and liberal arts colleges provided similar experiences of good practices in undergraduate education to African American students. Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) argued, however, that the general conclusions of liberal arts college research does not apply to Black males, perhaps due to the cultural incongruity that likely exists for them on these campuses. Nevertheless, other studies disclosed that Black students, specifically Black males, found greater academic success at these institutions, still, than at larger institutions (Fleming, 1984; Littleton, 2001). Although SPLACs offer some benefits to the Black males who attend—such as better study environments (Littleton, 2001)—they are not exempt from the experiences of Black males at PWIs (Fleming, 1984; Harper, 2012; Littleton, 2001). In some cases, those experiences may be amplified at SPLACS, where not only is there a lack of critical mass of Black students on campus, but few other Black

male peers and role models who Black male students may be able to relate to (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001).

Decades of research have identified non-cognitive and academic factors associated with the engagement and retention of African American males. Historically, personal and institutional factors of social and academic integration (Tinto, 1987) have been tied to student engagement and retention. Despite the level of academic preparedness, social factors (Strayhorn 2008; Tinto, 1987), non-cognitive factors (Reid, 2013; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985), and elements that foster social and cultural capital (Strayhorn, 2010) have been found as key factors in the engagement and retention of African American males, more than students of other ethnic backgrounds (Reid, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008, 2010; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). Tinto (1987) postulated that incongruence—the lack of congruence of the academic and social systems of the institution and the student—and social isolation were associated with voluntary withdrawal by students. Strayhorn (2013) found that, in addition to precollege factors, supportive resources, the caring relationships of faculty, staff, and peers, and close community connections were beneficial to the retention of African American collegiate males. Reid's (2013) research identified that African American collegiate males with higher self-efficacy and racial identity performed better than their African American collegiate males with lower self-efficacy. Reid found that the self-efficacy of African American collegiate males was the greatest predictor of achievement and that African American collegiate males with the highest levels of self-efficacy were more socially and academically integrated into their PWI.

Black Males in Higher Education

Research findings indicated that predominantly White campuses provided much less welcoming and less supportive environments for African American students than their peers of other races (Ancis et al., 2000; Strayhorn, 2013). Ancis and colleagues (2000) surveyed 578 undergraduate students—136 of them African American—and found that African American students experienced more racial conflict and less satisfaction with the university than their White, Asian, and Latino peers. Many years later, Strayhorn (2013) surveyed 391 White and African American undergraduates at a PWI and found that African American students were still more likely to experience the campus climate as "a cold, uncaring place" (p. 121), and that such perceptions lent to students' decisions to leave college. African American men were found to have higher intentions of leaving college.

Some of the principal studies identified in the literature have also have, through qualitative measures, offered Black males in particular to tell their stories of their PWI experiences. Brooms (2017), for example, interviewed 40 Black males on their collegiate experiences—specifically their experiences with race and gender on campus, what strategies they used to persist in college, and the significance of participation in a BMI on their experiences. Parker and associates (2016) interviewed 24 Black males at a large PWI to inquire about their perceptions of their campus climate and campus diversity-related matters. In a much larger study, Harper (2012) interviewed 210 high-achieving Black males across 42 colleges in 20 different states and across six institutional types to examine Black male achievement. From earlier data of his research, Harper (2009b) constructed five composite counterstories of Black male experiences at PWIs. These

studies will be further amplified throughout the study; however, all of these studies highlight the importance of campus policies and practices in creating a more supportive campus for African American students.

The Importance of Race and Space: HBCUs and PWIs

High School Racial Composition and College Choice. High school racial composition matters in the racial composition of the college that students choose; however, students' reasons for choosing to attend PWIs and HBCUs differ. For example, Freeman's (2005) research participants suggested that African American students who attended predominantly White high schools were more likely to prefer attending an HBCU to be around more Black people and Black culture whereas African American students who attended predominantly Black schools reported wanting to experience more diversity and, therefore, carried the desire to attend PWIs. However, Littleton (2001) highlighted that most students that attended the small private liberal arts college in his study attended high schools in which Black students were 50% or less of the student population. Littleton (2001) and Ariza and Berkey (2009) reported that students who attended SPLACS selected their colleges because of parental desires to have their students learn what it was like to be a part of the greater society and to be around more diversity, specifically more Whites. Students also reported having chosen to enroll in SPLACS because of the financial aid opportunities that were extended to them by the institution (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001). However, students who attended more affluent schools or predominantly White schools were more likely to be better prepared for college, which may influence not only their college access, but their college

choice as well (Littleton, 2001). According to Littleton (2001) these were the students who were reported to be more likely to attend the SPLACS discussed in this study.

Campus Racial Composition and Black Male Success. Flagg (1993) identified Whiteness as a baseline identity because "to be White is to not think about it" (p. 969). For students of color, to not think about their own racial identity is not as affordable of an option (Cooper, 2006), especially for Black students (Ancis et al., 2000). The research is replete with the importance of campus racial composition on Black student experiences (Allen, 1992; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Davis; 1994; Fleming, 1984; Reeder & Schmitt, 2013)—especially that of Black males (Fleming, 1984; Davis, 1994). Campus racial composition has been tied to student satisfaction (Allen 1992), student involvement (Allen, 1992; Brooms, 2017; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014), student departure and sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2013; Tinto, 1987); student integration (Davis, 1994; Tinto, 2013) and academic success (Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984). Specifically, focus on Black males at PWIs illuminates the subdominant and invisible positioning that Black males encounter and the psycho-social stress that they endure as being both Black and male.

Fleming (1984) provided one of the most cited and considerably comprehensive explorations of Black students at both HBCUs and PWIs. In a mixed method study, she tested and interviewed nearly 3000 college freshmen and seniors at 15 colleges (seven predominantly Black colleges and eight PWIs) across four states. Fleming (1984) found that at PWIs, White males were able to enjoy more positive expressions of achievement and enjoy their education environment as more "free from downward pulls on their aspirations and from motivational conflicts that douse ambition" (p. 140). On the

contrary, Black males at PWIs, more than their Black female counterparts, reported experiencing their campus environments as more racially stressful, which led to greater potential for academic inertia and engagement in less developmentally supportive activities. At HBCUs, however, Black males thrived in the same ways that White males thrived at PWIs. Of note, Fleming highlighted that Black males at PWIs—in comparison to their HBCU counterparts—had access to more campus resources and, on average, entered college from more privileged backgrounds and with higher standardized test scores.

According to Fleming (1984), the alienating atmosphere that Black males experienced at PWIs may have limited their possibilities for growth. These campus ecological limits may have explained how Black males at PWIs experienced a decline in academic success and developmental growth, in contrast to their peers at HBCUs who had a more positive correlation between academic level and academic and developmental progress. Further, Fleming argued that Black males at PWIs were generally disenchanted with their interpersonal interactions on campus and engaged typically in less constructive extracurricular outlets that syphoned energy away from their academic pursuits and did little to resolve their problems. At HBCUs, Black males reaped similar gains as White males at PWIs regarding a culturally supportive environment, supportive relationship networks, academic and career growth, and productive extracurricular involvement. Fleming offered that upon entrance in PWIs, Black males are categorized as subdominant and rendered invisible. She argued that the entrance into the unfamiliar and culturally unsupportive campus ecology of PWIs may cause psychological concerns for Black males on these campuses. Fleming suggested that although HBCUs are unique in their

mission and campus environment, Black males that experience similar support in their environments at PWIs could reap similar benefits as their HBCU counterparts.

Research that built on Fleming's (1984) HBCU and PWI comparison highlighted similar experiences for Black students. Like Fleming (1984), these researchers (Allen, 1992; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Cokley, 2000; Davis, 1994; Reeder & Schmitt, 2013) contended that the socio-psychological environment and perceived social support of the institution had a greater effect on Black student success more than academic preparation and lead to the greater sense of belonging and academic integration. Allen (1992) and Davis (1994) found that although Black males at PWIs reported higher high school grades and college entrance test scores, they reported lower academic achievement and lower levels of social involvement than those at HBCUs. Reeder & Schmitt (2013) also found that African American students at PWIs had to put forth additional effort to achieve the same academic success than their same-race peers at HBCUs despite more successful pre-college factors of African American students attending PWIs.

Allen (1992) posited that Black students at PWIs reported less favorable relationships with their professors. Black males, overall, were likely to be more successful who were higher achievers in high school combined with being more fully integrated into the academic life of the college (Davis, 1994). Those who reported positive faculty relationships & felt positive about their connections to peers of both races reported the greatest social involvement (Allen, 1992). Chen, Ingram, and Davis (2014) discovered that, of the various measures on the NSSE, having a supportive campus environment was the highest predictor of African American student satisfaction at HBCUs and PWIs. All of the above researchers argued that this supportive campus

environment had aided Black males at HBCUs in having greater academic success on average than their PWI peers.

Black Males and the PWI Campus Ecology

Some Black students in the literature contended that they preferred to attend PWIs with the hopes of interacting with diverse others (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Freeman, 2005). Parents also wanted their Black students to interact with more White students, faculty, and staff in order for them to gain more "real world" socialization (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001). For some students on campus, college is their first experience with meaningful interactions of someone from another race. This is especially the case for Black students at PWIs in either being the first Black person that White students have encountered or Black students encountering White people in a meaningful context (Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011).

Students' home communities were reported to be a key factor for Black students in their adjustment to PWIs in that those who have had meaningful relationships with a White person prior to college were reported to better adjust to-and integrate into-the campus environment (Davis, 1994; Woldoff et al., 2011). Black students who came from predominantly Black communities and high schools were reported to have a more difficult time adapting the PWI campus ecology and reported more difficulty in finding supportive peer groups (Woldoff et al., 2011). However, Black students have been reported to exhibit higher levels of racial identity on average at these institutions—possibly due to the salience of their race within the campus ecology (Stewart, 2008).

Black male interactions at PWIs are not just limited to person-to-person interactions and have the potential to begin even in recruitment (Cuyjet & Meriwether,

2016; Fleming, 1984) and the application process (Stewart, 2008). Through institutional recruitment efforts and materials, some students perceived that their colleges would offer greater levels of diversity than they actually experienced once they arrived on the college campus (Brooms, 2017; Cuyjet & Meriwether, 2016; Littleton, 2001; Parker et al., 2016). Upon arriving to campus, Black males reported immediately feeling alienated and made aware of the racialized campus environment whether through campus relics such as confederate statues and flags (Brooms, 2017), campus spaces such as academic halls (Smith et al., 2016) and campus public domains (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007); the provision of White Greek organization houses and no present space allocated to Black Greek organizations (Parker et al., 2016); with the names of campus buildings representing Whiteness (Brooms, 2017; Parker et al., 2016), or in their social interactions with members of the campus community (Brooms, 2017). PWIs' promises for diversity have been reported by Black males to be a cloak for the divided and racialized reality of campus, which sends a double message of inclusion (Brooms, 2017; Parker et al., 2016). Some of the Black males in Broom's (2017) study explained that campus diversity did not equate to unity and cooperation among students. Though, when Black males made an effort to change the racial division and misconceptions on campus, they were sometimes met with incivility, disdain, and lack of cooperation from their White campus community (Brooms, 2017; also see Harper, 2009a; 2011; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

Black Misandric Environments and Psycho-Social Stressors at PWIs

Banning and Strange (2001; 2015) posited that the key components of all human environments include (a) the physical condition, design, and layout; (b) characteristics of the people who inhabit them; (c) organizational structures related to the purpose and

goals; and (d) inhabitants' collective perceptions or construction of the context and culture of the setting. Therefore, Black male experiences at PWIs occur within the campus ecological context and are not just limited to surface social interactions. The campus ecological system is not just location-based, but also reaches through to the events of recruitment and enrollment. For example, enrolling Black males without providing them with culturally supportive environments; sending double messages within the behavior setting of the campus such as the diversity that students expect at a PWI and what they actually experience (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Cuyjet & Meriwether, 2016), and giving the impression of false inclusion through deficit-driven initiatives (Harper, 2014) can all have deleterious effects and "lead to rapid dissatisfaction, lack of connection, disengagement, and disenrollment from the institution" (Cuyjet & Meriwether, 2016, p. 51). More prevalent in the research are the effects of the constructed environment on Black males at PWIs through experiences of "niggering" (Harper, 2009a) and other accounts of racially stressful interactions (Allen, 1992; Brooms, 2017; Davis, 1992; Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013). As with any stressors, these racial stressors have the potential to impede students' academic performance, engagement, and overall college experience (Chang, Eagan, Lin, & Hurtado, 2009; Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008; Harper; 2011; Steele, 1997; Smith, 2009; Tracey and Sedlacek, 1985).

Psychosocial Stressors at PWIs

Pierce and colleagues first defined racial microaggressions as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of blacks by offenders" (p. 65) and contended that racial microaggressions serve as the principal instrument for racist behaviors. Sue and Associates (2007) further identified racial

microaggressions as "verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 271) which have replaced more overt racist actions (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007). Sue et al. (2007) labeled three forms of microaggressions. Microassaults are more deliberate acts of racism performed in a more private space. Microinsults are more typically identified forms of racial microaggressions and are those actions that are demeaning to one's racial identity. Microinvalidations are also a more identifiable form of microaggression and are those actions that exclude, ignore, or dismiss the perspectives of People of Color. Common microinsults identified for Black students included the assumption of racial and intellectual inferiority, the assumption of criminality, and the assumption of a universal Black American experience (Sue et al., 2008).

Constant exposure to racial microaggressions, such as those aforementioned, can also cause students to be more sensitive to "stereotype threat"—the "sense of a threat that can occur when one knows that he can be treated negatively or judged according to a negative stereotype associated with one's group" (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008, p. 92). The sustained and continuous engagement in managing raced-gendered microaggressions and working to prove themselves can potentially induce in Black males' psychological stress and other symptoms of what Smith (2009) considered "racial battle fatigue". Smith (2009) identified racial battle fatigue as "the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost of fighting against racism" (p. 298) that Blacks, and other students of color, experience regularly within both educational and societal contexts.

Racial battle fatigue responses are physiological, psychological, and behavioral responses, and occur greatest in the face of mundane racial incidents and microaggressions, as well as in anticipation of a racial stress response. Racial battle fatigue can result in anger, anxiety, resentment, withdrawal, and disengagement and can impede academic achievement (Smith, 2009). This can especially be the case for students who do not have a strong racial identity and socialization (Smith, 2009). It can also be amplified when there are fewer Black males present on campus and have a greater opportunity for "onlyness" in campus spaces (Brooms, 2017; Harper et al., 2011; Littleton, 2002).

Harper and Colleagues (2011) introduced the term *onlyness* as "the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group" (p. 190). This term was introduced when describing Black male resident assistants at a PWI who served in their roles with not only few peers to relate to, but no same-race supervisors or mentors to consult with in their navigation of a predominantly White campus environment. The occurrence of onlyness is magnified at SPLACs due to a lack of critical mass of Black students, especially Black males on campus (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001).

Onlyness in the classroom meant that students were often called upon and looked to respond when conversations involved racial contexts (Littleton, 2002). This presented a deep sense of pressure in having to be the spokesperson for all People of Color and for Black males in particular (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Harper, 2011, 2012; Littleton, 2002). This also created a deep sense of pressure in the need to present a positive

counter-image of Black males, as these men were often one of few Black men, and Black people in general, that White students and professors interacted with (Harper, 2009a; 2012). Thus, Black males spent time educating their White campus community members on flawed perceptions of Black men that were presented to them such as being an athlete for non-athletic males or being asked about rap music by faculty and other students in class (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper, 2009a; Littleton, 2001; Smith et al., 2016;).

Onlyness not only meant having to be subject to racial stereotypes of Black males, but also meant not having anyone else to turn to for support (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Harper et al., 2011, Harper, 2012; Littleton, 2001, 2002). In some cases, Black males have reported being further marginalized by same-race peers if they were not athletes or considered "not Black enough" (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001; Woldoff et al., 2011). Black males, then, are not only managing racial stressors from the dominant campus community, but from others within their racial group—which further took away from the ability to effectively create a space of belonging.

Black Misandry and the Racialized Campus Ecology

For Black collegiate males, Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2007) identified Black misandry as the "exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors" (p. 563). Similar to what Harper (2013) described as *niggering*—which he defined as "the process by which stereotypes about Black boys and men shape people's low expectations for their success in schools and society" (p. 191), Black misandry produces microaggressions that serve to reproduce ideas of racial and gender inequality and justify

the subordination and oppression of Black males (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). Through these Black misandric stereotypes, Black males were more commonly rendered as anti-intellectuals (Cokley, 2003; Harper, 2009a; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007), criminals and predators (Brooms, 2017; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007); athletes (Littleton, 2002; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007) and ghetto experts (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). These media and socially driven stereotypes lend to what Brooms (2017) refers to as the "paradox of invisibility" (p. 109) in which Black men are rendered both invisible regarding their individual attributes and hyper-visible and hyper-policed because of these stereotypes (Brooms, 2017; Fleming, 1984; Harper, 2009a; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). This paradox leaves Black males toggling between the bipolar masculinity of the threatening "Bad Black Man" and the assimilationist "Good Black Man" created by and perpetuated by White racial primes (Cooper, 2006). Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2007) and Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) identified three key domains in which Black males commonly experienced racial microaggressions: (a) campus-academic, (b) campus-social, and (c) campus-public spaces.

In campus-academic spaces, Black male intelligence and belonging in academic spaces have been met with microinsults and questions of legitimacy (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) shared stories of Black males being selected last in peer academic groups due to anti-intellectual perceptions of their peers. When Black males did show their intellectual capabilities, they experienced a lack of acceptance of belief of their academic capabilities and reported being singled out—either in surprise of their success (Harper, 2009a; 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) or suspicion of

cheating (Smith et al., 2016). Smith and his colleagues (2016) recounted Terrence's story

of receiving a near perfect score on his midterm and, after being singled out and accused

of cheating, was asked to retake the exam. In addition to intellectual proof, Black males

also reported having to physically prove that they belong in academic spaces after being

racially profiled, or spatially profiled (Wilkins, 2007), by the campus community,

campus police, or local police because they "fit the description" of a perpetrator or

looked out of place (Parker et al., 2016; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith et al.,

2016; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). Black males in these cases have been asked to

produce identification proving that they belong on campus, and sometimes more than one

form of identification or corroboration of their stories of belonging (Smith, Allen, &

Danley, 2007; Smith et al., 2016).

In the campus-social environment, where students expect to socialize with peers

and relieve stress, Black males have reported being surveilled and criminalized (Brooms,

2017; Iverson & Jaggers, 2015; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007;

Smith et al., 2016; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Even restorative spaces on campus

such as Black fraternity spaces, parties, dorm rooms, or friendly football games have

been reported to be hyper-policed, leaving students with fewer spaces to unwind, build

community, and reinforce positive Black male images (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). In

Iverson and Jaggers (2015), Terrell told of his experience with a resident assistant (RA)

who entered Terrell's room, because Terrell's alarm was sounding, and found alcohol

that belonged to his roommate, a White male. After being called into a meeting with his

hall director, Terrell, who did not drink, was questioned about the alcohol, was given a

documented warning about the alarm, and his roommate was never contacted about the

alcohol found. Similarly, during a game of football with some friends outside of a residence hall, Kyle, in Smith, Danley, and Allen (2007) and Smith et al. (2016), recounted multiple police cars and additional bike officers who showed up to a call of disturbance—despite there being not any irregular disturbances—and made the group of Black males leave a space that was regularly occupied by students of other races and ethnicities who also played football and other sports. Even Black male resident assistants have reported being considered suspicious in campus spaces (Harper, 2011).

Campus-public spaces are the spaces within the local community surrounding the campus (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Black males recounting their experiences at PWIs in much of the research have given accounts of experiences off campus in which they were policed, feared, or made suspicious when simply walking to get food or patronizing local establishments (Smith et al., 2016). Even off-campus, Black males were asked what sport they played or were treated as perpetrators. In Smith et al.'s (2016) study, Ahmad recalled being surveilled and searched by a White campus police officer while buying snacks off campus because he fit the description of a reported Black male between "5'7" and 6'0" tall, "wearing blue jeans, gym shoes, and a dark coat" (p. 570). He also noted that two other Black men that he did not know had also just experienced the same circumstance by two other police officers—all while the actual perpetrator walked by. Relatedly, in Brooms' (2017) study, Sean asserted that even when suspicious criminal activity occurred off-campus, the generic description of Black males made even those Black males on-campus suspects.

Stereotype Management and Black Male Counternarratives

Despite the abundance of stories of Black male alienation and stress at PWIs, not all Black men are affected the same way by the racialized campus environment of PWIs. Focus only on the problematized experiences of Black males bounds the scope of their experiences to deficits and negative encounters (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2012). Researchers have contended that despite non-cognitive factors such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; 1981; Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Tracey & Sedlacek 985), higher levels of racial identity (Cokley & Chapman, 2008), an understanding of racism, and the ability to manage racism are more instrumental than cognitive factors for the academic performance and retention for minority students' academic performance and college persistence (Tracey & Sedlacek 1985). Tinto (1987), Davis (1994), and Fleming (1984) have also posited that for minority students at PWIs, integration into the social environment was more important than academic environment integration for student retention and success. Although many Black males in the research reported still experiencing Black misandric racial microaggressions, they adopted academic and social coping strategies which incorporated their racial and masculine identities as central elements in their counternarratives (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2012; Smith et al., 2016).

Although racialized campus ecologies may have an injurious effect on the academic and psycho-social development of some Black males, others embody what Moore, Madison-Colmore, and Smith (2003) called the *prove them wrong syndrome* in which African American males "assumed a more academic posture and a stronger sense of purpose, commitment, and confidence in their academic persistence and performance"

(p. 67; Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2012; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Smith et al., 2016). Harper (2009; 2012), for example, highlighted high-achieving Black males who addressed faculty and student Black misandric and microaggressive responses head on and as they occurred by questioning why, for instance, faculty members or peers were surprised at their intellectual contributions in academic spaces. Additionally, Black males in the research used their academic engagement and social engagement efforts to create positive images for themselves and for Black men in general (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2012). Black males reported being intentional in doing the things that people did not expect them to do— because of racial primes—such as connect with faculty, sit in the front of the class, and be involved on campus (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a). Khaseem, in Harper's (2009a) study reported countering Black male invisibility by making sure that people knew he was a high achieving, intelligent Black male by speaking publicly every opportunity he got as well as empowering other Black males to do the same.

Having a high racial identity and self-concept helped some Black males in the research to not only cope with the racialized campus ecology of PWIs, but helped some men to thrive, despite the toll of racial battle fatigue (Brooms, 2017; Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Harper, 2009a; 2012; Smith et al., 2016). Some Black males developed and demonstrated what Whiting (2006) termed a Black male scholar identity (Brooms, 2017; Parker et al., 2016), which included academic self-confidence, self-efficacy, future orientation, the willingness to make sacrifices, and internal locus of control (Whiting, 2006). A prime example is Terrance who, in Smith et al.'s (2016) study, when asked to retake a near-perfect scored midterm under the suspicion of cheating, retook his midterm with confidence and achieved a higher score. Black males such as those in studies by

Parker et al. (2016), Harper (2009; 2012), and Brooms (2017) illuminated that Black males are responsible for their own accountability as some discussed the challenges and rewards of navigating the campus racial climate and Black misandry with the greater goal of success in mind.

Summary

Black males' existence within the PWI campus ecology illuminates the subdominant and invisible positioning that Black males encounter and the psycho-social stress that they endure as being both Black and male. Their existence within the PWI campus ecology "reflects the racial microaggressions they encounter as they negotiate their identity in a world that marginalizes their existence and transforms them from a Black male to an object, from a student-scholar to a racial target, and from a potential protector to a potential predator" (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007, p. 573). Although Black males at PWIs typically entered with higher college preparation and had access to more family and campus resources, on average, due to unsupportive campus racial environments, they had to work harder to achieve the same results as their HBCU peers (Davis, 1994; Reeder & Schmitt, 2013). Despite their struggles with and within the PWI campus ecology, some Black males were intentional about countering White racial primes and Black misandric ideas about them and other Black males by using their academic engagement and social engagement efforts to create positive images.

Student Engagement

Main Conceptions of Student Engagement

The construct of student engagement has been empirically tied to a plethora of student success and development outcomes such as college adjustment (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003), critical thinking and intellectual skill development (Anaya, 1996, Baxter Magolda, 1992, Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2006), diversity competence (Hu & Kuh, 2003), psychosocial development and positive self-image (Bandura, Peluso, Ortman, & Millard, 2000; Pike, 2000), and persistence rates (Berger and Milem, 1999; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Tinto, 1987). In student engagement research, the definition of student engagement is unclear and debatable (Trowler, 2010) as the concept itself is identified by various names, theories, and other concepts. Astin (1985) simply summarized the idea, however, that "students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133). Four prevalent concepts associated with student engagement in higher education literature were identified for this study. Macfarlane and Tomlinson (2017) argued that "the role that students play as co-constructors of university quality enhancement also needs exploration and how such roles are potentially conditioned by the institutional context" (p. 1). The following concepts offer suggestions to this notion.

In the development of the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ), Pace (1985) proclaimed that "all learning and development require an investment of time and effort by the student" (p. 5). Whereas time is a dimension of frequency, effort is identified as a dimension of quality as some tasks may require more effort than others. Pace asserted that the greater the effort required of the activity, the greater the potential

may be for educative reward. The college experience consists of events and conditions that the college makes possible and which are intended to facilitate student learning and development in some respect. However, Pace noted, the onus may be incorrectly placed on the institution. Although the institution is accountable for the structural resources that are provided for student learning and development, students are ultimately responsible for the "amount, scope, and quality of effort they invest their own learning and development, and specifically in using the facilities and opportunities that are available in the college setting" (p. 6). Thus, Pace suggested that accountability for student success must consider both what the institution does and offers and what the students do with institutional resources.

Alexander Astin's (1985) theory of Student Involvement is among the most frequently cited work regarding student engagement. According to Astin, student involvement is defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 135). A *highly involved* student is characterized as one who is active in studying, campus activities, and interacting with faculty and other students. An *uninvolved* student is characterized as one who, on the contrary, neglects studying and abstains from social interactions and campus activities. Astin's involvement theory carries five postulates:

1. Involvement refers to an investment of physical and psychological energy in various "objects".

2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features.

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associates with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement.

5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 135-136)

Like Pace's (1985) theory of student effort, Astin's theory emphasizes the critical function of student behavior, more than how students think and feel about their experiences. Astin, like Pace, also placed the onus of engagement on the student while also noting the importance of how the institutional environment may promote student development and involvement.

Vincent Tinto (1987), another of the most cited scholars of student retention and engagement, linked active student engagement with successful student integration and retention through his theory of student departure. Tinto defined student involvement (or engagement) as the integration of students into the academic and social domains of the institution, driven by individual commitment in the form of (a) personal college and career goal commitment (goal commitment) and (b) the student's commitment to the institution (institutional commitment) (1987; 2000). The greater the alignment between a student's goals and academic and social environments of the college, the more likely a student is to be integrated and actively involved. This alignment also mirrors Strayhorn's (2012) contention of sense of belonging within the college environment, which refers to a student's perceived social support and feelings of connectedness with, acceptance by, and value to the campus community and other members of the campus community. Ultimately, according to Tinto's (1987) theory, a student's sense of belonging is the key

motivator for his institutional engagement-driven by the congruence of his individual commitment and the goals, practices, and policies of the institution. Student engagement according to Tinto, therefore, is a function of a student's emotional and cognitive processes.

Kuh (2016) defined student engagement as "the time and energy undergraduates put forth in educationally purposeful activities combined with the policies, programs, and practices that institutions employ to induce students to put forth such effort" (p. 49). He asserted that what students do in college is more important regarding their learning and development outcomes than who they are or where they attend college (Kuh, 2002) and that this representation of engagement is the single most predictor of students' learning and development. Kuh (2016) reiterated previously noted researchers' ideas that maximizing student engagement requires both student effort and institutional effort. To measure these efforts, Kuh and other associates, under the direction of Peter Ewell, developed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which is now utilized by many institutions across the country, which measures student engagement experiences with educationally purposeful activities, students' perceptions of their institutional efforts and institutional environment, and students' demographic data (Kuh, 2009). The results of the NSSE allows researchers to examine desired outcomes for various student and institutional types through process indicators for effective student satisfaction and persistence (Kuh, 2009).

Barriers to Engagement: Incongruence, Isolation, and Alienation

Marginality and Sense of Belonging

A student's sense of belonging is idealized as a mutually beneficial relationship of mattering between the student and the greater collective (Strayhorn, 2012). In exchange for membership in the college collective, individuals may receive the support and care of the group. Strayhorn (2012) postulated that a college students' sense of belonging is not only important for a student to feel connected to his or her college campus, it is a basic human need and motivation for everyone. Strayhorn (2008) contended that a sense of belonging consists of both cognitive and effective elements as a student responds emotionally (cognitive) or behaviorally (affective) according to the student's assessment of his, her, or their position in relation to the greater collegiate group. Thus, whether a student is marginalized or central to campus culture, practices, and policies on campus could determine how he may engage in the campus ecology (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1987). Students whose subgroup functions and beliefs are held closer to the central campus culture may feel a greater sense of belonging and may be greater engaged in the campus environment, whereas students whose cultural functions and beliefs are held at the periphery of the campus culture are at a greater risk for institutional departure (Tinto, 1987). Krause (2005), Mann (2001), and Tinto (1987) offered alternatives to student engagement that reflect barriers to the notation of positive campus engagement due to a lack of sense of belonging on campus.

Alternatives to Engagement

Krause (2005) argued that engagement for some students may be conflicting as the institutional culture may sometimes seem alienating and uninviting and justified inertia, apathy, disillusionment, or engagement in other pursuits as alternatives to engagement for these students due to an incongruence in individual and institutional interests. Krause noted that *inertia,* indicative of doing nothing, as opposed to disengagement, may suggest active detachment. Inert students may not see the need to engage outside of their familiar paths, may fail to participate in activities in and out of the classroom, and may fail to self-regulate or motivate themselves. Inertia and apathy, thus, are grouped together regarding students' lack of desire to engage in the campus environment. Krause offered the idea that for some students, the college environment may require requisite skills in learning and development that may not be in place, leaving the students' feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Other students may come to consider attending college as just one of many things to do in their day and may be otherwise occupied in other engagements and commitments such as off-campus employment. Therefore, Krause suggested that those in higher education should consider these other alternatives to positive engagement for some student populations.

Alienation

Mann (2001) offered conceptions of *alienation* regarding teaching, learning, student identity, and student engagement that may particularly applicable to Black males at PWIs. Identifying various perspectives from which alienation could be viewed, she argued for the consideration of reframing the way we view student classroom participation and learning. Mann first cited the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of

alienation as "the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved" (p. 8). Although these perspectives offered on alienation identify different facets of this isolation and how it may present itself, alienation in higher education could be summarized as the dissonance between one's socially constructed self and one's desire for authenticity and self-authorship due to the social construction of the academic domain by those in dominance and power. Ultimately, alienated students are:

> estranged from the language, culture and practices of the context in which they now [find] themselves, and is reduced, by their position in the discourse as first-year student, to a type rather than to an individual. One could argue that this has the potential to provoke the sense of estrangement and disorientation, of invisibility, voicelessness, and ineffectualness, that we can experience when in the position of outsiders in a foreign land. (p. 10-11)

First, alienation in higher education may result from students finding themselves in the social conditions of higher education in which there is greater focus on students' performativity within, and utility to, the institution rather than the "possibility of a meaningful personal purpose in engaging in higher education" (p. 9) and an intrinsic pursuit of knowledge, understanding or justice through education. Second, alienation may arise from pre-existing discourse which defines and positions the Black male as a student and the ways in which he is named and engaged. Thus, his identity as such is formed by his social discursive position and the social rules and primes associated with his raced-gendered identity. Black collegiate males [students] enrolling into an institution of higher

education, she furthered, enters into this discoursal world in which they are positioned according to the language of this world and according to more powerful others (e.g. faculty, more experienced or highly regarded students, staff, etc.) who may have greater facility within higher education discursive practices.

Further, Mann (2001) positioned that alienation results, in large part from positions of otherness and estrangement caused by the colonizing-like unequal power relations. Students are alienated by being othered, having imposed upon them the dominant perceptions and understanding of their space and being, and by losing their sense of self and agency and becoming a more "compliant self" (p. 13). As "outsiders, [Black male] students see what may seem ordered, united, and respectable as a mask" (p. 11). By engaging in this new space and accepting it as it is perceived by dominant social insiders of the space, *outsider* students may risk negating living their realities and, thus, may choose not to engage at all. These students are then confronted with questions of how to bridge their two worlds and manage their engagement in a space in which their realities are repressed. As the students' repressed realities are not validated in the discourse of their PWIs, they may be unaware of this repression. Their desires, being silently invalidated, are forced to be lived out in the margins, which may cause students to either withdraw their participation or conform to the requirements of the space. This invalidation and loss of agency makes it difficult for students to find a place to "be at home" and to be themselves within the campus ecological system, which may cause them to experience a diminished capacity to connect with their authentic voice and desires.

Mann (2001) posited that if one's self is contingent upon events and dependent upon others, "then being in a situation where one's self is not validated in good enough

relationships and contexts leads to a loss of a sense of self, and of agency and desire" (p. 12). Moreover, finding oneself in a position of otherness can create a tension in the management of day-to-day existence. The dissonance that may be created between building stable constructions of the world (e.g. what it takes to be a college student, a successful employee or citizen)—noted as *reality work*—and identifying who one is and their distinct ideas of who one wants to be in relation to this reality—noted as *identity work*— may move students to escape by engaging in surface approaches to learning and functioning to avoid asking questions of who they are and the significance of their being at the institution. Thus, alienation can also lead to self-deception and students being disciplined into docility.

Incongruence and Isolation

Tinto (1987) identified incongruence and isolation as the absence of integration into the institution, which could also pose as barriers to student engagement. *Incongruence* refers to the "lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution" (p. 53-54). Incongruence, Tinto postulated, may arise within the formal and/or informal academic domain as well as the social domain of the institution and more frequently arises from the day to day personal interactions that students have with the campus ecology. Although *isolation* may be associated with incongruence, it differs in that it arises from an "absence of sufficient interaction whereby integration may be achieved" (Tinto, 1987, p. 53). Incongruence may likely occur in for students with some cultural aspect that is dissimilar to that of the dominant culture of the institution. However, isolation can occur for students who are similar to the dominant culture of the institution but have been unable to interact purposefully with other

members of the campus community. Isolation, Tinto contended, may not be merely a circumstance of individual personality, but may also arise from students' previous social experiences as well as the interactional structure of the institution. Tinto further argued that students whose subcultures are further from the center of the dominant culture and structure of the institution are more likely to have a lower sense of belonging to the institution. Thus, to improve upon circumstances of isolation and incongruence, Tinto suggested that faculty and student contact may be more important earlier in a student's college life and that programs that may place certain student subcultures closer to the center of the institution may be of greater benefit to both the students and the institution.

Summary and other Notions of Student Engagement

In their iteration of student engagement regarding diverse student populations, Harper and Quaye (2009) maintained that although student involvement and student engagement are conceptually related, students can be involved without being engaged. For example, a student can be a member of a student organization without being engaged in organizational activities or a student may attend a class and take notes and not be engaged in classroom discussion. Trowler (2010) added that "acting without feeling engaged is just involvement or even compliance; feeling engaged without acting is dissociation" (p. 5). Trowler (2010) further conceptualized a continuum of engagement according to three dimensions of student engagement by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004).

Trowler's (2010) continuum, identified levels of engagement beyond the dichotomy of being engaged and being disengaged by providing the notion of being positively engaged, non-engaged, and negatively engaged. Per Trowler, a positively

engaged student in the organization would be a part of the planning process of events and would be what Astin (1985) might consider highly engaged. A student who is withdrawn or inert may be considered in Trowler's (2010) continuum as non-engaged. However, a student who is a part of a student organization but may work against the beliefs and practices of the organization due to personal beliefs or relationships may be negatively engaged. Examples of these levels of engagement, along with definitions of each dimension, are provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Examples of a Continuum of the Three Dimensions of Student Engagement

	Behavioral	Emotional	Cognitive
	Compliance with positive behavioral norms such as academic and social attendance and involvement.	Experience of affective reactions such as interest, boredom, appreciation, or a sense of belonging.	Investment in learning, preference for challenges, and self-regulation.
Positive Engagement	Attends and participates in academic and social activities with enthusiasm	Active interest and enjoyment	Meets or exceeds academic and social expectations.
Non-Engagement	Skips class without excuse, does not use campus resources, does not attend social spaces and activities	Boredom; lack of sense of belonging	Late, rushed, or missing assignments, little to no studying, late or absent from academic and social spaces and activities
Negative Engagement	Boycotts or disrupts academic or social activities.	Debate and rejection	Does assignments and engages in social activities according to personal beliefs and parameters.

Note. Adapted from Trowler's (2010) Continuum of the Three Dimensions of Student Engagement. The definitions in row1 are from School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence by J. A. Fredricks, P. C. Blumenfeld, & A. H. Paris, 2004, *Review of Educational Research, 74* (1), 62-63.

In all of the aforementioned definitions of student engagement, the ultimate idea has been that student engagement involves an investment by the students and by the institution. For the purposes of this study, student engagement has been defined as the time and effort students invest behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally in purposeful academically and socially developmental experiences. Though this definition may seem to place the onus on the student, the structural resources and practices of the institution to develop student social and academic engagement should not be dismissed as an equally important aspect of student engagement.

Black Male Engagement at PWIs

Although Fleming's (1984) study argued that Black males at PWIs showed inertia in academic and social engagement attitudes and energies, research that followed argued that Black male engagement actually developed as they neared their senior years. Though not specific to Black males, Flowers (2007) found that, compared to African American freshmen, African American college seniors reported higher levels of academically engaging experiences—such as the use of the library, interacting with faculty, and effective course learning—and higher levels of social engagement—such as participating in clubs and organizations. Brooms (2017) also reported multiple stories of Black males who learned the importance of their engagement on campus to their success as college students and as Black male. Their experiences with engagement early on have reportedly had effects on their ideas of, and engagement with, the ecology of the campus in their later college years. Black males in the research have reported the reciprocal relationships of engagement and the ecology of the campus (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2012; Parker et al., 2016; Strayhorn, 2010; 2013) as well as the interrelatedness of academic

and social engagement (Brooms, 2017; 2018a; Harper, 2012). In addition to the benefits of, and barriers to, engagement, they have also identified the importance of alternatives to engagement in various aspects of the campus ecology as valid options for engagement and self-care (Brooms, 2017; Hotchkins, 2017; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Wood, 2014). Within all of the conversations with Black males are the influence of faculty and peer relationships and their influence on Black male engagement and success (Brooms, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; Harper, 2009a; 2009b; 2012; Wood, 2014).

Benefits of Engagement for Black Males

Harper (2012) identified seven benefits of active engagement for African American males, which included (a) aiding a strong identity development, which aids in personal activism and advocacy on predominantly White campuses, (b) overcoming previous social and educational disadvantages, (c) acquiring the social capital and resources which help them to navigate social and academic success, (d) crafting productive responses to racist stereotypes, and (e) negotiating peer support for achievement. Additionally, Harper and Quaye (2007) noted that cross-cultural interactions not only aided Black males in learning about and appreciating people of other identities but heightened the Black males' awareness of the oppressive experiences of other marginalized groups on campus. Though not all geared specifically toward Black males, Beatty, Bush, Erxleben, Ferguson, Harrell, and Sahachartsiri (2010) argued that while unsupportive environments in campus organizations made Black students feel unheard and unsupported, supportive environments in campus organizations helped students integrate better into the campus ecology, aided them in development of sense of belonging, and motivated them to take on larger leadership roles on campus.

Barriers to Engagement

As previously noted, a students' marginality or centrality in relation to the campus culture, practices, and policies plays a role in how they may engage in the campus ecology (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1987). Per Mann's (2001) assertion regarding alienation, Black male alienation can arise from the pre-existing discourse of the PWI and the White racial primes that exist within it that may position the way in which Black male students are labeled and engaged on campus. It can also arise from a loss of sense of self, agency, and desire (Mann, 2001) that has been reported to result from Black misandry, stereotype threat, and niggering racial microaggressions (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; Smith et al., 2016; Steele, 1997). Black males have reported being alienated from positive relationships with campus faculty, staff, and students as well as the ways in which this alienation may cause mistrust and other negative feelings leading to academic and social negative engagement or disengagement (Brooms, 2017; Parker et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Wood, 2014). For example, after seeking guidance from a White faculty member regarding his interest in astronomy and being told that it may be too difficult for him, Deondre, in Brooms' (2017) study lost his desire to further engage with faculty. John, in Wood's (2014) study also lost his desire to engage in the classroom after receiving negative reactions from faculty and students. Additionally, John, in Ariza and Berkey's (2009) study, noted that Black students ate together in the cafeteria so as not to feel marginalized and isolated on campus. Strayhorn (2012) asserted that the negative consequences caused by the disruption to a students' sense of belonging may necessitate re-engaging them in activities and interactions that foster belongingness in order to regain a sense of inclusion.

Why Black Males Get Involved

Illustrated within the research is that as individuals, Black males not only engaged with the campus environment different than other student groups, but have different reasons for engaging in the ways that they do (e.g. Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Though, the most prevailing reasons that Black males have reported being engaged on campus have been for racial uplift (Guiffrida, 2004; Harper, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2007), exposure to other ideas and identities (Harper & Quaye, 2007); and networking (Harper, 2009a; 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Supported in the research is Harper's (2009a) assertion that the environmental press of the institution could influence Black male students' perceptions of involvement when other Black males are seen being involved. While some Black males reported intentions to get involved once they attended college (Brooms, 2017), some reported that seeing other Black males on campus involved with aims of being successful encouraged them to consider getting, and staying, involved on campus (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a). Some Black males also reported that faculty and administrative nominations for various opportunities that the students were unaware of were also encouraging to get involved in various activities and initiatives that students' might not have considered (Barker & Avery, 2012).

Modes of Engagement for Black Males

Race-Based Organizations

Despite the type or purpose of the organization, whether an honors group, an organization related to one's major, or a governing organization, Guiffrida (2003; 2004) argued that African American student organizations all had similar purposes in providing

students with counter-spaces in which they can commune with others like them, learn from others like them, and give back to their communities (Harper, 2009a; Harper & Quaye, 2007) which facilitated their social integration into their PWIs (Guiffrida, 2003). Participation in these organizations furthered the cultural connection for Black students from predominantly White communities (Guiffrida, 2003; Jackson & Hui, 2017). Black student organizations have also been argued to provide restorative spaces for Black students as well as offer opportunities to advocate for African American concerns on campus and in society (Guiffrida, 2003; 2004; Harper, 2009a; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Alric, in Harper's and Quaye's (2007) study, reported that although he saw the value in engaging in mainstream campus organizations, he believed that he could have a greater impact of students of color through his participation in organizations like the Black Student Alliance and through Black caucuses. Khaseem in Harper's (2009a) study reported becoming involved in the Black Student Union, campus chapter of NAACP, and other activist groups on campus in order to disrupt stereotypical views Whites held about Black men. These organizations were viewed by Black students as a means for bringing them all together and encouraging empowering cultural connections (Guiffrida, 2003, 2004; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Littleton, 2002).

Harper (2012) asserted that having meaningful interactions with same-race peers improved students' responses to stereotypes and onlyness. For Black males, participating in organizations specific to their race and gender identity, also gave them opportunities to develop deeper relationships with other Black males and to find brotherly emotional and social support (Jackson & Hui, 2017). Sutton and Terrell (1997) also reported that minority-focused student groups provided a less intimidating environment for African

American males to develop leadership skills and serve as a catalyst for integrating them into campus-wide organizations at a PWI. Two particular venues for Black males that are [prevalent] in the research are Black fraternities and Black male initiatives. These venues, and other Black student organizations, allow Black males to witness like-minded Black males in leadership and development positions, which have encouraged them to participate in these organizations (Brooms, 2017; 2018a; Harper, 2009a).

Greek Life

Alpha Phi Alpha was the first Black Greek letter organization, founded on the principles of manly deeds, scholarship, and love for all mankind (Ross, 2000). Established in 1901 by six men at Cornell University, the group began as a study and support group for Black students on campus at a time when Black students were excluded from the secret societies and venues that provided academic and social support for White students (Ross, 2000). The fraternity was formed from conversations of how to make the study and support group more purposeful and permanent (Ross, 2000). Despite the negative experiences that some Black males may have with physical and psychological hazing (Kimbrough, 2005), Black males have reported Black Greek organizations as meaningful spaces of identity development and collective responsibility (Dancy & Hotchkins, 2015; Harper, 2009a).

Black males have reported that participation in Black fraternities have served as a disruption to Black misandric and racist narratives of Black men by providing them with examples of Black men who they perceived to be doing great things. For example, Eric, in Dancy and Hotchkins' (2015) study noted that being in his fraternity motivated him to aspire to greatness because he was surrounded by men in his fraternity who held what he

saw as respectable careers. Black males in the research also recounted the collective responsibility of their brotherhoods and their individual contributions (Dancy & Hotchkins, 2015; Harper, 2009a). Similarly, Edward in Dancy's and Hotchkins' (2015) study noted that that he learned that his individual representation made the organization what it was. Further, Michael in Harper's (2009a) study noted that his fraternity ensured that individual members were performing well academically so that the group could maintain their high academic profile. The overarching narrative that Black males provided was that their participation in their fraternities maintained the aim of the original founders of Alpha Phi Alpha (Ross, 2000), which was to disrupt the status quo of the support and development provided to Black males at PWIs by aiding and encouraging academic achievement and supporting the development of Black manhood (Dancy & Hotchkins, 2015; Harper, 2009a).

Black Male Initiatives

Black male initiatives (BMIs) have been institutionally developed out of a need to increase Black and improve Black male retention, persistence, and graduation (Brooms 2017; 2018b). These initiatives provide academic and social development by serving as a space for peer connections and mentorship for Black males (Brooms, 2017, 2018b). These efforts may be established as various models such as student-run organizations such as the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) (http://saabnational.org/about), campus-run initiatives such as the Black Male Initiative at North Carolina State University (https://villages.dasa.ncsu.edu/village-options/black-male-initiative/), committed institutional spaces such as the Bell National Resource Center at the Ohio State University (https://odi.osu.edu/bell-national-resource-

center/about.html), and as system-based models such as the African American Male Initiative of the University of Georgia (University System of Georgia African American Male Initiative, 2012).

Brooms (2018a) and Brooms, Goodman, and Clark (2015) identified that Black males reported that engaging in BMIs at their respective campuses heightened their sense of self; increased their sense of identity and belonging; motivated them to succeed academically; and allowed them to gain access to campus and community resources, like-minded peers, campus faculty and administration, and other beneficial people. For some Black males, BMIs offered opportunities for engagement with like peers at times when the students' may have been otherwise disengaged, or inert, socially on campus. For instance, Kory, in Brooms' (2017) study noted that without participation in Mighty Men, he would have been in his room wasting time. However, his participation in his BMI helped him to understand the importance of being engaged in college in order to prepare for life after college (Brooms, 2017).

Student Governing Organizations

Mainstream campus organizations, such as the Board of Trustees and Student Government serve to set policies and practices for their institutions. Black males who reported their leadership experiences in these organizations reported having joined these organizations in an effort to provide Black student voice in these spaces where they may typically be underrepresented (Harper & Quaye, 2007) and to bridge important campus resources with the need for resources for African American students on campus. Further, they used these organizations to advocate for Black student concerns and ensure that positive Black ideas were included in policy and practice conversations (Harper &

Quaye, 2007) even if their part in these conversations were compulsory as a result of tokenism. Although Cullen, for instance, in Harper's and Quaye's (2007) study, was forced to take on a similar, policy-related role as being one of very few Black males on campus, he found value in his assignment as the ambassador for Black student voice. As a result of these efforts, Black males in these roles gained the attention and support of key campus administration as well as brought Black speakers and entertainers to campus where there had been none in the past (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Other Campus Organizations

Outside of student governing organizations and predominantly Black organizations, Black males reported joining predominantly White and other student organizations outside of their identities for various reasons. These reasons include improving Black male and Black student resources, representation, and stereotypes (Harper, 2009a; Harper & Quaye, 2007) and to learn more about working with people of other identities-especially Whites (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). At schools where there were smaller populations of Black males, some students did not find many other options for engagement (Littleton, 2002). Within these organizations they still risked experiencing Black misandric microaggressions (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Experiencing these racialized interactions, Black males reported not feeling supported by their peers or their institutions (Beatty et al., 2010; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Parker et al., 2016) which had the potential to drive Black males to alternative forms of engagement (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). However, some Black males understood that to be successful, they needed to forge relationships with people from different backgrounds (Beatty et al., 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2007). As a result of forging these relationships,

they learned to work with and appreciate the differences that various identities bring to various settings (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Cross-cultural interactions prepared students for interactions with diverse others in the real world (Harper & Quaye, 2007) and particularly aided them in "dealing with" Whites (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

Black Male Scholar Identity and Academic Engagement

Having explored data from the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CESQ), Cuyjet (1997) discovered that Black males, compared to Black females, indicated that they less often performed academically engaging activities such as taking detailed notes in class, spending extensive time on writing assignments, or seeking help with their academics. While this may provide some explanation to overall Black male achievement concerns, only focusing on this data further marginalizes Black males and perpetuates Black misandry (Harper, 2009a; 2010). Although Black males throughout much of the research identified challenges of Black misandry, alienation, and isolation, some of the Black males have expressed strategies of achievement and the importance of academic engagement. Black males such as Bruce and Kory in Broom's (2017) study chose to focus on their academic engagement and secure themselves as scholars first before their engagement in other avenues on campus.

Black males in much of the research who reported higher levels of academic engagement embodied scholarly behaviors similar to the Scholarly Identity in Black Males model offered by Whiting (2006). Whiting (2006) argued that Black males who have a positive scholarly identity view themselves as competent, capable, and intelligent academics and that they embody an integration of nine characteristics:

- self-efficacy,

- future-orientation,

- willing to make sacrifices,

- internal locus of control,

- self-awareness,

- need for achievement greater than the need for affiliation,

- academic self-confidence,

- racial identity, and

- masculinity.

Thus, Black males with a positive scholarly identity choose to reject racist, gendered, and Black misandric stereotypes out of a high self-concept and an understanding that they are responsible for their own success. They are also not as concerned with being popular and social for popularity-sake and are more concerned with high achievement. Finally, Black males with a positive scholarly identity also have a positive racial and gender identity, have a high self-awareness, set goals and actions for their futures, and are willing to make sacrifices to reach them.

In research highlighting the stories of academically engaged Black males, many of the Black males reported strategies that demonstrated their scholarly identities. Black males reported confronting racial stereotypes presented in class by asking faculty members and classmates to confront their Black misandric assumptions and biases (Harper, 2009a; 2012). Often, also, in the research regarding Black male resilience and academic achievement were the reports of showing the White campus community positive images of Black achieving males, which also included being mindful of the way

that they engaged in various spaces on campus (Brooms, 2017; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2009a; Smith et al., 2016). Sean and Theodore in Broom's (2017) study, for example, mentioned sitting in the front of the class to counter anti-intellectual images of Black men. Similarly, in Harper's (2009a) study, Khaseem mentioned making sure that everyone knew him as being a High achieving Black male and took on opportunities to not only make this statement for himself, but to bring others into the action of taking those same steps. In Fries-Britt and Griffin's (2007) study, Nathan stated the importance of managing his actions and emotions to show his White campus community positive images as a Black male honor student. Like them, other Black males noted not only the need to present positive images for themselves as Black men, but for other Black males and for Black people as a whole (Brooms, 2017; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2009a; Harris III, Palmer, & Struve, 2011; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Smith et al., 2016).

The Reciprocal Relationship of Academic and Social Engagement for Black Males

Throughout the research were accounts of the reciprocal relationship between academic and extracurricular engagement in which Black males explained the effect that their extracurricular engagement had on their academic engagement and vice versa (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2012). Many of the Black males in Harper's (2012) national study noted that their extracurricular engagement benefited their academic engagement and achievement because "they had less time to waste, interacted frequently with academic others, and had reputations to uphold" (p. 12). Harper (2012) also noted that the high-achieving Black male students in his study worked hard to impress those faculty members who were advisors of the Black males' respective organizations when they took their classes and that their interactions outside of class with these faculty also

influenced more positive in-class interactions. Further, the males in Harper's (2012) study, and Black males in other research (see Brooms et al., 2015; Harper, 2009a; Jackson & Hill, 2017), reported that their interactions with peers through their extracurricular engagement introduced them to networks of same-race and other peers that aided them in their study efforts. Thus, well-placed extracurricular involvement that increased the social and cultural capital of Black males also benefited the academic achievement of the African American males (Strayhorn, 2010).

Some Black males reported leveraging their extracurricular engagement efforts to improve the academic engagement of other Black males and Black students on campus (Harper, 2009a; Harper & Quaye, 2007). For example, in an effort to improve Black student success and retention on campus, two Black males in Harper's and Quaye's (2007) study started the 4.0 club in which they scheduled study tables in the library and provided recognition and incentives for Black students achieving a 4.0 grade point average at the end of each semester. Michael in Harper's (2009a) study noted that the Black males in his fraternity required their members to maintain high GPAs in order uphold the group's high academic profile, which encouraged the men to strive high academically. Seeing other Black males who were being successful on campus was reported to have been a motivator for other Black males to succeed academically and in leadership positions (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2009a; 2009b).

Alternatives to Engagement for Black Males

Krause (2005) and Trowler (2010) noted that rather than engaging in various aspects of the campus ecology, some students may otherwise engage—to include inertia, or non-engagement, and negative engagement—in response to alienation and isolation on

campus. In the research, some Black males created their counternarratives by disengaging from those Black misandric experiences and parts of the campus ecological system as part of their coping and self-preservation strategies (Brooms, 2017; Hotchkins, 2017; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Wood, 2014). Although apprehension to academic engagement has the potential to negatively affect student grades (Wood, 2014), some Black males reported non-engagement, particularly socially, as an effort to thwart the perpetuation of racist and Black misandric stereotype threat. For example, Calvin in Wood's (2014) study discussed not engaging in class unless asked to in an effort to not appear dumb. In Broom's (2017) study, Deondre and Charles reported "I'll just do me" (p. 121-123) attitudes in response to negative in-class and on-campus experiences. This protective disengagement may have appeared to be dismissive, but actually served to provide the men with resilience against the racist, Black misandric, and niggered experiences they had encountered. Finally, in Hotchkins and Dancy's (2015) study, Oscar, a Black male leader of a predominantly White student organization, employed what Hotchkins and Dancy's (2015) study called *reactive invisibility* by rescheduling meetings and not attending socials in order to purposefully avoid discussing issues of race or of him as a Black male. According to Trowler (2010), these are efforts of negative engagement; however, Oscar's (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015) motives were one of preservation and protection of himself by taking a step back from his engagement responsibilities at times.

It is important to note that disengagement from one element of the campus ecology does not predicate disengagement from all elements of the campus ecology. For example, Charles and Deondre (Brooms, 2017) were socially involved on campus.

Specifically, Deondre, after being denigrated by a faculty member from whom he sought academic council regarding an astronomy program, disengaged from aspects of faculty interaction that engendered Black misandric racial microaggressions and further deprecation. Outside of this element, Deondre maintained a high grade point average, was involved in multiple student organizations, held a presidentship in the Black Student Union, and engaged in numerous hours of community service. Black males in Wood's (2014) study utilized academic support services and peer groups to aid them in their success in ways that they were unable to engage in their classrooms. Thus, for some Black males, these engagement alternatives served as forms of restoration from racial battle fatigue and stereotype threat that allowed them to thrive in other places (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

Summary. Cuyjet and Meriwether (2016) argued that false inclusion in the campus ecology could lead to the dissatisfaction with, and disengagement from, the institution. Black males reported being alienated from positive relationships with members of the campus community, which lead to mistrust, negative sentiments, and alternative forms of engagement such as inertia and disengagement from various aspects of the campus community. Though, inertia or disengagement from one aspect of the campus ecology did not predicate the same behavior within another aspect of the campus ecology. Active engagement for Black males at PWIs benefited them in coping with and overcoming these circumstances, as well as provided them with support from other Black males and various faculty and campus administration toward academic and social success.

Harper (2009b) asserted that environmental presses that demonstrated a culture of Black male engagement could further influence Black males' perceptions of involvement. Many Black males in the researcher reported that seeing other successful men of color academically and socially engaged encouraged them to also be successfully academically and socially engaged. Black males also reported that the support of faculty and administrative propelled them academically and socially in ways that they may not have previously considered (Ariza & Berkey, 2009). Further, for some Black males' social engagement and academic engagement held a reciprocal relationship. Black males did not only engage for personal uplift, but also engaged for racial uplift.

Being Black on Liberal Arts Campuses

Although liberal arts colleges—as an institution type—vary in elements such as size, selectivity, academic programming, affluence, and affiliation (Astin, 1999), Gudeman (2001) argued that a "central mission of traditional American liberal arts colleges is to prepare students for civic responsibility, teaching them to test their beliefs against the perspectives of others in vigorous debate" (p. 251). Additionally, King, Kendall Brown, Lindsay, and VanHecke (2007) suggested that the overarching goal of a liberal arts education is one that "provides students with the necessary skills to construct lives of substance and achievement, helping them to become wise citizens" (p. 2). Astin (1999) argued that, despite institutional affiliation, what sets private liberal arts colleges apart from other institutions in the positive effects that they have on students' bachelor's degree completion, quality of instruction, and satisfaction with their faculty are attributed to their small size, residential program, strong faculty commitment to student development, student-administrative trust, and generous expenditures on student services.

Liberal arts researchers have argued that liberal arts colleges offer their students a distinctly exceptional type of educational experience that engages students in greater practices of teaching and development compared to other institutional types (Pascarella et al., 2004, Seifert et al., 2010, Pascarella et al., 2013; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). Although the academic benefits of liberal arts colleges may be extended to African American students (Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella, 2006), researchers have argued that liberal arts college campus ecology is not experienced the same for African American students (Hu & Kuh, 2006), especially Black males (Allen, 2018; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010).

Benefits of Liberal Arts Colleges

Liberal arts researchers have argued that liberal arts colleges offer students greater engagement with educationally purposeful practices in education, despite potentially confounding influences such as precollege characteristics and college preparation. For example, Pascarella, Cruce, Wolniak, and Blaich (2004) reported that liberal arts colleges fostered a broad range of good practices in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), including high quality teaching practices, student interactions, and academic challenge and high expectations (Pascarella, et al., 2013; Seifert et al., 2010). Kuh (2003) reported that liberal arts colleges engaged students more frequently in activities that integrated curricular and co-curricular experiences (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2003). Liberal arts colleges were also reported to provide greater support for students' academic and social needs (Kuh, 2003; Umbach & Kuh, 2006) and were more likely to engage their students in diversity-related interactions (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). Though, the support and engagement in diverse interactions were more pronounced for White students on campus (Hu & Kuh, 2003).

For Black students, liberal arts colleges were reported to provide the same exceptional academic benefits as those reported for all students at these institutions when compared to research universities and regional institutions—experiences that were argued as comparable to that provided by HBCUs (Seifert et al., 2006). Littleton (2001) found that students in his study benefited from the small size of the liberal arts colleges they attended as it offered fewer distractions, thereby increasing the opportunities for focus and attention and lending to attaining good grades. Black students at liberal arts colleges also reported that the faculty at their institutions were caring and approachable (Littleton, 2001). Fleming (1984) discovered that Black males at County College reported a more academically and developmentally supportive environment, similar to that of the HBCUs in her study. Despite these benefits, however, Black students at SPLACs reported not finding the campus environments of these institutions as supportive of their needs as reported by other students (Allen, 2018; Fleming, 1984; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010).

Black Student Experiences at Liberal Arts Colleges

Black students who attended SPLACs reported various reasons for attending their institutions, including generous financial aid packages and parental desires for students to be better prepared for life in a diverse society (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001). However, some students reported that what was conveyed to them about their colleges' diversity during the recruitment process was contradicted once they arrived on campus (Ariza & Berkey, 2009). Stewart (2008) purported that Black students' identities within the campus racial climate were named at the checking of the race box during the application process (Steward, 2008). Although some students reported the desire to be in

the racial minority as a result of having always been around Black people, other students reported feeling like they were temporary residents in someone else's territory and faced identity conflict (Littleton, 2001).

Black students at SPLACs reported some of the same social struggles as their Black counterparts at other PWIs (Allen, 2018; Fleming, 1984; Littleton, 2001), particularly difficulties adjusting to their campus environments due to a lack of critical mass of other Black students—especially those who were not athletes—and of Black faculty and staff. Additionally, the limitations of being located in a small, rural, predominantly White towns created complicated Black student adjustment (Stewart, 2008; Woldoff et al., 2011). However, students who had some meaningful interactions with Whites in some way prior to their matriculation into their institutions were reported to have an easier time adjusting socially and academically to their SPLAC campus ecology (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Woldoff et al., 2011). Furthering the complexity of adjustment for some Black students at SPLACs were their conflicts with their same-race peers. Reports of gender-related discord between Black men and women, social division between athletes and non-athletes, and sentiments of Black students who were "acting White" or not "Black enough" by their peers further minoritized Black students at SPLACs. Rather than receiving the enriching experience they had been promised, some students found their experience to be more like a "bootcamp for life" (Ariza & Berkey, 2009, p. 49).

Black Male Experiences at Liberal Arts Colleges

The research on Black males at liberal arts colleges offers a much more variable picture of their experiences in comparison to their Black male counterparts at other institutions, as well as Black women and other students at liberal arts colleges. Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) sought to identify the engagement of Black males with faculty and peers in the context of good practices in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Their findings were counter to that of Seifert and Associates (2006) in that Black males attending liberal arts did not fully experience the distinct advantages that liberal arts colleges have been reported to offer for Black students overall (Seifert et al., 2006) and for other students (Pascarella et al., 2004). Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) suggested that for Black males at liberal arts colleges, engagement in peer cooperation was significantly lower than that of Black males attending master's institutions. Fleming (1984) found that Black males at the small PWI in her study were more likely than their peers at other PWIs to experience greater academic and extracurricular development, their experiences were still problematic.

Allen (2018) identified the ways in which Black males experienced and navigated a racially hostile environment at liberal arts university. Black males in his study reported various Black misandric experiences of over policing, invisibility, and anti-intellectualist responses to their presence on campus. For instance, Jay Blaze described being followed by police on campus numerous times while walking around campus and being made to show identification to prove that he was a student and that he worked at the information desk. Black males in Allen's study reported having to constantly be aware of what they were doing and wearing in light of police presence and the presence of the White campus

community. Some Black males chose to *code switch*—or change their vernacular—and reposition themselves more toward images of the Cooper's (2006) *good Black male* (Allen, 2018) in order to defy Black misandric images and reduce racial hostility. Some Black males, like Reg in Allen's (2018) study, however, chose to be their true selves and not assuage White racial primes.

Black Student Engagement at Liberal Arts Colleges

Liberal arts colleges have been reported to provide students with exceptional opportunities for academic and social engagement as well as opportunities to integrate the two (Kuh, 2003). Watson and Kuh (1996) reported that Black students at liberal arts colleges devoted more time to academic engagement. Littleton (2002) noted that Black students at the SPLACs in his study noted that faculty relationships was the most significant factor in their persistence, and academic clubs and organizations were the third most popular engagement choices for Black students.

Involvement in campus activities was the second most noted persistence factor for students in Littleton (2002) and was a more significant factor of persistence for Black men than women. Littleton (2002) purported, however, that athletic involvement could have influenced this data as nearly half of the participants—mostly males—were involved in intercollegiate athletics which he found to typically be the case for the majority of Black males on their respective SPLAC campuses. Outside of athletics, social organizations were reported the most popular engagement choice of Black students in Littleton (2002). Some students, like William, Chris, and Warren, believed that being involved on campus helped them to become more well-rounded and participate in opportunities to give back to the community, to their culture, and even abroad (Littleton,

2002). On the contrary, some students became involved in activities on campus in an attempt to simply pass the time while in college (Littleton, 2002).

Specific to Black students at SPLACs, however, was the absence of substantial cultural organizations geared toward Blacks (Littleton, 2002). One of the four colleges in Littleton (2002) did not have an African American social organization. There was also a lack of Black Greek organizations, leaving many students feeling more isolated and without effective opportunities for gender-related bonding. One key finding in the research was that Black students reported, and were reported by administration, to be less inclined to participate in student governing campus organizations such as the Campus Activities Board (CAB) or the Student Government Association (SGA) but believed that there should be some Black representation. Student governing organizations—like many other organizations on campus—were considered to be more geared toward White student interests (Littleton, 2002). Ariza and Berkey (2009) reported, though, that Black students at liberal arts colleges who had significant interactions with Whites prior to enrollment at their institutions were reported to be more involved in campus organizations and activities that were considered non-traditional for Black students such as predominantly White Greek organizations, study abroad, and SGA and experienced less stress in their academic and social engagement.

Summary

W.E.B. Dubois (1903) and Franz Fanon (1967) each argued the existence of the two worlds that exist for Black males—one Black, and one White—and the double consciousness that Black males must possess in White spaces. Black males in the PWI must possess this double consciousness. Through this double consciousness, Black males

experience a "paradox of invisibility" (Brooms, 2017, p. 109) and are simultaneously invisible as their authentic selves and hyper-visible and hyper-policed within the PWI campus ecology. Black males must also navigate the appearance of the dichotomized "Good Black man" and "Bad Black Man" (Cooper, 2006). For Black males at PWIs, White racial primes and Black misandry and general racial microaggressions are ever-present. Constant exposure to socio-psychological stressors presented challenges to Black males on these campuses-especially in smaller and more rural campus environments where Black males were the minority within the minority and where onlyness enhanced their paradoxical invisibility.

Although Black males largely experience alienation at PWIs, engagement for Black males can not only help them to counter the effects of unsupportive campus ecologies but can help them to work toward racial uplift and uplift of other marginalized groups. Social engagement on campus for Black males was reported to offer them spaces and connections on campus that can counter the stresses of attending a PWI (Brooms, 2017; 2019; Harper, 2009a) as well as give back to the Black community and other marginalized communities (Ariza & Berkey, 2009). Academic engagement was key for Black males, especially positive connections with faculty (Harper, 2009a) but can sometimes be stifled by For Black males due to Black misandric and microaggressive academic environments (Brooms, 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Academic and social engagement played a key reciprocal role in Black male success at PWIs. Black males find various ways to engage socially on campus that provide them with counterspaces for networking with other Black males and other Black students as well as with other successful Black males. Further, Black males have reported that faculty and

administrative mentorship, no matter the race, has been beneficial for their leadership and academic development.

At SPLACs, Black males were reported to have experienced greater academic gains due to the small and personal nature of the institution. However, these institutions were not without their White Institutional Presence and the psycho-social stressors that Black males experienced at PWIs. Black males at SPLACs also reported being marginalized from their same race peers who denunciated them for not being Black enough-especially when they demonstrated characteristics that are not associated with Black male behaviors. Thus, racial primes by their peers were also a factor for Black males at these institutions.

At SPLACs, engagement in raced and raced-gendered was reported to not be as readily accessible for Black males (Littleton, 2002) due to a lack of critical mass of Black students. Thus, at times, Black males who wanted to be engaged were relegated to White student organizations. However, some students noted the decision not to be engaged in these organizations and other campus events as they did not appeal to the needs and desires of Black males and Black students. This included the non-engagement in campus governing organizations. In the classroom, Black males reported feeling alienated due to onlyness and sometimes disengaging, or being inert to, classroom discussions. The research on Black males at SPLACs highlighted that the effects that Black males reap from being engaged at PWIs may not always be extended to Black males at SPLACs due to the low numbers of Black students, faculty, and staff at these institutions.

Although pre-college characteristics of students have been found to be an important predictor of student engagement and success (Davis, 1994; Gonyea & Kinzie,

2015), for Black males, the research suggests that their engagement and success on campus has may be determined ecologically. Where Black males can find supportive campus environments is where they have reported thriving and engaging the most. Some Black males, however, persisted academically and socially despite the Black misandric stressors. Academic and social engagement afforded Black males opportunities for personal growth as well as racial uplift and ways to navigate the racialized campus ecology. However, the idea of engagement for Black males should be conceptualized beyond the dichotomy of engagement and disengagement and should consider how the campus ecology contributes to Black male alienation how this alienation may drive Black males toward alternative forms of engagement in the campus ecology.

CHAPTER III

Method

Patel (2014) declared that "our social locations and histories have an impact on not just what we say but how we say it, and what meanings are made of our utterances" (p. 372). As such, this study was conducted as a critical race case study to draw on the stories and voices of Black collegiate males at SPLACs to gain a deeper understanding into how various aspects of the campus ecology influence their engagement decisions. Both critical race methodology (CRM) and the use of case study as a research strategy intersect to allow for rich stories that illuminate the data collected through semi-structured interviews. Conducting a multimethod analysis based on Spradley's (1979) ethnographic analysis methods further facilitated examination of how Black males make meaning of their experiences and how they situate their stories through counterstorytelling by (a) examining individual ideas about Black male experiences, (b) identifying the relationships between those ideas and other terms and concepts, and (c) bridging those individual relationships to the whole experience of Black males within the campus ecology of SPLACs and how they drive Black males' engagement decisions.

As a critical qualitative researcher, the goal was not simply to tell a story of the deficits Black males experience in higher education, but to address how the power dynamics of their institutions serve to influence their collegiate engagement (Merriam, 2009). In the spirit of critical qualitative research, I aimed to bring to light the perspectives of these students regarding the campus ecology in a way that will lead to advocacy and activism (White, 2015) toward the creation of authentic and transformative spaces, practices, and policies by SPLACs for Black males (Patel, 2014). Using a critical

race approach of inquiry and analysis, I intend to position the Black males in this study as co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge and to illuminate voices that are typically oppressed and marginalized (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002)— asking the fundamental questions of who, or what, is legitimated and who or what is disqualified in the campus ecology (Cannella & Lincoln, 2009).

In addition to my research methodology, this chapter will further outline the ways in which this CRM case study was conducted. First, I have reiterated the research questions to lay the foundation for this study. Additionally, this chapter will detail the participant and site selection, data collection sources and methods, and data analysis methods used in this study. The chapter also offers my positionality as a researcher as well as my methods for ensuring the trustworthiness of the data provided in this study.

Research Questions

As previously stated, the primary focus of this study aimed to answer the question of how Black male interactions with the various aspects of the campus ecology of small, private liberal arts colleges influence their engagement decisions. The research questions investigated were:

- How do Black males attending small, private liberal arts colleges make meaning of their college experiences (e.g. classroom experiences, interactions with other students, campus resources, interactions with physical and social environments, and other relevant campus policies and practices)?

- In what ways do Black males' college experiences, as described above, influence their decisions to be engaged on campus?

Research Design

Case Study

Yin (2009) explained that a case study should be employed when a researcher desires to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, especially when its contextual conditions are highly pertinent to that understanding. Thus, case studies are composed of two key elements: the phenomenon as the unit of analysis, or *bounded case* (Merriam, 2009), and its context. Thus, a case study was chosen to focus this study within the bounded case of Black male engagement decisions—as my phenomenon or unit of analysis—and within the context of the SPLAC, seeking to identify how the campus ecology of SPLACs influence these decisions by this particular student demographic. While Black male engagement has been previously studied by several researchers (e.g. Brooms, 2017; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Harper, 2009a, 2012; Strayhorn, 2017), I purposefully chose SPLACs as a unique institutional type with characteristics that may be pertinent to Black males at these campuses. Doing so helped me to explore in-depth the experiences of Black males at these campuses, which allowed for greater understanding of Black males at PWIs, and specifically those in this context.

This study was conducted as what Baxter and Jack (2008) labeled a single case with embedded units, or holistic case study. This type of case study was utilized to better illuminate the interactions of Black males with their SPLAC campus ecology and analyze how these interactions influenced Black males at each institution (within case analysis), between the different institutions (between case analysis), and across the different institutions (cross-case analysis) (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Employing a qualitative case study empowered participants to tell their stories—their views of reality—which enabled

me to better understand the participants' actions and build a closer relationship between the participants and me (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Critical Race Methodology

Critical race methodology (CRM) is centered on the "voice" or experiential narrative component of CRT and confronts the dominant discourse, or majoritarian story, in education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstorytelling is the principle vehicle of CRM in education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015) and provides a way to disseminate the experiences and realities of oppressed people (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Counterstorytelling further provides a step toward understanding and addressing the complexities of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999) and lends to the potential for enhancing social capacities to create systemic changes, such as improved academic achievement for students (Love, 2004). Black males' counterstories—their insider perspectives—are essential to a deeper understanding of the education system and how it may be confronted to change how Black males see themselves represented in, and engaging within, the predominantly White campus ecology (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined CRM as a theoretically grounded approach to research that:

> (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process and challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color;
> (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color;

(c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination;

(d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color; and

(e) uses an interdisciplinary knowledge base to better understand the experiences of students of color. (p. 24)

CRM in education brings to light deficit-informed research and methods that suppress and distort the epistemologies of People of Color (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and, conversely, illuminates these epistemologies and experiences as funds of strength (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Further, CRM in education opposes the idea of neutral research or objective researchers (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and can be used to seek out resolutions to the conventional research theories, concepts, paradigms, and methodologies that have been used to explain the experiences and epistemologies of People of Color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Majoritarian Stories. Barbara Love (2004) defined majoritarian stories as "the description of events as told by members of the dominant/majority groups, accompanied by the values and beliefs that justify the actions taken by dominants to ensure their dominant position" (p. 228-229). For People of Color, majoritarian stories distort and silence their experiences (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Love (2004), for example, referred to the generally recognized history of the United States as a majoritarian story. White racial primes of Black male images and identities (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007), as well as the neutral and objective findings of the benefits of liberal arts institutions, are both examples of majoritarian stories regarding Black males

who attend SPLACs. Love (2004) highlighted various tools used in the construction of majoritarian stories that yield White American values as normal, natural, and ordinary. She contended that the myth of meritocracy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) is the primary tool of majoritarian storytelling and hinges on the premise that the system is designed to ensure that students who are smarter and work harder are rewarded. Other tools of majoritarian storytelling include (a) fostering the invisibility of majoritarian stories by viewing them as history, policies, procedure, and statements of fact and rendering certain realities of non-dominant peoples invisible; (b) making assumptions of the experience of the dominant group as normative and universal; (c) promoting the perspective of schools as neutral and schooling as apolitical; and (d) equal opportunity that everyone has the prospect of reaping the rewards of society. These tools, Love (2004) maintained, cause White privilege to appear normal, natural, and ordinary, guised as policies, practices, rules, and regulations.

Counterstorytelling. Delgado (1989) submitted that there is a cohesiveness of shared understandings and meanings that stories create. For the "out-group", counterstories create a counter-reality to that of the "in-group", inviting readers to challenge their assumptions against majoritarian dialogue that perpetuate racial primes, and evaluate their own understanding. Delgado (1989) proposed at least three reasons for counterstorytelling: (1) much of reality is socially constructed; (2) stories provide members of out-groups a vehicle for psychic self-representation and lessening their own subjugation; and (3) the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help transcend dysconscious (King, 2015) and ethnocentric worldviews. There is a humanizing

experience that stories and counterstories provoke (Delgado, 1989), helping us to understand what life is like for others.

Ladson-Billings (2013) asserted that the aim of counterstorytelling is "not to vent or rant or be an exhibitionist regarding one's own struggle" (p. 42). Rather, the intent of employing counterstorytelling is foundation for deeper assessment, and advancement of the larger concerns, of the operation of racism in education policy and practice (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2013). In his CRM-focused study of African American males, Howard (2008) endorsed that in striving to pursue beneficial interventions for improving the educational opportunities for African American males, researchers must be cognizant that the perspectives of these students may provide different and more critical narratives about educational practices than majoritarian narratives and perspectives. The Black males in Harper's (2009) study discussed the majoritarian stories told of Black male academic failure without consideration of the narratives of high achieving Black males.

Research regarding liberal arts education has by and large silenced the voices of Black males by focusing more on neutral stories of the benefits and advantages of liberal arts education (e.g. Pascarella et al., 2013; Seifert et al., 2006; Seifert et al., 2010); however, Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) argued that those benefits did not extend to Black males. Through this research, I aimed to challenge the majoritarian stories of Black male engagement decisions at SPLACs and invited them to share their counterstories of how their interactions within their SPLAC campus ecologies may influence their decisions engage at these campuses.

Participants and Site Selection

Given that this study focused on the engagement decisions of Black male students at predominantly White small private liberal arts colleges, criterion sampling was used to further identify the colleges and Black males in this study. In order to ensure that the Black males would be selected from similar institutions, two colleges were purposely selected for their shared Carnegie Classification as four-year arts and science focused colleges that have a very high to exclusive undergraduate population, are small or very small, and highly residential (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, n.d.). The former and latter classifications are considered characteristics of SPLACs (Astin, 1999) and promote high levels of student interaction with the campuses. The two colleges were selected through convenience sampling due to their close proximity to each other and to the researcher. Each of these colleges are located in the Midwest, have under 1,500 students, with a near 50% male to female ratio, a Black student population of less than 10%, and a White student enrollment of just under 70% according to the College Navigator data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (n.d).

The criterial for participants of this study were Black males who—at the time of this study—were 18 years of age and above, were enrolled fulltime at one of the selected colleges, have completed at least one year of studies, and were not actively involved in any official collegiate sports during the given academic year. Athletes were excluded from this study as they are typically relegated to stricter schedules that may not allow them to participate in the campus ecology in the same manner as non-athletes. This exclusion does not, in any way, imply that Black male athletes may not experience these campus ecologies in the same ways. For a case study, Creswell (2003) recommended

between three to five participants. Thus, a minimum of three Black males from each institution was desired, for a total of a minimum of six co-researchers.

Once the proper permissions were obtained from each institution to collect data on their campuses, invitation letters identifying participation requirements and eligibility, the participation incentive, the purpose of the study, privacy issues, and my contact information were sent to key gatekeepers at the institutions, namely those in diversity and multicultural affairs offices. Second, with permissions from key campus administration, recruitment for this study was expected to utilize fliers posted around each campus, emails sent to potential participants, and referrals by campus cultural center administrators. In order to encourage full participation, a $10 gift card was offered as an incentive to each participant upon the completion of the data collection process. In addition to recruitment using the above-referenced criteria, snowball sampling was also used to find participants via recommendations of gatekeepers—such as campus administrators and cultural office staff—and other co-researchers if necessary (Glesne, 2011). After potential co-researchers were identified and screened, the Black males were further informed of my role as a researcher, the importance of their participation, confidentiality and privacy issues, and the interviewing process.

At the conclusion of the site and participation selection process, the amalgamation of the COVID-19 pandemic conditions and the very small numbers of non-athlete Black males at the selected SPLACs created limiting circumstances in recruitment process. One is that I was not able to post flyers around the two campuses and do any in-person recruitment. Thus, I was only able to recruit through the connection of key administration at each campus and snow-ball sampling. The conditions also grossly limited the number

of qualified and interested co-researchers. Despite extended recruitment deadlines and multiple emails for outreach, only one Black male responded from one SPLAC and four Black males responded from another SPLAC. The resulting selection, then, consisted of four co-researchers at only one SPLAC, Midwest Acres College (pseudonym).

As part of the recruitment process, co-researchers selected a pseudonym for their confidentiality. Each Black male was asked to select the name of a Black male superhero or historical figure with which he identified. I chose to offer these two options to (a) provide guidelines for a pseudonym that would further protect their identity, (b) to make it easier for Black males to identify a pseudonym, and (c) to align our Black males with esteemed Black male characters. Though the selection seemed limited, the array of names to select from given this criteria provided a tremendous number of options for pseudonyms. The Black males in this study were provided with a sample list of personas to aid them in their pseudonym selection.

Data Sources

The counterstories created from the data were derived from semi-structured interviews. Given that the study focused on students' experiences according to specific aspects of their identities—being Black and being male—participants were asked to reflect on how their raced-gendered identities may influence their interaction with the campus environments. Per Yin's (2009) suggestion, the interview protocol was pilot tested by students similar to those in the study but who were not participating in the study in order to ensure optimal data guidance. Dancy (2013) proposed that in addition to providing the opportunity to test protocols before conducting the actual study, piloting

the protocols also provided the opportunity to "work through masculine anxieties" (p. 166) as well as researcher anxieties that may occur.

Interviews

Two waves of interviews were conducted for this study. The first interview served as the primary interview for data collection. Interview questions were created using the suggestions of Bhattacharya (2017). Bhattacharya (2017) outlined several types of interview questions that were used for this study. Descriptive questions, for example, allow the participant to describe details about a specific incident. Tour questions provide participants the opportunity to share stories of everyday experiences, from general experience through grand tour questions to specific, smaller units of experiences through mini-tour questions. Structural questions were particularly key to this study as they are designed to understand the structure of the environmental context within which Black males are making meaning of their experiences. Example questions and contrast questions are used for gaining further details from a particular question and to position co-researchers to provide alternate perspectives to previously given data, respectively. Table 1 demonstrates sample interview protocol questions and question types.

The interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and were semi-structured and conversational in nature to build rapport with students and allow them to tell authentic stories. The interview protocol (Appendix B) was structured in a way to help understand (a) the personal and situational circumstances that students encounter within the campus ecology, (b) how students view college involvement and engagement, and (c) student perceptions of the campus environment, programs, practices, and policies which may contribute to their decisions to be engaged on campus. The interview protocol was

based on the research questions, review of the literature, and the race-space theoretical framework.

Table 1

Sample Interview Protocol Questions

Question Category	Question	Question Type
Pre-College & Orientation to College	What did it mean to you, prior to coming to [Name of Your College], to be a Black man?	Specific Grand Tour
Defining and Perceiving Engagement	Please describe for me a timeline of critical moments in your time at [Name of Your College] that have influenced your current engagement decisions.	Task-Related Grand Tour
Academic Engagement	How would you describe your level of engagement with your professors?	Structural
Campus Ecological Interactions & Social Engagement	Describe the racial climate and community on campus.	Descriptive
Physical Environment/Campus Spaces	Please explain your personal interactions with campus spaces.	Example

The second interview served as a follow up interview to encourage participants—as member checks—to verify, clarify, correct, subtract from, or add to my preliminary analysis of their transcribed interviews. It also provided me with an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to the co-researchers based on the primary interviews. The questions for this interview were developed according to the data from transcribed interviews and, thus, were unique to each Black male in the study. The interviews were semi-structured, though more conversational in nature than the primary interview. Interviews were intended to last for approximately 30 to 45 minutes; however, the interviews were

scheduled within a full 60-minute time frame to account for the need for more time for conversation.

Data Collection Procedures

Consenting participants of this study each completed a demographic form, an orientation, a preliminary interview, and a follow-up interview. Once co-researchers' involvement was confirmed and agreed upon during recruitment, a brief orientation was scheduled at which the Black males were formally identified as co-researchers upon the signing of the informed consent form outlining the research criteria and details. All data and documents collected for this study were stored on my password-protected personal computer and backed up on a password-protected file drive in my locked file cabinet.

Orientation

An orientation was developed for each co-researcher in order to (a) review the consent protocol, (b) discuss the details of the study and data collection, and (c) develop and confirm the research schedule as it was relevant to their participation. During the orientation, the co-researchers also each selected their pseudonyms and were encouraged to address any questions or concerns they may have had regarding any part of the study— especially the consent protocol and data collection.

Interviews

All of the primary interviews were planned to be completed over a one-month period and followed the interview protocol. Each interview was expected to last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted at a convenient time for both the co-researchers and me. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted via Zoom (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2020c) video conferencing. At the end of each

primary interview, co-researchers were informed of the follow-up interviews and the remainder of the research process. Each interview was audio recorded to capture the full interview, transcribed using MaxQDA Plus (Verbi Software, 2018c), and manually checked for accuracy. After transcription, preliminary analyses were conducted using the four-step process outlined in the data analysis section.

Follow-up Interviews

Once the primary interviews were transcribed and analyzed, transcripts and preliminary analyses were emailed to each co-researcher. Co-researchers were asked to review the documents for accuracy, clarification, and anything else that may have been pertinent to the follow-up interviews. Follow-up interviews also served as member checks. This interview was expected to last approximately 30 to 45 minutes, though co-researchers were provided more time when needed. Co-researchers were reminded of the process and were first asked if they had any questions, concerns, or comments about the research and the process thus far. Finally, the co-researchers and I went through the process of member-checking my preliminary analyses that were previously emailed to them. Following this interview, final within-case analyses were conducted, followed by between-case and cross-case analyses.

Data Analysis

In their critical race methodological analysis of Chicano and Chicana graduate school experiences, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) sorted through their interview and focus group data for patterns, themes, and examples of the concepts they desired to highlight in developing their counterstories. For this study, I sorted through the data to find patterns, themes, and examples of the race-space framework by employing elements of Spradley's

(1979) developmental research sequence for ethnographic inquiry. While this study does not employ ethnographic inquiry or analysis, I found Spradley's methods to be valuable for uncovering a-posteriori symbolic categories and identifying relationships between race and space for Black males at SPLACS. Spradley's methods aided in deeper interpretation into how Black males made meaning of how these relationships that may have led to their engagement decisions.
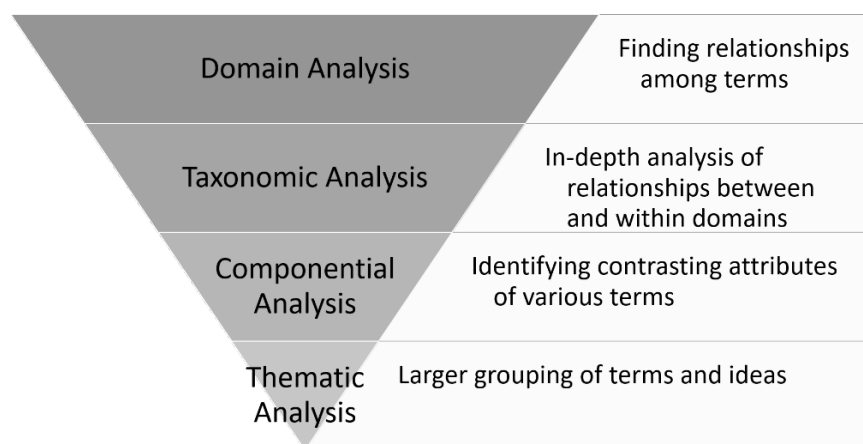
After preliminary interviews, data were transcribed using MaxQDA Analytics Pro (Verbi Software, 2018c). Each interview recording was reviewed multiple times to capture the sentiment of each interview and to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, per suggestions made by Saldaña (2009). Preliminary within-case analysis was conducted for each interview and provided to co-researchers for accuracy and follow-up. After preliminary analyses, additional data from co-researchers' feedback from member checking were added to the preliminary data and reviewed for any changes. Data were then analyzed for between-case analysis to compare and contrast Black male stories between the two campuses, and cross-case analysis to find a common story among Black males at both campuses (Baxter & Jack, 2008). All data analyses were conducted using MaxQDA Analytics Pro (Verbi Software, 2018c).

I utilized four steps of data analysis for this study, shown in Figure 2. First, a domain analysis created a domain of the relationship between terms and concepts mentioned in Black males' interviews. Second, I conducted a taxonomic analysis and combined domains of similar relationship. Third, I conducted a componential analysis by identifying differential attributes among terms. Finally, a thematic analysis was conducted to group domains and taxonomies into larger universal themes that connect

Black males' terms and concepts to greater social and relational concepts and ideas and to

give a more holistic view of how Black males make meaning of their interactions within

the campus ecology of SPLACs.

Figure 2

Description of the Four Levels of Analysis

Domain Analysis	Finding relationships among terms
Taxonomic Analysis	In-depth analysis of relationships between and within domains
Componential Analysis	Identifying contrasting attributes of various terms
Thematic Analysis	Larger grouping of terms and ideas

Note. Adapted from Spradley (1979)

To first find the relationship between ideas that share like meaning in how Black

males experience their SPLAC campus ecologies, a domain analysis was conducted. A

domain consists of three features: (a) a cover term; (b) two or more included terms; and

(c) a single semantic relationship (Spradley, 1979). The first element, a cover term, is the

name for a category of "cultural knowledge" (Spradley, 1979, p. 100). The second

element of a domain is the included terms, which are terms used by the Black males that

are related to a cover term. Cover terms and included terms are connected by a single

semantic relationship. Casagrande and Hale (1967) identified 13 types of semantic

relationships in their study of Papago folk definitions. Spradley (1979) later proposed that

there were nine universal semantic relationships that were the most useful in beginning a

domain analysis. Table 2 provides a list both sets of semantic relationships and identifies

those utilized by both Casagrande and Hale (1967) and Spradley (1979).

Table 2

List of Semantic Relationships Identified for Domain Analysis

Researchers	Type of Relationship	Relationship of X (Cover Term) to Y (Included Term)	Also Found in Casagrande and Hale (1967)	Also Found in Spradley (1979)
Casagrande & Hale (1967)	Attributive	X is one or more attributes of Y		X
	Contingency	X occurs following, or in conjunction with, Y		
	Function	X is an aid in the performance of Y		X
	Spatial	X is, in whole or in part, spatially oriented with respect to Y; X is a usual or necessary place where Y occurs.		X
	Operational	X is a goal, or recipient, of an action, Y.		
	Comparison	X is similar to or contrasted with Y		
	Exemplification	X is defined by citing an appropriate co-occurrent Y		
	Class Inclusion	X is a part of a hierarchical class Y		
	Synonymy	X is an equivalent of Y		
	Antonymy	X is the opposite, or negation, of Y		
	Provenience	X is sourced by Y		
	Grading	X has placement in a series or spectrum that also includes Y		
	Circularity	X is defined as X		

(continued)

Researchers	Type of Relationship	Relationship of X (Cover Term) to Y (Included Term)	Also Found in Casagrande and Hale (1967)	Also Found in Spradley (1979)
Spradley (1979)	Strict inclusion	X is a kind of Y		
	Spatial	X is a place in Y; X is a part of Y	X	
	Cause-effect	X is a result of Y; X is a cause of Y		
	Rationale	X is a reason for doing Y		
	Location for action	X is a place for doing Y	X	
	Function	X is used for Y		
	Means-end	X is a way to do Y		
	Sequence	X is a step (stage) in Y		
	Attribution	X is an attribute (characteristic) of Y	X	

Both sets of semantic relationships were considered for this study in order to provide me with greater opportunities for connecting terms.

I conducted this analysis according to Spradley's (1979) recommended steps. I first selected a verbatim sample of text in each transcript and looked for the name of things such as key places or players within the campus community. I identified possible cover terms and included terms within the sample, along with their semantic relationship, paying close attention to those relationships that identified the race-space and raced-gendered-space dynamic that may occur with the SPLAC campus ecology. I then searched the remainder of the text for possible included terms that may have fit with the domain. This process was repeated throughout each transcript.

After domain analyses were completed, I grouped domains for each co-researcher into taxonomies (taxonomic analysis). Taxonomies are "a set of categories organized on

the basis of a single semantic relationship" (Spradley, 1979, p. 137). Conducting a taxonomic analysis allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the domains constructed and further identified the relationship between domains. To develop a taxonomy, first, a single domain was selected. I then looked for domains that could either serve as a subset or a more inclusive domain of the selected domain. Appendix E demonstrates an example of this analysis.

Once taxonomies were created, I conducted a componential analysis which allowed me to identify attributes or "components of meaning" (Spradley, 1979, p. 174) for any term in the analysis. This analysis allowed me to identify differences among related terms, whereas the two previous analyses identified only the similarities. Contrasting features among terms were documented in what Spradley (1979) called a paradigm. Initial paradigms were created, noting the various attributes of terms. Closely related areas of contrast were used to create a completed paradigm.

Following the componential analysis, the data were grouped into themes. Spradley (1979) identified themes as "elements in the cognitive maps" (p. 186) which make up beliefs and assumptions about the nature of one's experiences. For the purpose of the analysis, the themes arose from the ideas, "tacit or explicit, recurrent in a number of domains and service as a relationship among sub-systems of cultural meaning" (Spradley, 1979, p. 186). In this study, themes represented Black males' assumptions and beliefs about their experiences at their SPLACs and their resulting engagement decisions. To thematize, macrodomains were created by bringing together cover terms that shared a semantic relationship, such as *places Black males engage on campus* or *types of Black male classroom experiences.* Similarities and differences were observed between

domains and universal themes were created for each Black male to aid in the co-construction of his counterstory.

Once macrodomains were created for each Black male, the analytic process began again with taxonomic analysis. Macrodomains from each co-researcher were analyzed for similarities and differences, again, paying close attention to those relationships that identified the race-space and race-gender-space dynamic of the SPLAC campus ecology. I created taxonomies for those domains that shared similar cover terms and observed those that did not fit within taxonomies. A thematic analysis was then conducted for the collective analysis.

To represent the counterstories of Black males in this study, I exercised Spradley's (1979) six levels of writing. Level one was constructed using universal statement about Black and non-Black college students according to the literature. Level two consists of cross-cultural descriptive statements about Black students and non-Black students at PWIs and SPLACs according to the literature and data from the co-researchers. Level three provides general statements about Black males specifically at SPLACs according to the literature and data from this study. Level four offers general statements about Black males at the SPLACs in the study as provided by the themes produced through the data. Level five provides specific statements about a particular domain or taxonomy observed. Finally, level six offers statements of specific experiences of the co-researchers at their respective SPLACs. Structuring the stories in this way helped to tie together the literature, CRT, and the experiences and engagement decisions of Black males at SPLACs.

Trustworthiness

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argued that using CRM substantiates that we must

regard experiences with, and responses to, racism and raced-gendered oppression in and

out of schools as valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data. Delgado (1989) asserted

that for this data, as counterstories, to be effective they must be, or appear to be,

noncoercive. The process and the product of the research, as well as the researcher,

should demonstrate rigor and the adherence to a set of criteria that facilitates public

inspectability and systematic development (Lincoln, 2015). Lincoln (2015) contended

that in naturalistic and constructivist research, the criteria for rigor and ethics are deeply

interrelated. To establish credibility, I employed member checking and rich, thick

description (Merriam, 2009). First, however, I have outlined the ethical considerations

which are addressed by these measures of credibility and other strategies throughout the

research.

Ethical Considerations

Although Lincoln (2015) argued that rigor and ethics in qualitative data are

essentially intertwined, it is important to highlight key ethical considerations particular to

this study. One such consideration is that of maintaining anonymity, particularly at

SPLACs given their small campus sizes and student populations. Since many students

may know the Black males in this study in some capacity, and since the Black males may

be familiar with each other, Lincoln (2015) argued that others can tell who gave a

specific quote or story, thereby unintentionally violating the principle of heavy reliance

on natural language and direct quotations in data reporting. Thus, efforts will be taken to

reduce the amount of text that will be direct quoted so that unique quotes will not disrupt the confidentiality of the co-researcher.

Another relevant ethical consideration is that of previous studies having the potential to shape my data analysis and data reporting specifically (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Much of the research on Black males' experiences within the campus ecology of PWIs tell a grim story of Black misandry and hostile campus environments. Therefore, there is potential for researchers to create what Weis and Fine (2000) call "voyeuristic search for 'good' stories" (p. 48) that tell the best story, inadvertently through one-sided creation of the interview protocol and through research-influenced data analysis. The influence of previous literature on data collection and analysis could also be facilitated by what Strauss and Corbin (1990) identified as "theoretical sensitivity": the researcher's knowledge of relevant existing research that allows her to make sense of emerging themes in the data. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) highlighted that researchers should have a sufficient amount of theoretical sensitivity to properly design and carry out the study; however, it is also important to be aware of how this could constrain potential new conceptions of the data that are outside of the data provided in existing research. Although this concept is familiar in grounded theory methodology, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) utilized theoretical sensitivity to aid in creating counterstories in their study.

An essential ethical consideration for this study is what Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) term "relational competence" (p. 39). Relational competence considers the social and relational aspects that I brought to the process, the relationship I had with the Black males in the study, and my evolving role as a researcher. Relational

competence has four components: (a) social identities; (b) researcher positionality; (c) power relationships; and (d) reflexivity. Together, these components allowed me to consider the importance of recognizing how my social identities may have been perceived by the Black males in the study, addressing any prior assumptions and biases that I may have held prior to and during the research, identifying any potential presence of power differences that may have existed between Black males in the study and me as a researcher and campus administrator, and reflecting on the interrelatedness of these components and how they may influence the study. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) recommended that the research design include ways for me to demonstrate my social locus, my investment in the research, and how I planned to negotiate the "self-other relationship" (p. 46) between the Black males and me.

Credibility

To establish credibility and address concerns of ethics and rigor, I employed multiple strategies. First, member checking consisted of providing a copy of interview transcripts to each of the Black males who participated in the study. Information regarding the themes and data analysis were also provided for confirmation from each participant that his interview and experience was accurately captured. Member checking also served as a way to involve Black males in the data analysis and co-construction of the data. This aided in ensuring that my social perspectives and theoretical sensitivity did not unduly influence data collection and analysis.

Analyzing the data from the narrowness of the relationship between terms and concepts and their contexts to the broader thematic analysis will lend to the creation of rich, thick description. In reporting the data, rich, detailed descriptions and direct quotes

from Black males regarding their engagement decisions and interactions with the campus

ecology were provided. This method of rich, thick description (Jones, Torres, & Arminio,

2014) was used to establish an interconnectedness between the reader, the research, and

the Black males and me as co-researcher. It further offered the reader the opportunity to

trace the claims that were made through the data.

Finally, throughout the research process, I entreated reflexivity through

journaling, memos, and analytic journaling. I maintained a research journal to keep note

of any conceptions of bias, my thoughts of my social locus as I reviewed literature and

collected data, memos of tension during data collection and analysis, and other

experiences and thoughts regarding aspects of the research and research process.

Journaling allowed me to address the ethical considerations previously mentioned. In

addition to the research journal, I maintained a separate analytical journal (Saldaña, 2011)

which contained thoughts and reflexivity of the data analysis process. This journal

included items such as analytical ideas and thoughts, notes regarding the analytical

process, and questions that may have arisen for follow up during the follow-up interview.

While I worked diligently to ensure that this study addressed pertinent ethical

considerations and incorporated key strategies to rigorously address these considerations,

and the design and execution of this study as a whole, I understand that ultimately, the

assessment of rigor and ethical consideration is up to the reader (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

CRT positions me, as the researcher— as a medium for the research—to

acknowledge the shared experiences that I may have with the Black males in this study,

integrating my experiential knowledge and shared history as the "other" and operating in

a multiple consciousness, as well as my desire to work with these Black males in sharing

their stories (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Milner (2007)

suggested that when developing a researcher positionality regarding topics of race and

culture, the researcher should work through the seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers of

the research by (a) "engaging in evolving and emergent critical race and cultural self-

reflection" (p. 395), (b) reflecting on the self in relation to others involved in the study

and acknowledging what the researcher and participants bring to the research process, (c)

collaborative engagement in reflection and the representation of race and culture in the

research with participants, and (d) shifting the process of inquiry from the individual self

to the broader systematic scale of race, racism, and culture. Thus, as Ladson-Billings

(1999) argued, the experience of raced or raced-gendered oppressions is important for

developing a CRT analytical standpoint. Matsuda and associates (1993) also noted that

CRT work "involves both action and reflection" (p. 3), which can aid me as a critical race

scholar in both doing the research and reflexively interrogate how my racial

conceptualizations may surface and how they may frame the research and the research

process (Duncan, 2002; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

As a Black woman who has experienced the influences of the racialized

underpinnings of a PWI, I am somewhat of an insider regarding the experiences and

perceptions of Black students at these institutions. By profession, I also work with Black

males—and other historically marginalized student populations—in helping to foster a

positive sense of belonging and positive cultural and intercultural discourse at a SPLAC.

Therefore, my interest in this research is personal, political, and relational as one who

shares in the understanding and knowledge of the systemic ways of knowing of Black

people and the systemic context of race, racism, and culture at SPLACs, and in the

greater society. However, though I am Black and may have some shared values, beliefs,

and expectations with the young men in this study (Rudestam & Newton, 2007), as a

woman I do not have the same experiences as Black males. The participants of this study

may also possess different generational experiences, values, beliefs, and expectations

than I. It is important, also, for me to address possible tensions that may arise through

reflecting on my own oppression and privilege as a researcher who must also work within

the same traditionally White system that I am researching (Ladson-Billings, 2000;

Milner, 2007). Ultimately, my role and goal as a researcher is to position myself as a

steward of knowledge as opposed to an owner of knowledge and to provide "a productive

and generative space that allows for finding knowledge" (Patel, 2014, p. 373) with the

Black males in this study as the co-creators of knowledge.

Summary

This study was situated using critical race as a theoretical framework and

furthered through methodology. Using case study as a research strategy to bound the unit

of analysis of Black males within the context of SPLACs facilitated the convergence of

constructivist and critical inquiry for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of Black

male engagement decisions as a result of their interactions within the SPLAC campus

ecology. Howard (2008) opined that a critical race methodology can provide a qualitative

study that allows students to discuss and call attention to the impact that institutional

policies and practices have on their perceptions of school and how they believe this

impact further shaped their lives. As a Black woman, and as an educator at a SPLAC, I

understand the struggle of being of double consciousness and of managing the effects of

endemic racism. However, there is much to be learned from our Black male students in these spaces in order to enhance our institutional effectiveness. This study was designed to position the Black males in this study as co-researchers and tell their counterstories. Using CRM allowed Black males to tell their stories of how they perceived the campus ecology and how it influenced their academic and social engagement.

CHAPTER IV

The Story and the Counterstory

The primary focus of this study was to identify ways in which the campus ecology of SPLACs, predominantly White small private liberal arts colleges, influence the engagement decisions of Black males on these campuses. This was explored through two main questions:

- How do Black males attending small, private liberal arts colleges make meaning of their college experiences (e.g. classroom experiences, interactions with other students, campus resources, interactions with physical and social environments, and other relevant campus policies and practices)?

- In what ways do Black males' college experiences, as described above, influence their decisions to be engaged on campus?

In answering the research questions, this chapter is centered on the voices of four Black male researchers, exercising counterstories as the principle vehicle of Critical Race Methodology (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). A case study method was employed, centering Black male engagement decisions as the bounded case and SPLACs as the context (Merriam, 2009). Further, these counterstories were analyzed through a race-space framework, utilizing the junction of CRT (Matsuda et al., 1993) and Campus Ecology (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015).

The multimethod analysis adopted from Spradley's (1979) ethnographic analysis methods allowed me to identify the ways in which the Black males in this study made meaning of their experiences within the campus ecology of Midwest Acres College individually and collectively. It further aided me in identifying the ways in which their

transactional relationships with Midwest Acres College influenced their engagement decisions. Beginning with a domain analysis, then moving to a greater taxonomic analysis, I was able to first find meaning-making relationships between terms, then find a greater connection between the individual relationships. Componential analysis required me to identify contrasting attributes of various domains. Finally, the thematic analysis allowed me to identify larger themes in which domains and larger taxonomies connected.

The individual stories presented in this chapter provide insight into each co-researcher's character and views. These stories were developed from co-researchers' interviews to reflect their pre-collegiate experiences as Black males in their high school and community settings, their conceptions of their Black male identities, why they chose to attend Midwest Acres College, and their experiences and engagement as Black collegiate males at their SPLAC. Member checking was employed through which each of the co-researchers reviewed his counterstory to ensure accuracy and their comfort with their individual stories. Co-researchers, however, were not exposed to another co-researcher's counterstory. Through member-checking follow-up, no changes were made to co-researchers' narratives as each Black male believed his story to be representative of his character the intent of his narrative.

Following their individual stories is a greater collective story of how Black male engagement decisions are influenced by the campus ecology of Midwest Acres College. It is important to reiterate that due to the small student populations at SPLACs— especially given the demographic criteria for the SPLAC in this study—that many students, faculty, and staff may know the Black males in this study in some capacity, and the Black males may also be familiar with each other. This presents a greater opportunity

for identification. Thus, in order to maintain confidentiality, the co-researchers' names; the SPLAC they attend; and other key identifying names of people, places, and things have been given pseudonyms. Further, Lincoln (2015) argued that some may be able to identify who may have given a particular statement or story, which could inadvertently violate the principle of heavy reliance on natural language and direct quotations in data reporting. Thus, for the sake of ethical protection of the co-researchers of this study, these counterstories have been paraphrased in some cases where a Black male's identity may be further identified through his natural language. Following, direct quotes were not utilized in the greater collective story that may allow for any co-researcher, the college, or other persons to be identified.

Black Male Counterstories

My co-researchers, Afro, Lightning, Cyborg, and Panther each came from different states and varied family and cultural backgrounds. They selected their pseudonyms according to a Black male superhero or historical figure with whom each of them best identified. The Black males in this study ranged from sophomore to senior classification and were each STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) majors at Midwest Acres College. Following are their individual character stories. These stories are their firsthand accounts of their pre-collegiate experiences, their college expectations and experiences, and their iteration of their Black male identities.

Panther's Story

I'm a first-generation African-American, with parents who immigrated from Africa. I grew up in a predominantly White area not far from Midwest Acres College. My high school was also predominantly White. Although my high school friend group was

mostly White, I made it diverse when I got the chance to. Still, I never really had a close Black friend in high school. I actually had culture shock if I see so many Black people because I didn't know how to interact.

I've always built strong relationships with people in high school. Taking the time to get to know people, I think that helped me to succeed. I've always enjoyed interacting with my peers and got along well with them. They told me I was so nice. In class, I was usually one of the people who enjoyed stimulating the conversation and encouraging others to speak. Building strong relationships with faculty and staff helped me succeed in high school. If I needed help, I felt comfortable asking for help. I've built a lot of lasting relationships with my high school teachers.

With my parents being from Africa, I've always been around African culture. For me, African culture is a strong part of my identity and being first-generation Black American is something that is a point of being proud and has given me chances to not take things for granted. I enjoy it because it's another culture, another layer to my identity that I've been able to explore. It's helped give me a different perspective from Black Americans who might have a disconnect from Africa. It's helped me see two sides of a coin.

I don't really compare myself too much to other Black men, but I take things that I like about somebody. I would always just look at things that inspire me by Black men. Like, if I saw who was really business savvy or creative, I want to be like that. I've looked for this inspiration in my family, if not in my friend group. Most of the comparisons that I've made to other Black males have been to people in my family or looking at the news or history. If I'm looking at history, I want to look at more than just

athletes because I want to see more examples of other things Black people are doing. Malcolm X and Mansa Musa are examples of men I look to. The creation of the internet and connecting computers are things Black people were heavily involved in. You never heard of this stuff.

Being Black is a confidence booster. I enjoy being in my skin. I'm proud of the fact that I'm Black and not ashamed of it at all. As a Black man, I'm really about being a family person. I want to have some financial security and financial freedom. I want to be a business owner. I want to be someone who's thinking long-term and is an example for other Black people and Black youth. As a Black man, I'm someone who's intelligent— who is going to strive for excellence. I'm not a breaker of stereotypes, but if there's one that I click with, that's just me. I've never encountered any explicit racial issues, just slight things like friends telling me I sound really White. One friend told me "Let me know if this offends you, but you're the Whitest Black kid I've ever met." Why is it necessary to say that? I was annoyed because I've heard this many times in my life, so I just kind of tuned out. Even my grandma who's from Africa thought I was a White person when I called her. What purpose does that statement serve in my life? What do you expect a Black person to talk like? Things like that just kind of throw me off. I try not to be too emotionally connected to what people say because I feel like if you want to be in conversation, you have to have some kind of level-headedness to really stay in the conversation and not start insulting someone.

When planning for college, I wanted to go somewhere big like Harvard, but my work ethic didn't match my ambition. I decided I was going to at least go to a state school. Then my mother found out about Midwest Acres College. I really enjoyed

everything I found out about the college, and, even though it was past the deadline, I was encouraged to apply. I'm really glad I'm here at my college. I really love the campus; a lot of that has to do with how diverse it is-at least for me. Coming to Midwest Acres College, I was expecting the college to be majority White. Since it's a private school, it's probably going to be like my high school. I was also expecting most people at the college to be from the state, but only a small percent of people are, so that threw me off guard—how different people were and how many different places they came from. I wasn't expecting it to be as diverse as it is. For some people who came from really diverse places, it might not be a lot of diversity here. It was mostly White kids all the time at my high school, so it was a good mix for me. I was talking with somebody who goes to a larger state college here and they said, "It's not very diverse, and it's kinda problematic." I'm glad I didn't go there.

For the first few months at Midwest Acres College, I felt kind of lonely. Though, having the new student orientation group gave me those first sparks of friendship. I got to kind of just feel comfortable and feel a sense of belonging. The lounge of the dorm I lived in was a perfect place to just have a community hub. In college, I really want to get to know people from different backgrounds, so having that hub was a good avenue for that and it pushed me to get to know people. Eventually, though, I met a very diverse group of people in a game of Uno at lunch, and it kinda evolved from there. I met friends from Korea and even Kenya. I never had a close Black friend in high school, so having a friend from Kenya was pretty cool.

During my freshman year, I realized that Black is so much more than American Black. It's like a universe of people—it's not so one dimensional with only one country's

experience that has Black people. I think I've been able to appreciate that because now I have had some friends from the Bahamas, from Jamaica, and other places. I'm always learning something new—when you think you know something. Making friends who are Black American also just continues to help me to expand my awareness of what different people's experiences are. I look at things I can better improve myself, and I find a lot of good inspiration from the Black males on campus. I always feel a connection with them because we're Black.

Being a Black man has given me own unique kind of voice. It has allowed me to give any insight from my own experiences. It has also connected me to a broader community. Being in college has made me more vocal as a Black man about certain things, conversations, in terms of identity. It has made me engage in more dialogue. I've gotten into conversations in college that I didn't really get too much into in high school. Conversations in terms of my identity have changed. I've been willing to participate in conversations when it comes to race or things going on in politics. The friend group I surround myself with, we're okay with having conversations that might be controversial to some, which made me engage more in dialogue. I've met some people with differing opinions. A friend of mine was defending Trump and—although my mom told me not to talk about Trump and issues of the 2020 election—I felt very fine to criticize my friend. Since this is such a diverse college, you meet so many people from different places and you're going to have some friction when you're talking about things.

In a freshman course, we were discussing race and things like that. I think the professor was being extra sensitive and wanted to make sure the Black voices were heard. Most of the students in that class were White and there were like three Black students in

my class (like, that's the lottery in my high school). And it's so funny because we were literally sat right next to each other. It was nice. I enjoyed that. When the class talked about race, the Black students were the most vocal. I didn't want to talk too much because I wanted to hear what other people had to say. I kind of made it a point to be like, "Hey, you know, I'm just giving my own two cents," and that I'm not the voice for all Black people. Like I said, it's kind of a like a universe of what is Black out there, so I'm just getting my own corner of the sea. I wonder how conversations are like when Black students aren't in the room. I feel like White students don't speak up or voice their opinions on race when Black students are in the room. Maybe people had opinions, but they didn't really want to share it because it might not be politically correct. I feel like the more social justice warrior-oriented White students pick on the people who have differing opinions.

I've always enjoyed being at school and interacting with people. I really liked to dive into extracurriculars at school and in the community. In high school, I got involved in a multicultural leadership group and in theater. I think there are a lot of opportunities to have community at Midwest Acres College. I feel like there are a lot of platforms to get engaged and get connected to things. Even when COVID happened, I felt like there were still a lot of good opportunities to plug into the community. When I see others I've engaged with in other clubs and spaces, that boosts my engagement. Most of the clubs I've been in, I've been the only Black person. At the same time, it's like, those aren't the only clubs on campus. So I wonder if it's also limited by what I attend, because I might be attending something that other Black students are not attending.

The Black student organization on campus and the multicultural house are platforms that are available that I haven't gotten involved with as much as I would like to. I have joined the Slam Poets Society group and have enjoyed having a space so I kind of express myself in that way. I like sports, but there were other things I wanted to participate in and do. I knew I wasn't ready to put up that kind of commitment for sports. I've gone to activities where I got to meet certain people that I might not have otherwise met. Things like talking to other people of different cultures, different clubs and activities. Whether it is an international student club, gaming, or shooting hoops in the gym, I've experienced a lot of spaces to participate. I even heard about a program where Black students could come early to kind of get familiar with campus. Though, I saw that and didn't know what to expect. I wanted to enjoy my summer more. Had I known better, it would've been really cool if I had done that.

Coming in, I felt like the professors really cared about us as students. I love engaging with my professors. I try not to be the Black man stereotype. I hate it when I get to class late-being the last person and the only Black person in class. It's setting a weird example. I want to put my best face forward—especially as a Black student. I want to represent myself in a better way. I always try to be engaged in class and ask questions. I've had professors email me and thank me for being an active participant in class. Outside of class I can do a better job of reaching out to my professors. If I see my professors outside of class, we'll speak and have good conversations. Professors do a really good job of making themselves available. I don't think I've had a professor that didn't like being reached out to.

Overall, I feel like whatever students want to do, Midwest Acres College is pretty supportive in terms of Black students. I don't feel like I have to hide my identity. Staff and students on this campus are more receptive to what Black students have to say. I feel like I've been treated very fairly. There are no places where I don't feel accepted on campus. I've gotten to meet campus security and they've been really cool. That doesn't mean at night I'm going to say hi when I see campus safety. Whenever I do see campus security come out looking, honestly, I don't want any trouble. It's always a weird feeling just because all the stuff that happens in the news. But they've been very nice. Here, I've also finally had my first Black professor and thought, "Whoa, this is cool." It was good seeing more diversity on the professorial staff. That's something the college should consider when hiring—having more diversity with the student body and faculty.

My advice in terms of being a Black man at a predominantly White small private liberal arts college: If you see a Black student—fellow Black student—go ahead and introduce yourself because it's just different being around people who look like you. And it's just nice cuz it's like, when you go somewhere else and you've been surrounded by people just like predominantly White, it can be a cultural shock at times. But once you get used to it, it's refreshing. I met a new friend this last month who I had seen around, but we had never said hi to each other. So it was super cool and long overdue. That's happened to me a bunch of times with some Black students, a few of them were seniors, so that was unfortunate. For myself, my takeaway is just that I have my own role to play. I bring my own kind of values, insights, character, and personality to the table. All that is wrapped around my personality, including being Black, is all shaping the type of person I

am. So, not really try to be anybody else, but just discover more my authentic self. That's why we come to college.

Cyborg's Story

I grew up in another state not far from Midwest Acres College. While my church and my community were diverse, my high school was predominantly White. So I was used to being in a predominantly White learning environment. Being in that environment has never been an issue for me. I think mainly because of my religion—as a Christian—my faith has kind of always been my main identity and everything else just falls after that. I just see each person as just another person and treat them as such. I guess growing up, race wasn't something that was too much on my mind. In high school, and even before, my teachers have always been really supportive of me and trying to get me to do my best work. I could tell that the teachers really cared about the students. I participated in a lot of sports in school, and did some things outside of school.

Although being a Black man isn't something I would really use as a descriptor of myself, it's something I would kind of more subconsciously think about. Growing up, my minority friends would see me as somebody's who's less Black because I didn't possess certain attributes and things that would be characteristically Black—like listening to hip-hop and playing basketball. So, being told that I act White, I tried to lean more towards sports that seemed more Black. So, for part of high school, I ran track, for example. Then I tried to not let that get to me and started doing things that were more interest to me. That's how I got into Nordic skiing. And people were like, "What? A Black guy doing Nordic skiing? Unheard of!" And so, I guess it was something that on the back of my mind—being Black.

When looking into colleges, I expected college to be a little bit like what's seen on TV with all these different kinds of groups of people and you gotta find your group. You know, your professors are gonna give you unrealistic expectations and not help you at all. There was a little bit of that kind of fear. But at the same time that's unrealistic for the most part. I also knew that at smaller colleges, the atmosphere was going to be different than if I went to a bigger college. So, I wouldn't be in a class of 10,000 students and the professor would be able to see me on the horizon. I already know that wasn't going to be my situation. I wanted to have a similar atmosphere as the high school I went to at home because I'd be more comfortable. I wanted to attend a small college because I work better in smaller classes—where I can have access to my professors and get help when I need it. Working in groups and having a smaller-knit community are things I thought would work better for me. So, when I found Midwest Acres College, the academic program was a big deciding factor for me. It was a small college with smaller class sizes and more diverse than other school I looked at. I wanted to be somewhere closer to home because I didn't know how I would react to being homesick, but I didn't want to be too close.

Here, there aren't as many people of color, but I knew it would be hard to have the same diversity as I do in my home city. I wasn't really having high expectations for that. The major I'm in is also not very diverse in terms of African Americans. I wasn't expecting that there'd be a lot of Black people in my classes because of the major. I didn't have a high expectation that many people would go into that field. A lot of the Black friends that I had have been more interest in business, engineering, or computer

science. I think of my role as providing a dispersion of "Hey, Black people can do anything," that Black people can succeed at anything.

Initially coming into Midwest Acres College, because I didn't plan on doing a sport or have a thing that I was a part of, I didn't make friends as quickly as I normally would. Finding that community is difficult. Growing up, sports and extracurriculars was a way for me to make friends. So, since I didn't do that coming in, I was slow at making friends. But then I met someone who lived on the floor below me, and then was introduced to a bunch of other friends and just began to meet people like that. I was looking for people who didn't necessarily have similar interests, but who kind of thought the same way I did. I made a pretty good friend group at the beginning of the year that way, and some of them were athletes. If I didn't have that initial friend group, I don't know where I'd be right now.

I did try out for an athletic team during my time at Midwest Acres College and got to know members of the team pretty well. That experience made me feel a bit more a part of the campus community as a whole. I knew more people and could meet more people through them. I enjoyed going to practices and hanging out with the team. Even the coach was really nice to me. I didn't make the team though. But, that made me realize that I didn't really want to be involved in sports. I guess the thing with College sports that doesn't really resonate with me is the level that people place it on in terms of importance in their personal life. Sports for me is on the same level as free time, where some others might put it higher on the list. I play sports because I enjoy the sport and I just didn't want to dedicate myself that much to something.

When I came to Midwest Acres, being a Black male wasn't something that was necessarily on my mind in terms of how people might treat me differently. Growing up I haven't really felt like I've been treated differently than anybody else cuz everybody is different back home. I have had experiences where people have asked, "As a Black guy, how do you feel about this situation?" So, I guess people feel like they need to be more cautious about what they say around me, at least initially. As a Christian, I try not to judge people in general because I don't know their situation of how they grew up and things that affected them to become who they are. So I try to view each person kind of as a clean slate and just judge based on what I know. Once people get to know me, they'll just kind of be more open about their opinions about stuff. I think if I just treat people as people, they're gonna treat me as a person. So, I don't think that being a Black male on campus has really affected me that much.

More so, though, my Black male identity is something I've been a little more aware of. Some of the people that I've met here obviously haven't grown up in an environment that's as diverse as where I live, or really even that diverse at all. So, they're gonna have certain assumptions or opinions about Black people and about Black men. So, I've taken it on myself to show people that you can't judge a book by its cover. When I interact with people, I just try to be my most genuine self and not try to play into any stereotypes or play away from any stereotypes. I just kind of be myself and allow those people to see that each person is an individual and that you can't just judge people based on things that you hear or things that you see on social media and whatnot. You have to judge each person for themselves.

As a Black male, I think about how, in the U.S., there seems to kind of be the authentic Black experience, which is sort of this idea that you have to do certain things and you have watch certain movies. You have to listen to certain music growing up and gone to barbecues and done all these activities to see and be seen as an authentic Black person. There's been those things that have been part of my experience growing up, but some of those things have not been part of my experience. So, when I'm thinking of myself in comparison to other Black males, I wonder, "Am I Black enough?" I've noticed that interacting with the guys I have at Midwest Acres, there have been certain aspect to stuff they talk about that is related to that. But, just having anything in common with another Black male makes me less concerned about those roles I feel like I need to fulfill and just get to looking at them like another person and talk to them as another person.

At Midwest Acres College, I feel embraced as a Black man because I don't feel like I've been treated differently than anybody else with the people I've interacted with. Though, because of experiences back at home with my minority friends growing up, I assumed that would be the case wherever I went, so I hadn't really sought out other Black males on campus. I was almost afraid that my Blackness would be invalidated if they were exhibiting more of a Black culture than I was. I assumed that a lot of minorities at Midwest Acres—or maybe at other private liberal arts colleges—would be similar to Black people back at home where if you don't do these things, you're not really Black. This year has slightly changed my perception of minorities that do go to liberal arts colleges. The fact that there are other people that might not fit as much in the Black stereotype has been eye-opening to me—putting into perspective the variety of people and some ideas we might have about things. Hanging out more with minorities that live

in my dorm and that I work with, I've realized they've had similar experiences as me. Being at a private liberal arts college, whatever kind of steps they've taken to get to that place has probably placed them in a different position than minorities that don't go to a liberal arts college—different interests or life experiences.

I don't believe there's really anything to do that I feel like I need to really hide my Black identity from anybody. The people in the surrounding town are super nice and always want to talk to you. Though, outside of town, I do think about my Blackness a bit more because it's not very many people that look like me. On campus, the culture is similar to real life. Generally people just like to be around people who look like them. It's more comforting. My roommate this year is another Black male on campus and has influenced some of the things that I've gotten involved in this year. Even hanging with other minorities on campus this year has been comforting.

Still, people don't fit into one type of mold. So since there's not many people of color here, I may still see a Black person in a group, though the rest may be White. I have friends of all cultures. The friends that have been in my classes, for example, have been the biggest thing that has motivated me. Seeing them putting as much work in as they do, knowing this stuff is frustrating—seeing them put in the hard work—makes me want to work hard. And being able to be there to help my friends encourages me.

Faculty and staff on campus are pretty good about making connections. My professors are pretty good about being available for help and making sure that people come to get help when they need it. In classes where it's easier to get ahold of the professor or talk to them, it makes me more willing to ask questions. One of my professors a lot of times wouldn't actually have meetings at his office. He would meet us

in places that students would usually already be studying and make himself more available in our environment rather than us having to go into his environment. That made it feel much more welcoming to ask for help. Another professor once had me and an few other students over for dinner and we met his family. He took us out to lunch another time. Having more of a casual relationship outside of class makes me more comfortable talking more about academic stuff also. It makes me not want to let my professors down and motivates me to do well in class.

With the whole social justice movement that's going on, I feel like the school addressed it as well as they could. Seeing the dynamic of people's views will be interesting. Being at a predominantly White institution, I honestly don't know what to expect from certain people. I've seen a lot of White people in the movement and backlash from other people. As a Black man I'm gonna be caught in it regardless. Before this kind of situation, I didn't really consider my Blackness as much. But now that stuff is unfolding—especially where I live—it's more apparent to me. It's something that I didn't really think was going to be of importance, but the world obviously has different plans. It's something I guess I need to be more conscious of. So, this year I've done some soul-searching I've just kind of tried to be more accepting of myself. Just because I don't act in a certain way, that doesn't take away from the color of my skin. I'm still gonna be Black. I am a Black male and that is me.

Lightning's Story

I grew up in a pretty diverse community in another state. My high school was pretty diverse also. I had all kinds of friends. I had Asian friends, Hispanic friends, Caucasian friends, Black friends. We were all there. Back then, it was mostly school,

school, school and do what you gotta do to stay focused. I didn't really socialize or party much. I've always been pretty good with school. I didn't have trouble studying like some of my peers. Of my peers, I've kind of been the one who likes to solve problems. So whenever they come to me for help, whether it's with schooling or with any personal issues, I always like to be able to listen and to do my best to help in any way I can.

In high school, I made great relationships with my teachers. It was easy for me to talk to them, go to them for questions, or just to see how they were doing because I like talking to people. In high school I also got involved as a student ambassador, in a college prep program, and a trivia club. It was a lot of fun.

Growing up, talking to my father about his experiences made me aware of my position as a Black man. I've always been Black, and I've always been a man. So those are just kind of essential to who I am. Being a Black man means that I have to be careful what I say to a White man because there are people who will assume the worst just because of how I look. And that's just the reality. People assume because I'm this tall, big Black man that I can be scary and intimidating. But honestly, I'm not like that at all. And people are just always surprised by that. Like, they see me and they're like, "Oh, you're nothing like we thought you would be." And I'm like, "What do you think I was gonna be like?" I've had that happen basically my whole life. I don't hold it against them because it's just kind of how it was. But it just kind of reminded me that people are going to judge you based on your appearance. That's just the reality, so I have to work through that. Because if I don't, then what am I gonna do with my life? Luckily for me, I've never experienced anything as bad as my father did.

I've always felt a little bit different than other Black men because most Black men are interested in sports. Sports is something I was never really interested in. I was always really interested in school and science and math and stuff like that. Because of that, I was different from my peers. Sometimes I felt like it made forming relationships with other Black peers a little difficult at first—because I was different from the norm, in essence. Growing up, my friends would say, "You're smart, you can just do this." I'm like, "You're smart too. It's not going to be the same for you, obviously, but if you ask for help, you're going to be able to get this." It's like they're scared about asking for help, or with schooling, or with anything outside of school as well. And I'm like, "You can just ask. There is no problem or there's no issue. It's not bad to want to better yourself, you know." But I feel like when it comes to sports, they're all on top of that, like they're supposed to be on top of that. And they are so much more than just basketball players.

Coming to college was a given. My parents and my sisters made that very clear. Going on to college wasn't even a question, it was a reality for me, and I know that for a lot of other African Americans, that's not always the case. I've talked with a lot of my friends and, let's just say, I've been very lucky and blessed to have a family that's very supportive of my future and my goals. I found out about Midwest Acres College in an online college search. I just kind of stumbled upon it. I looked into and really liked their program and thought, "What's the harm in applying?" I got in, and they game me so much money—way more than other schools. I didn't even have to take out a loan until this year—my senior year. I didn't expect college to be as challenging as it is. I expected to have fun and be on my own, but college is serious business and it's a lot of work. I want to make sure that I do well at this school because my dad puts in a lot of money and

time here. I'm not going to just waste everything that he's done. That's a big motivator for me.

When I came to Midwest Acres it was kind of a culture shock. I felt uncomfortable in my own skin because it's just so different and there are a lot of different people here and there's a lot to that. Being a Black man, it became more obvious that there's a difference because the school I'm at is predominantly White. There's not as much diversity here as I'm used to. So I started noticing pretty quickly that there is kind of a difference between my background and upbringing that with a lot of people's and theirs. For example, there was a community program working with the local school, but I didn't really know a lot about the city then. I was afraid that there might be an issue since I'm Black and there weren't a lot of Black people in town and I wasn't very sure if that could've caused any issues. Friends were just like, "Yeah, you should do it. We're doing it." But it's different for them. It's not their fault that I still have to think about stuff like that. When you're going to a new place, you have to worry if there are these issues here and if you're going to be a part of it. It was my freshman year in college. I didn't want any trouble or drama. I'm gonna have some fun, but you have to think about these things. Being Black is something you kind of have to live through to really know.

As a STEM major, it became very clear that not a lot African Americans were in that field. I felt that was a little weird. In high school, even my AP classes were diverse. It became very, very clear that wasn't the case at this school. I still made a lot of friends with all of the people around me because we wanted the same things, we had the same experiences, we were together through the same soul-crushing classes that make you want to pull your hair out. It brought us together. But again, they're different than me.

Their experiences are different. They don't really think the same way I do, and that became really, really clear in a lot of my classes and with some people. Like, for instance, I had one friend who is part Black, but could pass as White. We were joking around one day and he kind of made some reference to Roots in a joking manner. Basically, he was saying, "Don't whip me like Kunta Kente." And then he said it was okay because he's part Black. But I had to let him know, "You're only Black when you're making these remarks." That's not how that works.

Despite the lack of diversity, I still make a lot of friends and I don't think race and gender actually have affected who I've tried to make friends with. It seems like a lot of us interact with each other well across cultures. I have friends of all kinds of races and genders, and I've seen other Black males who are the same. Though, a good chunk of my friends are White because my classes are predominantly White. There are some instances that I feel different from a lot of people simply because I'm Black. Sometimes there are things me and other Black students can relate to that are different from White students and it's very clear there is a difference between us—the way we think about and see things. With my Black friends, I talk with them a lot and they're cool and easy to talk to. They understand me and it's just nice. Although we're all hanging out with different friends, I feel the Black community here is still very strong and present. We are able to commune and talk with each other with a lot of ease. I feel like we tend to group together and have each other's backs. I haven't really come across racism here. I have heard instances of racial intolerance that have made people feel unsafe and was told by other Black students to be vigilant and protect yourself and there are people who are around to support and help you.

When it came to engaging on campus, I mostly just focused in on finding a job and making money, because I want to be able to contribute to whatever was left over from the tuition as much as I could. Because, like my dad works really hard to make sure he pays for all the monthly installments, and each year it just keeps getting more and more expensive, doesn't really help. I know this with a lot of my friends, their parents were the ones who were just paying for everything they didn't really need to get the job. That's just not my experience at all. There were things I really wanted to do because it seemed like a lot of fun, but because I was working so much, I didn't really have as much time to get involved with any other groups or any other clubs or activities as much as I really wanted to in college. There were some days right after class I would go to work, I would go to dinner and then I'll go to my other job. And that was my day. I thought I would be more engaged than I am. I thought that in college I would kind of become a different person and that I would be more active and a little bit more outgoing. That didn't happen the way I thought it would. But I did what I felt like I needed to do. Because of that, I don't feel as connected to the school as I would've hoped by now.

All of this is not to say that I'm not engaged at all. I have gotten involved in some opportunities through my major. I have done some research and gotten a really cool internship that was truly a game-changer for me. I've also done some community engagement through my major that was really fun. This year, I've met new people by trying to be more engaging and talk to people more—have more conversations than I usually do. I've been able to hang out with friends. It's been a little hectic, but I was able to engage more with the other students that are here, learn more about them, and kind of make more relationships there. I've also tried engaging in the Black student group on

campus in my Freshman year, even though I couldn't get into it as much as I wanted. Though, the few times I went to meetings, there weren't that many of us, and that worried me. But, I didn't know what I could do about that. It kind of felt like everyone in that group was older and graduated, and us younger ones didn't really invest in it as much as we should have.

Overall, here, I've had some pretty good experiences. I think I'm treated pretty fairly and with respect. Wherever I am, I work hard and I do what I need to do and I think other people see that. I wouldn't say that I feel attacked, outcast, ostracized, or harassed. To say I feel embraced by the community, I don't know if I could say that either. I've never felt like I needed to hide parts of my identity. I've always been kind of open and honest about who I am and where I come from. I've never felt ashamed for anything like that. I know that other people have faced issues here at Midwest Acres College, I just don't know exactly what those situations are and if they were dealt with accordingly.

I know from my own experience that we have professors who care. I mean, they really do care, and they'll do whatever they can to help you through whatever issues that you find yourself in. Knowing that helped me a lot through school and throughout my classes. My relationship with my professors has been pretty good. I can talk to them about anything I'm worried about or stressed about. One professor is really great at making sure he's available whenever through emails and text. He would even have late night tutoring sessions. Another of my professors, in particular, gives me advice and I'm able to talk to them about how I feel about things outside of class. My advisor is great and she's always there to talk, to give advice, or to give us a hug—anything that we needed. That has helped me in so many ways because college can be a little stressful—

mentally, physically, and emotionally. Seeing professors outside of class and with their families shows me they're a real person and not just a professor. And even my bosses in my jobs are great to talk to. Just these relationships to know that other people care about your well-being is really, really helpful and it just makes everything so much easier.

With everything that's going on with George Floyd and hate crimes, I wonder where should I go after college that I would feel the safest. I feel like nowhere is safe and what should I do about that? When will this not be a problem and finally and completely change? What's scary the most is just, you don't really know if you're safe anywhere in the country. When you're going to a new place you have to worry if there are these issues here and if you're going to be a part of it. You go somewhere, you think you're safe, but there are all these people who have interesting views. And now it seems like they're just coming out of the shadows and attacking people for no reason. What if one of these day's it's me? When will it stop? When will it change? I just don't know what to do. I want to do something. I want to make a change. I just don't know how.

Afro's Story

I grew up in a state not far from Midwest Acres. My grammar school was all Black, so that's something I was used to. My high school, though, was really diverse. So when it came time for me to get out of that space the all Black space, it was kind of an elevation for me. I felt the growth in myself as being able to communicate with everybody else. In the area I was in, we had people of all walks. We'd have Asian students, Latinx students, White students, Black students. It was a perfect mix. Coming to college, I kind of carried that same thing of me being around people of all different walks. Of course being at a PWI, I had to get used to that aspect of it. That wasn't too

hard to adjust to. But of course at times it'd be a different shift because it's not the high school setting anymore. It's more grown; you'll see all types of different attitudes different people.

In high school, with a lot of my teachers, we had all these built relationships because the school was built on that sort of sense of family bonding. We had gender-separate campuses, but together we were all family, and that's how it would work. So me being in my section, it was always a thing of brotherhood, and then respect for any of our teachers, any of our elders, and anyone who came through the doors—whether they're an alumni or another parent bringing their child to attend. There, it was like they really didn't see color. It didn't matter what you were, you were one of us and we are here for you. Always being able to with a teacher helped me to succeed in high school. They just really made an impact on me as far as what they taught me and the ideals we carry as far as what to expect from people and how to deal with them.

Throughout high school, it was a thing of me finding myself. Kids of my age group were doing more adult things. I was in my own separate lane doing whatever. I was finding out a lot about life itself and how I saw myself as a Black man. From youth, it was ingrained in me just how things can be and how they are. I always kept in mind that I could have a target on my back and wouldn't even know it. No matter how bright, how talented, how articulate I am, someone was always going to have some different perception. Everybody gets their perception, but regardless of what that is, I still have to be me and I have to find what it is for me to be a Black man. And I'm still doing that as life continues. So, before college, I was searching for answers.

Growing up, I looked to my Grandad mostly for guidance as far as financial things, or he would give me motivation and say, "As long as you do good, you got this." But most of the time I was searching for answers, I really just kind of found it myself in all of the settings that I put myself in. I learned everything that I needed to learn from that life experience. It's not something that was just told to me; and I feel like I got a lot more out of that. And I still continue to do that because you can get guidance from somebody, but when they try to guide you completely their way, then you lose out on sculpting that pathway for yourself.

Moving on to college, I felt like it was going to be like another endeavor. I knew that whatever college choice I made, I wanna stick with it and make that move. I didn't want to go to a HBCU because then I felt like everybody's perception—whether it be my family or friends— of be a "proud Black man" and have that specific image on me. So I decided to do something different with where I went. When Midwest Acres College was introduced to me, I thought, "Okay, that's far enough for me to drive but also for [my family] to want to visit me. So I'm gonna go here and start figuring stuff out. I'm gonna go meet some more people. I'm gonna do some more life learning."

My high school counselor told me about Midwest Acres and told me to talk to one of our teachers who was actually an alumni. The teacher gave me the whole rundown about the school and how it got him where he was. So, I looked into the school a lot more, did all the requirements, sent off my materials, and got the acceptance. There were also a bunch of other things that made me want to get involved, like the scholarship I received. Seeing how my financial aid kicked in, I decided this was doable. I could have chose any other school and we would've found a way to pay. But I didn't know how to

necessarily fully put a price on my education. I went wherever my heart told me to go, really.

Being at a close-knit high school prepared me for being at Midwest Acres. I had visited the campus already a couple of times. When I got to Midwest Acres, it was everything I wanted it to be really. This was my new oasis—my home away from home—and I'm gonna make a way for myself here. I was ready to meet more people. Before I left home, I was kind of antisocial. But when I got there, all the friends that were with me as the days went along just called me a social butterfly. I was ready and was more excited. I was ready to reach out and take whatever I can get from it.

One thing I had to get used to coming here was people not being used to seeing people of my skin color. There were a select few others who shared that same experience with me. Being at Midwest Acres, I met my go-to friends. I met a few of those people who I feel like are going to be those friends for life. Seeing all the student groups and meeting everybody else who's really down to hang out and me participating in different thing made me grow more as a person. I became a lot more social about who and what I got involved in. My work ethic also changed in college because I didn't want to seem like that one student who be falling off around everybody, or like the party animal or anything. I was figuring out how I wanted to display myself to the rest of the world.

Every Black man has their separate experience as to how they gon' do, so I don't really compare myself to others. I can't compare myself to the athletes because they have their specific place—their specific things that they are going to experience. I can't compare myself really to Black people in faculty because I see them as not only family, but they're still administrators. So, that's another support system. Going to a party and

being one of the only two Black people there, it was a weird feeling. My mom and other people told me not to become that token Black kid. So, being at a PWI, it's not gonna be a thing of becoming the point of entertainment or the focal point of the party, like "Oh yeah. Tell me about this. You rap? You do this? You play basketball?" Just various things like that. Having multiple White friends in high school, I was used to having White friends; and I still talk to them to this day. But being around most of their ritualistic parties, it's a weird culture. Some of it I can get down with. Some of it wasn't for me. So, most of the time in recent years, I've just been doing a lot of activities on my own or finding more people like me—other Black students—to do more activities with.

I didn't really have any issues getting connected to the college. I found it very easy to talk to everybody. I didn't feel any distasteful feeling from anybody as I was talking to them wanting to know some stuff. If I did feel something like that I just leave it alone and just go somewhere else. But most of the time it was very easy to get in contact with somebody. It's a small campus, so you'll always run into somebody and have a quick convo. Race didn't really play much of a part in creating friendships on campus. It's mostly, like, the contents of our character when I meet somebody. Seeing someone in passing, being in the same class, coming from class, at lunch, working on a project— we'd connect like that. Then I'd get to know more people when somebody would introduce me to somebody else.

Here at Midwest Acres, it's not that many Black students. They're either involved in sports or Greek life. That's not really a lane I gravitate towards. Sometimes we end up at the same party or something like that, or we'd all be going to some event and link up like that and talk more. Sometimes I eat meals with them. It's really easy to connect with

them. It's just that we're on different schedules or broken up into our factions a lot of the times. I have White friends, but I feel like my social battery will go out being around the usual White people, just because the either want to drink, smoke, watch some obscure show, talk about women or whatever. I decided I'mma save my energy for myself and for somebody else who I can actually connect with like that. So, connecting with other Black students—even some of the athletes—we bonded over things like getting haircuts together. We were talking about potentially living with each other. And I just felt a lot better with that because these are people I can actually talk with about stuff that's really relevant between us. That's my growth, just being at the school with people and just knowing where I stand on that stuff. Having somebody that you can relate to is a positive impact.

I see Black males on campus involved in science, English, education, athletics, student government, Slam Poets Society. Very rarely I see them involved in my major. Coming to a PWI, it's a bit unsettling because you're the minority in a minority. With me being a Black man, I'm already a part of the disenfranchised party. So I make sure that I focus on getting a good GPA. That's how I'm gonna look good on paper. For me to work below "average" anything like that would kind of just hinder that. I make it goal to always look good on, and off, paper. I'm going to get my job done when I get the required grade to pass and above that and set an example. Regardless of what perceptions other students or the teacher may have upon me coming in class, I'm here to defy all of that and let it be known, "He's strictly business. Plain and simple." So let's just do absolute greatness, cuz that's what I'm all about. That what I strive to do.

I've had a few negative experiences with professors, but I've had some good experiences too. There have been times where professors come in, present, and leave and I can't get much out of that. I can't really say much to them. If they're not going to try to be engaged, then I'm not going to try to be engaged. I try to give the same energy they give. I'm someone who likes to get thoroughly involved in conversation with my professors about topics to show them that I'm learning from them. When I come across professors that I can really talk with like that on a personal level, I feel a lot more comfortable to reach out if I need help. There are professors that will text, reach out, email, or speak to me if they see me around campus. That personal approach really helps instead of a professor who just says, "Alright. Here are my office hours," present, class, walk away.

Being here, I haven't come across any example of professors treating me different as a Black man, nor have I had any negative encounters with campus or local authority. So, I feel like Midwest Acres values me as another student. The school itself has a new student orientation for students of different racial backgrounds. So, it's like, they value these students' contribution to the campus life itself. I feel like that applies to me as a Black man too, and that adds more to our racial background. It's a positive look. I feel like, though, that a lot of the things they may do or put in place will serve a little bit as an appeasement just to say we did this—a sort of showmanship to make you feel more comfortable and at the same time, it's not allowing so much comfortability. It gives way to the majority White to further instill how it is they run things around here. The White culture of the college has their set ideals of how they function around campus. Most of the campus spaces belong to them. By them I mean the heterosexual White male. The

college kind of caters to that demographic more so than it would other racial backgrounds. To make this a safe space for students of color, there just needs to be a bigger population of Black people at the college to further push that agenda.

To sum up everything, I feel like it all comes down to the ability of adaptation here. You can't control what happens, but you can control how you react. And me choosing this space—me choosing this institution to come to—that's an initial choice. I couldn't choose all that would come with it. I didn't know all that would come with it. All I can do is control how I would react to it. The best bet for that has been adaptation, regardless of all the things I feel the institution can do as a means of change to make it a better place for Black males, Black females, or any other racial background to pursue their education. At the end of the day, it all comes down to how much you can adapt because the system is only going to flip so much. My experience is to learn how to buckle down, adapt to what it is going on around you, and continue to get after what it is you want.

2020 events of racial unrest have made me carry myself different. Instead of exerting a lot of energies and stuff, I'm more reserved and smarter about the way I move and the things I say. I took a trip to George Floyd square during a break one time. Taking that trip helped me to realize that I'm getting older, and being older as a Black man is a lot more dangerous cuz I'm being perceived as more of a threat the further I go. I mean, somebody could look at me as a threat even if I was a 13-year-old. But with more age just comes more danger. Just seeing the realities of what's going on right now to fight against the injustices of inequalities in America lets me know that any day, it could happen to me too. And it was weird. So, it's just like, a lot can happen in a short period of time. I just

had to come to grips with that. This is the reality we live in, and at some point I'm going to be out here. I'm sheltered here in this dorm room. But as I get closer to graduating, how I carry myself as an adult Black man now had to change as we get closer and closer to this close and chapter of life in college. That experience really helped me to have perspective on guiding others. With quarantine, I can't give hands on explanations or have a talk with somebody to let them know that these are the breaks. But I can give guidance and consolation from afar.

Summary

These four counterstories from this study's co-researchers provide insight into their individual experiences as Black males. Through their narratives, we can gain vision into their varied backgrounds, experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding being Black at Midwest Acres College. Further, we may gain understanding into their varied experiences and perceptions of what it means to each of them to be a Black man in general. Next, as previously stated, the research questions guided the findings of their greater collective story.

Being Black at a SPLAC: Findings and Data Analysis

The individual character stories of Afro, Cyborg, Lightning, and Panther are valuable constructions which provide insight into each co-researcher's story. First, they illustrate co-researchers' pre-college educational experiences. This information allows for further interpretation of their transactional experiences with their peers and teachers, the demographics of their high schools and communities, and their engagement prior to college. Second, these stories illuminate co-researchers' perspectives on how they view their Black male identities. This enables enlightenment regarding how each Black male

has formed his image, ideas, and perspectives as a Black male, which may help to further identify how each of them make meaning of their life and educational experiences. Third, these stories highlight the transactional relationship each co-researcher has with Midwest Acres College. Not only does it demonstrate the transaction relationship, it demonstrates the transformative relationship each one has with the campus ecology and the identification of the race-space dynamic for each of them.

Setting the Scene

Researchers have tied various social elements to student academic success. Campus racial composition, for example, has been tied to student satisfaction (Allen, 1992), student involvement (Allen, 1992; Brooms, 2017; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014), student departure and sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2013; Tinto, 1987); student integration (Davis, 1994; Tinto, 2013) and academic success (Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984). Further, student engagement has been associated with college adjustment (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003), critical thinking and intellectual skill development (Anaya, 1996, Baxter Magolda, 1992, Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2006), diversity competence (Hu & Kuh, 2003), psychosocial development and positive self-image (Bandura, Peluso, Ortman, & Millard, 2000; Pike, 2000), and persistence rates (Berger and Milem, 1999; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Tinto, 1987). Tinto (1987) postulated that student engagement is tied to a student's sense of belonging: the mutually beneficial relationship of mattering between the student and the greater collective (Strayhorn 2012). Thus, lack of congruence between a student and his college environment may lead to alienation (Mann, 2001; Krause, 2005, Tinto,

1987), alternative engagement (Krause, 2005), and potentially student departure (Tinto, 1987).

Small, private liberal arts colleges, such as Midwest Acres College (pseudonym) have been theorized as providing students with distinctive educational experiences above other institution types, namely in the areas of student academic engagement—such as superior teaching quality and focus (Pascarella, Wang, Trolian, & Blaich, 2013; Seifert, Pascarella, Goodman, Salisbury, & Blaich, 2010)—and social engagement—such as greater interactional diversity (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). For Black males, attendance at SPLACs better engaged students in Chickering and Gamson's (1987) good practices in undergraduate education above other institution types and similar to that of HBCUs (Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella, 2006). However, compared to their White peers, African American students found their SPLACs to be more racialized and unsupportive spaces (Allen, 2018; Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Littleton, 2001; Snyder & Custer, 2017; Watson & Kuh, 1996). Still, Fleming (1984) and Littleton (2001) also revealed that Black students, particularly Black males, found greater academic success at these institutions, than at larger institutions.

Midwest Acres College is a predominantly White SPLAC in the Midwest that is classified through Carnegie Classification as a four-year arts and science focused college that have a very high to exclusive undergraduate population, are small or very small, and highly residential (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, n.d.). According to the College Navigator data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (n.d). it has a demographic of under 1,500 students, with a near 50% male to female ratio, a Black student population of less than 10%, and a White student

enrollment of just under 70%. The Black males in this study learned about the college through various media. For example, Afro heard about from a school guidance counselor, Panther learned about it through a friend of his mother, Lightning discovered in in an online college search, and Cyborg found it through a search for nearby small colleges. Each of them, however, chose to attend the college due to the significance of the academic programs each of them was considering, the college's proximity to home, and the small intimate size of the college. The amount of financial assistance each Black male was offered by Midwest Acres College was also an important determining factor.

The co-researchers in this study were from various cities and states and each come from a variety of school and community settings. Panther and Cyborg reported coming from predominantly White high schools. However, Panther reported his community was also predominantly White, while Cyborg reported more diversity in his community. Afro and Lighting reported coming from more diverse high schools and diverse communities. For each of them, campus diversity was perceived based on their school and community demographics and previous experiences with meaningful relationships with someone who was White (Ariza & Berkley, 2009; Davis, 1994; Woldoff et al., 2011). Despite having had meaningful relationships with someone who was White, Afro, Cyborg, and Lightning did not find the campus to be very diverse. For example, Cyborg and Lightning gave the statements below:

> Cyborg: There's not as many people of color, and I knew since my city and surrounding cities were diverse, I was like, well, it's kind for hard to have that when you're in this state. I wasn't really having high expectations for that.

Lightning: In my year, I can only think of one other person that's Black. Most of the other students were White. I felt that was a little weird because in my high school, most of my classes were pretty diverse. Even the AP classes, there were still a little bit more diversity. So when I came here, that became very clear that wasn't the case here at this school…Especially for me, when you come from a place that's pretty diverse, and then you go to a place that's predominantly White, is kind of a culture shock because it's a big difference shoved in your face.

Panther, however, found Midwest Acres to be extremely diverse:

I really just love the campus. A lot of that has to do with how diverse, for me, it is at least. My expectations were like okay, it's basically pretty, what you might call it, not a very diverse school. Since it's a private school is probably going to be just like my high school. I didn't have too many expectations, but I think once I got there, I realized that maybe I did have expectations. I was like, "Whoa! This really college! Like, people are from everywhere." I was expecting people to mostly be from the state, but no while only a small percentage of the people are actually from here, that threw me off guard. I like that, just how different people were and how many different places they can come from.

Upon their arrival to the college, the co-researchers reported that their initial introduction to Midwest Acres, while not particularly racially problematic for most of the Black males, came with some social challenges. Afro, Cyborg, and Lightning reported the following:

Afro: Upon coming on, one thing I had to get used to was people not being used

to seeing people of my skin color and how there's a select few of others who

share that same experience with you.

Cyborg: Initially when I was here, because I didn't plan on doing a sport at

Midwest Acres, I didn't make friends as quickly as I normally would.

Lightning: When I came here, though, it's just was kind of like a culture shock. I

kind of felt uncomfortable in my own skin.

The stories following co-researchers' arrival to Midwest Acres College fall into

four main themes, derived from using the four-step data analysis inspired by Spradley's

(1979) ethnographic analysis methods. The main themes—developed from tying the

cultural terms of Black males to an aspect of another term, then bundling these domains

into taxonomies, then themes—provide some interpretation of how Black males made

meaning of their education experiences at Midwest Acres College. The greater themes

discovered were (a) experiences of being a Black male; (b), constituents of Black male

bonding; (c) aids in the performance of Black male coping at a PWI; and (d) attributes of

the campus ecology. Within these themes are sub-themes which provide a deeper look

into the co-researcher's experiences.

Experiences of Being a Black Male

Prevalent in the data, and as a major focus in the research, is the being of a Black

male. Given the prevalence of this in our co-researcher's lives, this theme encapsulates

all of the experiences of our Black males throughout their lives. This data truly disperses

across all of the themes. Thus, the subthemes simply provide a window into these experiences.

Per the interview protocol (Appendix C), Black males were asked what it meant to them to be a Black man prior to attending Midwest Acres College. Each Black male's character story illuminated the differences in ways in which Black males are socialized in their identities. For example, Afro reported having been made aware of the possibility of having a target on his back as a Black man as a youth, then exploring life as a Black man through his own experiences. Lightning reported having learned about struggles that Black men may have faced from his father as well as from his own experience of being perceived a threatening Black man—especially because of his look and height. For Cyborg, being a Black man wasn't something he considered to be a salient part of his identity, yet subconsciously, it was always in the back of his mind in the way that he was perceived as being less Black and trying to fit into what he considered to be the Black male stereotype. Panther, being a first generation Black American, imparted being proud of his being a Black American man as well as his African roots and culture and sought out positive images and characteristics of Black males in his friends, family, history, and the media.

Characteristics of "Acting White". Some co-researchers stories yielded elements of ways in which our Black males were considered not Black. Panther and Cyborg each talked about the ways in which they were perceived as less Black growing up. Panther noted that, being in a predominantly White high school and community, he had culture shock being around other Black people because it wasn't something he was

used to. However, in his community and with his family, he was accused of "being White" because of the way he sounded when he spoke:

> I've noticed classmates, like sometimes I get, "Hey, you're pretty White." Like, you really felt the need to tell me that?...I'll be on the phone with my cousins while I'm in school, and they'll be like, "Who's that White person you're talking to?"

For Cyborg, his experiences in listening to different music and liking sports that may not be considered "Black" generated criticisms of him not "being Black."

> One of the comments I've always heard when I was growing up was, "Cyborg, you act so White," and things along the lines of that. It was something I always tried not to let get to me. But I would kind of, maybe, lean towards doing sports that were, I guess, seemed more Black. So, when I was younger, I tried doing basketball for a little bit. But I ended up not really liking it as much. Then I did track and field. That was kind of like my big thing at least when I was in junior high, and then part of high school.

Negative Social Perceptions of Black Males. In addition to being perceived as acting White, the Black males in this study elucidate how they are perceived in the greater social sphere due to embedded racism and racial primes. These are the reproaches which surround institutions and mechanize the race-space framework both inside and outside of education institutions. Black males reported that being dangerous and being a threat are ways in which they may be perceived in the greater social space. Afro and Lightning highlighted their perceptions:

Afro: I'm getting older, and being older as a Black man is a lot more dangerous

cuz I'm being perceived as more of a threat the further I go. I mean, like,

somebody could look at me as a threat even if I was a 13-year old or something

like that. But it's like with more age just comes more danger.

Lightning: Because I'm this tall Black man, people assume I'm this scary and,

ooh intimidating…But honestly, I'm just not like that at all. And people are just

always surprised by that. They see me, and then they talk with me and they're

like, "Oh, you're nothing like we through you would be." And I'm like, "What do

you think I was gonna be like?"

Results of Perceptions of Black Males. As a result of the societal perceptions,

typically the racial primes, placed on Black males, co-researchers purported that being a

part of a disenfranchised party, having to work twice as hard for their success, having to

be more mindful of how they interact with someone who is White, racial battle fatigue

(Smith, 2009), stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), and even fear for their own

safety after graduating college are things that they've experienced. These experiences

include previous statements of being criticized by both Black and White friends, family,

and acquaintances. Conversely, the Black males in this study discussed White peers being

cautious about what is said around Black students, particularly in light of the more recent

cultural unrest having occurred in the U.S. during 2020. For example, Panther described

the reluctance of White students to speak up in class during a conversation of race:

I wonder what conversations are like when Black students aren't in the room.

Because I feel like when we are in the room, people who are aware, kind of, like,

afraid to speak their mind…There were two Black people in the class. I felt like I was the one who had the most things to say. This was a day when we were talking about race and how race is made up. It's just something that was used to kind of stratify people and that there's really just the human race. So when we were talking, I felt like the other people had different opinions, but no one really was very vocal. I feel like if I wasn't in the class—if all the Black students were not in the class—I'm just curious what kind of conversations would go on, like, what those White students, what would be the opinions that would come out.

Further, Lightning and Panther described their experiences with stereotype threat:

Lightning: So, at the school, they do something with the community. And I was thinking about joining my freshman year, but then I didn't really know a lot about the city back then. I was afraid that there might be an issue since I'm Black, and there weren't a lot of Black people here and I'm not very sure if that would've caused any issues. I just kind of held back from that.

Panther: I try not to be the stereotype, which I hate it when I get to class late, like, the last person. Of course, the only Black person in class…And then, I think consistently, it like the last two Black students to come in, like 10 minutes late. So it kind of makes me be more aware of that. And not that anyone should really care or assume "it's because they're Black." I just kind of want to represent myself in a better way…I want to put my best face forward—especially as a Black student.

Cyborg in particular brought forth his perspective on connecting with other Black males based on experiences of the criticisms by other Black people of acting White. Thus, the results of the perceptions of being a Black male where reciprocal. Cyborg reported:

> I feel like this year has changed slightly my perception of minorities that do go to private liberal arts college or the kind of people that I've been interacting with. I have a friend who, he's like super duper into 70's classic rock. I just think that's so hilarious. But he loves it so much. I guess before this year, I think I might not have gotten to know that side of him. I think that was nice just understanding a little bit more of the variety. I think it kind of just puts everything into perspective that some ideas that we might have about things, like, there's not a one size fit all for really anything.

The Reasons Why Black is Not a Monolith. The Black males in this study further elucidate that being Black—being a Black male— is not a singular or monolithic experience, culture, personality, or set of values. For example, Panther noted that it's a universe of what Black is out there:

> I think, especially during my freshman year, realizing like Black is so much more than. There's American black. You got the Bahamas, Jamaica, people in Europe and Asia. It's so big.

Cyborg's previous statement describing his friend who enjoyed 70's classic rock echoes the idea that Black is so much more than a singular perception. When asked how they might have felt that they had to hide their identity, unanimously the co-researchers stated in their interviews that they didn't feel the need, nor have the desire to hide their Black male identity. Then when asked how they may compare themselves to other Black males

and Black people, the Black males each provided various answers that allowed them to highlight their differences. Afro's statement reported how he views being a Black male in regards to peers and faculty:

> Every Black man has their separate experience as to how they gon' do. I can't compare myself to the athletes because they have their specific place, their specific lane or like the things that they're going to experience. I can't compare myself really to Black people in faculty like that because I see them as not only family, in a way, but they're still administrators. So that's like a step up that another support system, really.

Transactional Relationship of Being a Black Male at a SPLAC. At Midwest Acres College, the co-researchers discussed the various ways that being a Black male contributed to their being a student at their SPLAC and, reciprocally, how being a student at Midwest Acres College contributed to their being a Black man. Some of the characteristics of this transactional relationship included changing the way they communicated with others, the way they viewed their own Blackness, and self-acceptance. They expressed a range of feelings from discomfort to excitement. Lightning, for example expressed throughout his story how being a Black male at a PWI created extreme discomfort for him in his own skin. Contrarily, Panther's earlier statement showed that he enjoyed the diversity at Midwest Acres and being able to connect with not only other Black men, but other students of a plethora of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This engagement, in turn, encouraged his growth as a Black male at Midwest Acres. For example, Panther and Cyborg highlighted their transactional relationships within the campus ecology of Midwest Acres College:

Panther: [Becoming a student at Midwest Acres] has made me more vocal about

certain things—especially during of the whole campaign and Trump and

everything. And your college, a lot of people have different opinions. I feel like it

made me get into more conversations in terms of identity…With the friend group

I surround myself with, we were okay wit having conversations that might be

controversial to some. So, I feel like it kind of made me engage more in dialogue.

Cyborg: Over this last year, I've done a lot of soul searching and just trying to

figure out who I am and who I want to be—making sure that stand up for those

things. I just kind of tried to be more accepting of myself. Just because I don't act

in a certain way, that doesn't take away from the color of my skin. I'm still gonna

be Black. I am a Black male and that is me.

Onlyness (Harper et al., 2011) was another characteristic of the transactional

relationship between Black males and their campus ecological system. Each of the Black

males in this study highlighted the lack of Black students not only in their classes, but in

their STEM majors and at Midwest Acres College overall. Afro, like Littleton (2001),

noted that being at a SPLAC made Black males like him a minority within a minority and

described it as unsettling. Onlyness, as Afro further explained in his counterstory,

contributed to the racial battle fatigue that he and other Black males at Midwest Acres

College may endure. This is further noted in the themes *Black Male Bonding* and *Aids in

the Performance of Black Male Coping at a SPLAC.* Related to onlyness and racial battle

fatigue, Afro and Lighting mentioned cultural incongruence with how they both "fit" and

"don't fit" into the campus culture, which lead to considerations of departure from the college:

> Afro: So, we get students from all over, just about. But, it's not that much of variety that comes to the campus. They just all kind of then get lumped into this one culture of campus and things like that…And me being a Black man from an urban area, I feel like that was being the overarching culture of campus. I don't fit into that. That same thing applies to anybody else who may be…I'mma just say it: not White. When they come here, it's something different.

> Lightning: I wouldn't say that I feel attacked [at Midwest Acres College] or outcast or ostracized, or harassed. But to say that I feel completely embraced by the community—I don't know if I could say that either.

Defining Engagement

Before moving through the other key themes, it's important to integrate the question of how Black males make meaning of their education experiences at Midwest Acres College with how the co-researcher's experiences influence their engagement decisions. The next three themes pertain to describing Black male academic and social engagement decisions in relation to their experiences within the campus ecological system at Midwest Acres College. First, each co-researcher was asked how he defined engagement. Panther explained that engagement is about investing with genuine interest:

> I would define engagement as just doing something that genuinely interests you, because if you're doing it not just to have something on your resume, but really something that is interesting to you, you're willing to go more all out on it.

You're really willing to go all out on it and it's not going to be something that you're going to really be lazy about or procrastinate on because you really enjoying being around that group of people or being around that kind of activity.

…It's really about getting more experiences under my belt so I can just evolve.

Afro asserted that being engaged was a symbol of empowerment in terms of speaking out and reaching out to other students:

So, me being involved, I just kind of reach out and try to empower students to want to further break that bubble of comfortability and learn more about what's around you. So you can get involved and find some sort of enrichment in it.

Cyborg furthered Afro's mention of being enriched through engagement:

I also think that being engaged you don't necessarily have to go to everything but you kind of have to be open to things, because they might have a cooking seminar or something. And, like, cooking might not be your thing, but, let's say you don't know how to cook and you're like, "Oh, this might be really helpful," and so you'll like go to it. And then maybe you'll end up liking it. And, so I think being engaged, like, you don't necessarily always need to be going to things, but I think being open to go to things is important in terms of being engaged.

Krause (2005), Trowler (2010), and Fleming (1984) each noted alternatives ways that Black males may engage in the campus ecology due to alienation or isolation. An example of alternative engagement that Black males in Brooms (2017) reported is to "just do me", which is noted later as a coping mechanism. For Lightning, though, his main form of engagement was work. Work, for him was not in response to any alienation or isolation. Rather, he reported it to be a way to honor his father's work in paying for his

college education and to help out in doing so. With work as his main form of engagement, he reported feeling disconnected from the campus ecology as a whole:

> I don't feel as connected to the school as I would have hoped I felt by now. I guess that's the real, honest answer. Like, my freshman and sophomore year, I was invited to join fraternities. I was invited to join clubs and invited to go out and kind of get involved in other activities. I just was always working all the time. And most of the time afterwards when I was not working, I was tired—didn't feel like trying to go out and trying to socialize. And all I really wanted to do was just go back to my room, watch a movie, or read a book.

As someone who considered himself less engaged, he believed that it may have rendered him as someone less approachable than other students who were more engaged. Nevertheless, he reported the many ways that he interacted with the campus ecology to be engaged in various ways. Cyborg also discussed how being less engaged made him feel as a member of the campus community:

> I didn't really feel like I was engaged when I was at college just because I didn't always want to go to things because, like, it just didn't seem interesting to me. And so I felt bad. I'm like, "Oh, I'm being a bad college student because I'm not being involved on campus." But when they did have things that were interesting to me, I would go to them. So I think that I was still being engaged.

Constituents of Black Male Bonding

Each of the Black males discussed how they went about making friends and connecting with others at Midwest Acres College. For each of them, those bonds that were created also served as characteristics of their transactional relationship with the

campus ecology. Cyborg especially noted the importance of the relationships that were built through engagement:

> I thought about this a lot recently, actually, and I think one of the most important things to me is, like, relationships that I build with people. I thought about, like, "Okay, what type of things are important to me in this life?" … And so kind of having those close relationships is something I think is really important. So when I'm doing activities and stuff on campus, I'm not really always doing it to just do the activity, but I'm just trying to build those relationships with people that might have similar interests as me. It's something that I think is really important to me now. I guess, before I didn't really realize what I was looking for when I was doing activities. But now that I kind of think about that, I do it to kind of maintain those relationships with people that I like hanging out with.

Panther echoed Cyborg's belief that the relationships that are built through engagement are imperative:

> Sometimes it's about the activity, but sometimes, less the activity, more of the people I get to meet. I feel like connections are the biggest thing. You get to build those long-lasting relationships. And, sometimes those relationships end up helping you write an essay for your class or doing some peer review.

In addition to engaging with their peers, informal engagement with faculty and staff outside of class was reported to be a great factor in not only having a closer relationship with a faculty member, but how that relationship influenced their academic engagement. Lightning and Cyborg reported the following:

Lightning: Once you have more of a personal relationship with your professor, you feel a lot more comfortable with them. It's easier to ask questions when you're concerned or get help when you need it. And it just improves your academic performance. It just does, because you're that much more comfortable. And when you're less stressed about something or situation, it's easier for your brain to kind of work through anything, needs to think clearer. And then you just do better in the class.

Cyborg: My advisor for my minor, she's super nice and I love her. I'll see her sometimes. Like, she'll come eat in the cafeteria. And, so if she sees me in there she'll come talk to me. And so in terms of, like, when I'm in class, even if I'm not really having issues, I'll just be more willing to go talk to her. And so I guess having a more casual relationship makes me feel more comfortable in terms of talking about my academic stuff. But also it makes me just wanna not let her down. Doing well in my classes, it motivates me a little bit. Because I'm like, "Okay. We're best friends. We can just stay nice friends and I do well."

Ways that Black Males Interact Cross-Culturally. The co-researchers not only mentioned that they have friends of various identities, but notice that other Black males interact with diverse groups of friends as well—especially given the small size of Midwest Acres and the low number of Black males on campus. Overall, however, being a Black male at Midwest Acres College, despite having friends of various identities, meant speaking or behaving different—particularly with White friends. Cyborg and Lightning confirmed their experiences:

Cyborg: Code Switching. I definitely have experience doing that. And at this

point, it's kind of just natural. Like, if you're around White people, you use

different vocabulary than if you're around Black people. So, that's something I

wasn't really too aware of but I would notice that I do it.

Lightning: With some of my friends who are White and female, I do tend to make

sure that I don't accidentally find myself in a compromising position, just in case

things happen—just in case it looks bad for me. There are instances where, just

because you are Black and you're a man, you will be considered a liar if some

things are said about anything that you've done. And I don't want to find myself

in that position. So, I do have friends who are white females, obviously. I do

make sure that I'm not alone in rooms or anything like that. I try to—unless I

completely and utterly trust them, when I do have a few friends who are like that.

But other than that, I'm like, "No. Let's go out here and let's be out in public with

people you know."

Black Kinship. One form of bonding that was reported to somewhat counteract

the co-researcher's needs to navigate being a Black male at a SPLAC was that with other

Black people on campus. Although developing friendships of any kind were reported by

the Black males at Midwest Acres to be beneficial to their development, the co-

researchers noted that making connections with other Black people on campus was

important and beneficial for their sense of belonging. For example, Lightning contended:

I just see my friends talking with their friends, you know, having good time,

having good conversations. Honestly, I feel like, though, I felt the black

community here is still very present. We still are able to just kind of commune

with each other and talk with each other with a lot of ease. I feel like we are all

pretty connected and understanding because you know when you're in a

predominantly white area, a lot of times, we tend to group together and have each

other's backs. So, I feel like that community is still very present and strong here.

Black male kinship, Black student kinship, and Black kinship overall were considerable

topics through the co-researchers' counterstories. This particular subtheme, identifying

ways in which Black males—Black people—connect and create community, actually

encompassed, and is integrated throughout, various other themes and subthemes of the

research.

Ways in which Black male kinship was reported to be experienced were through

informal engagement with other students, student organizations, and even through

activities hosted by the college or a student organization, as magnified by Afro's

statement:

> Every once in a while the school will invite artists or comedians to come through.
>
> Sometimes a group will invite other artists or writers to come share their material.
>
> That right there—just connecting with someone who's also a minority—that just
>
> builds up that whole thing of me being welcome here. Like, "Okay. This is
>
> something I can relate with," because they may come from where I come from or
>
> experience the same things I experienced in being a minority in this country. That
>
> comes with a lot of experiences that White people may not have come across. So
>
> having those sorts of things, those sort of displays right there, it just gives people
>
> incentive to get involved more.

The co-researchers also illuminated the reciprocal relationship of Black male kinship and Black male sense of belonging in that Black kinship contributed to Black male sense of belonging and Black male sense of belonging was a result of, or reason for, Black kinship. For example, Panther noted that Black male kinship allowed him to see other ways in which Blackness exists:

> Panther: I had a friend from Kenya last year that came here. I could relate to them a lot because he was like, "Hey ma brotha." You know, speaking in that African dialect. So, like I said, I never had a really close Black male friend in high school; so having that was pretty cool. I could relate. But I've made some friends who are Black and they're not like *African* African, like he is. I think it's just continuing to help me expand my awareness of what different people's experiences are.

Panther also noted the Black kinship between himself and a Black faculty member:

> This was my first Black professor. I was like, "Yeah this is lit." But then that habit of though kind of causing tension between us—I was like, "Oh my God, my first Black professor hates me." But it turned out, no, she was actually very helpful. And as I started to show that I was making more effort in the class, we only improved our relationship. I'm like, "Okay." We got to learn more about each other and, oh man, that bond really clicked.

In a statement that Afro made, he described ways in which racial battle fatigue was remedied by Black kinship, provided him with growth, and resulted in an increased sense of belonging:

> I decided I'mma save my energy for myself, like, for somebody else who I can actually talk with like that. So most of last year I would just be in the room since

the roommate left. I was just in there solo and I'd just be playing my games,
watchin' my movies or shows, and just doin' work wherever I needed to. And I
got to talking with the Black students who are involved in athletics. And we was
talking about potentially living with each other or like going to do this, that, and
the third. We all went and got haircuts together. That was another bonding
activity right there. And I just...I felt a lot better with that then because, like, these
are people I can actually talk with about stuff that's really relevant between us
instead of just "Did you see that girl?" "Did you...oh man this is hitting so hard."
"Oh, man, this drink is really…you wanna go to the bar?" Stuff like that. I got
tired of that stuff. I guess that's like my growth: being at the school with people
and just knowing where I stand on that stuff.

In describing the racial make-up of his friend group, Lightning mentioned that having
Black kinship meant having someone who understood him:

Let's see. A good chunk of them are White, because like I said in those classes I
had, it's predominantly White. And then I have a few other black friends who are
also in the same major, and then a few other friends who are not in the same
major. But I talk with them a lot. And they're just kind of cool and easy to talk
with and they understand me and it's just nice.

The Black males in this study also mentioned being motivated by seeing other Black
males on campus do well. Lighting and Panther gave the following accounts:

Lightning: The only person I really think of Black that I saw the most, especially
throughout my years, was Stewart—how he wanted to get into his business and
his brand. I thought that was amazing. I tried my best to help out. He needed

people to help with, like, he was doing this video where he wanted to submit it so that way he can get this internship. I helped the best I could. I helped him film it and everything. I was like, "I hope I did a good enough job," because I want to help as much as I can. I love that he was really passionate about something that he wanted to do and he was taking the steps and doing what he needed to do. I found that really inspiring. So, wanted to help out as much as I could.

Panther: So, like, I've gotten to make some friends who are black here in college. For example, I got one person who graduated you might know, Stewart who was really into business and lifestyles and really business savvy. I have had conversations with them. I'm like, "Oh wow this is really cool." I was inspired by the things he was talking about so I'm like, "Okay, I can work on that on myself." I met somebody who's named Danny and they're like, really an athlete and really does, like, "Bro you're like Thor. What's going on?" And [he] really kind of just goes hard in everything they do. They're an athlete. They do gaming. And they also do, like, whatever they do. Even I heard someone complimenting them. They weren't even complimenting them directly; they were telling some other people, and they were like, "Man I want to be more like Danny. Like, bro goes hard at everything he does." That is inspiring. Another person is Afro and Corey. Corey, he's big on photography, and I enjoy taking photos and things like that. So, that I could relate with. I wanted to ask him questions, because I kind of wanted to get a better insight so I could do things like that. And then Afro, he's really talented. Then I've actually joined Slam Poets Society. So, I've enjoyed having a space I

kind of express myself in that way. So, I guess, in that sense, like, I'm looking at things I can better improve myself and I find a lot of good inspiration from the black males on campus.

Aids in the Performance of Black Male Coping at a SPLAC

Three subthemes emerged when it came to the co-researchers discussing ways in which they cope with being a Black male at Midwest Acres College. The following coping mechanisms demonstrate what Krause (2005) and Trowler (2010) identified as alternatives to engagement in response to alienation or isolation. The first was avoidance, as illustrated by Cyborg:

> A lot of time, since people wouldn't really understand everything that I have to deal with. I generally just try to avoid certain topics like race in relation to politics just because I don't feel like always having to explain my situation and make people feel bad...And just kind of having to be patient when I'm explaining things to people. Sometimes it does get a little frustrating. So, I just try to avoid those topics. I don't think there's really anything to do that I feel like I need to really hide from anybody. I think it has limited the people that I'd really want to hang out with just because they might not understand or it just would be for them. So, I think it has minimized my circle a little bit. I don't necessarily see that as a bad thing because I feel like quality over quantity.

The second way in which the co-researchers reported coping with their experiences at Midwest Acres College was adaptation, as Afro's statement asserts:

> I feel like it all comes down to, um, you know, the ability of adaptation here. Because, um, again, it plays into like, the whole you can't control what happens

but you can control how you react. And me choosin' this space—me choosin' this

institution to come to, that's an initial choice. But I couldn't choose all that would

come with it. I didn't know all that would come with it. But all I can do is control

how I would react with that. And the best bet for that has been adaptation—

regardless of, like, all the things I feel the institution can do as a means of change

to make it a better place for Black males, Black females or any other racial

background to pursue their education. At the end of the day, it all comes down to

how much can you adapt because the system is only going to flip as so much.

Third, in response to variables such as cultural incongruence, the inability to engage in

compatible friendships and social spaces, and less-engaged professors, the Black males

discussed ways they engaged in what Black males in Brooms (2017) noted as "just do

me". Lightning reported:

I just kind of focused in on getting money getting my classwork done. So, it's

focusing in on what I have to do. And because I think because I did that, I became

less involved with my community and like with the college community and with

everything there.

In addition to the above-mentioned things that aided in Black male coping at Midwest

Acres were sources of Black male thriving and personal growth. These sources included

Black male kinship, setting an example as a Black male, having positive Black males

images on campus, and proving others wrong about negative perceptions of Black males,

as per Afro's and Lightning's accounts:

Afro: In recent times, I just like kind of stayed to myself or talk with the other

Black students just to put my mind at ease about stuff, but also just stay about my

business and everything because with this being the last year coming up I can't. And especially considering what's going on right now I can't consider social standings as much as I wanted to. I have to continue on with the academic standing while also preserving my health and maintaining myself to continue moving forward afterwards, but also just be a voice for empowerment, voice for peace, a beacon of hope, of representation—a really good example as to how to carry yourself if you are also a Black student coming to this college because it's very much possible for you to come through and realize this isn't where you want to be. Or if this is where you want to be for four years then you can really carry that. This is how you carry that. This is how you get through that and make a name for yourself. So I just kinda keep my positive attitude and continue to get involved where it is I can get involved. And I plan on doing that so much more for this last year and leaving a mark of some sort then to move on whatever it is I got to do being engaged on campus.

Lightning: I know a lot of Black friends that I've had were really into Slam Poets Society because it's a chance for them to really talk about how they felt and put their feelings, their experiences down into words and really express them. And I thought that was cool.

Ways to Describe the Campus Ecology

Throughout the research, the co-researchers divulged the ways in which they described various elements of the campus ecology at Midwest Acres College. Being a PWI, one of the more identifiable ways in which some of the co-researchers described the campus ecology was "steeped in Whiteness." Afro, for example, argued the following:

> The White culture of the college, they have their set ideals. They know how they function around campus and that's that. But, like, most of the campus spaces belongs to them, if that makes sense. And when I say them, I'm talking about the heterosexual White male. And so, it kind of caters to that demographic more so than it would have all the other racial backgrounds.

Afro furthered his criticism of Midwest Acres College's campus ecology by extending the deeply rooted White culture to the greater local community. Although he mentioned the college doing things that made Black males feel a sense of belonging, he perceived Midwest Acres' performance in this regard to simply be a performative service for students of color—an appeasement to say that they did something for Black students:

> The institution, I feel like, wanted to make it comfortable for Black students to come in considering how they have this new student orientation for students of different racial backgrounds. And so it's like they value their contribution to the campus life itself. And I feel like that same thing applies to me as a Black man too. And so like any Black man who comes is like, "Okay, that adds more to our racial background." And that's a positive look. But I feel like a lot of the things they may do or put in place will serve as a sort of appeasement—just semi—just to say we did this. It's a sort of showmanship to make you feel more comfortable.

At the same time, it's not allowing so much comfortability. It gives way to the majority White to further instill how it is they run things around here.

Despite these criticisms, one of the ways that the campus ecology was described was accepting. Each of the Black males insisted that they didn't feel as if they were treated negatively by faculty or staff on campus and that there weren't any places where any of them didn't feel accepted on campus. Cyborg and Panther both noted that even with campus security, they believed that they weren't treated in any discriminatory manner:

Cyborg: I had a little incident last year that may have involved some things. They dealt with it really well. I just had to write a statement about alcohol consumption.

Panther: I've gotten to meet the campus security and they're really nice. They're really cool. I had to go to an appointment. They drove me and we had some good conversation.

As a result of his understanding of Black misandric behaviors that are often reported in the greater society, Panther also noted:

That doesn't mean at night I'm going to say hi to everyone I see when I see campus security come out. Just honestly, whenever I see campus security come out looking, I don't want any trouble. It's always a weird feeling just because all the stuff that happens in the news. But they've been nice.

The two most noted characteristics of SPLACs—as noted by researchers—that co-researchers magnified were the benefits of the small campus size (Astin, 1999) and the focus on good teaching practices by faculty (Pascarella, Wang, Trolian, & Blaich, 2013;

Seifert et al., 2010). One of the reasons why Black males reported choosing to attend Midwest Acres College is because of its small size, as previously highlighted. The small campus size was purported to have both positive and negative impacts on Black male experiences and engagement at Midwest Acres. One negative impact of the small campus size was reported to be the lack of critical mass of Black males, and Black campus community members in general. This lack of critical mass was reported to have a negative impact on campus diversity, which, in turn, perpetuated the culture and practices of Whiteness on campus. However, as Afro also shared, the small campus size was an aid in the performance of engaging with other students overall:

> Most of the time it was very easy to get in contact with somebody like, just real quick conversation. What's your name, number, email? I'll find you. I'll let you know about this. I'll let you know about that. And your small campus, like, you'll always run into somebody and have a quick convo about these things.

All of the Black males in this study gave high remarks regarding their interactions with faculty and staff members both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Panther, Cyborg, and Lightning recounted their faculty and staff experiences:

> Panther: I love engaging with my professors. I always try to be engaged in class and ask questions. I've had professors, you know email me, "Hey, thank you for always being an active participant class." When it comes to outside of class, I can do a better job of reaching out, because I know a lot of professors are like, "Hey, if you want to reach me, email me." They do a really good job with that, and I haven't taken advantage of that as many times…. I don't think I've had a professor that did not like being reached out to.

Cyborg: Me and [my employer] are super cool. We're super good friends. Like,

he had me over for dinner one time. He said that for my 21st birthday, he was,

like, "Yeah, I'll take you out to buy you a drink," but, we weren't at school for

that, so, I'll have to hit him up on that.

Lightning: I know from my own experience is that we have professors who care. I

mean, they really do care and they'll do whatever they can to help you through

whatever issues that he may find yourself in. So, I think, then knowing that has

helped me a lot at the school throughout my classes.

Even when it came to cultural competence, Lightning identified ways in which his

professors were helpful to him:

I have professors who asked me questions about my past and my own

experiences, because they can't really—like I said, most of my professors aren't

black—so, they can't understand some of the experiences I've had. And they ask

questions, they tried to help the best way they can. But again, it's something you

kind of just have to live through to really know. So, they do the best they can.

As previously noted, informal relationships with faculty and staff members on

campus aided in the performance of Black male bonding, Black male engagement in the

classroom and outside of the classroom, and the co-researchers' sense of belonging.

Engaged faculty members who made themselves available outside of class—especially

those who took extra steps to reach out to students—were a highly motivating factor for

Black males in this study in being comfortable with approaching these faculty members for academic assistance or even personal advice. Lightning stated, for example:

> Yeah, college definitely has been a handful—let's just say that a lot of ups and downs—but [my professor] was really there for me when I needed it, and so has a lot of other professors. Oh, and my bosses as well. Like my jobs, but they're really great people and they're really fun to talk to and they just tell me about their lives and I tell them about what's going on with me. And just these relationships to know that other people care about your well-being is really, really helpful, and it just, it makes everything so much easier.

Summary

Being Black, for the Black males in this study at Midwest Acres College, is ever-present—even if the Black men may not have focused on their Blackness as a salient part of their identity. For example, Cyborg highlighted that he typically considered his Christianity as the most salient part of his identity and how he interacted with people. However, he also noted that growing up he wasn't considered Black enough. Lighting emphasized "I have always been Black, and I have always been male." Their counterstories here even challenge how Black culture is identified through the various upbringings, experiences, and perspectives of each Black male. The themes that emerged through their stories allowed me to aid in the co-construction of their education experiences at Midwest Acres College and how these experiences influenced their engagement decisions at their college. The four major themes which emerged are (a) experiences of being a Black male; (b), constituents of Black male bonding; (c) aids in the performance of Black male coping at a PWI; and (d) attributes of the campus ecology.

It's important to note that although these have been separated, the taxonomies and domains identified through the data connect them. For example, while the taxonomy "Just Do Me" was identified as a function of Black male engagement, it is connected to Black male experience "as a way to cope at a PWI". Further, the taxonomies of "Black Kinship" and "Black Male Sense of Belonging" shared a reciprocal relationship.

2020 and COVID-19

In furtherance of the data received through the co-researchers' counterstories, I would be remiss if I did not address the circumstances of the moment of this research which impacted the world and, in turn, our Black males experiences and their engagement on campus. As COVID-19 plagued the world, swiftly bringing the world to a halt with devastating consequences, college campuses, cities, families, cultures, and students all had to change the way in which they moved throughout their lives and spaces. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions—educational and otherwise—shifted to quarantine protocols. This, in turn, challenged the ways in which people engaged, or desired to engage with others.

Along with the chaos of COVID-19 and quarantine protocols, the world also fell into cultural and racial unrest. Sparked by incidents such as the recorded violent deaths of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery and carried through with the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, and many other Black people; the violence toward southeast Asians and Asian Americans in response to COVID-19 causal accusations toward China; the global rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement; and the violent responses to, and attacks on, peoples of color in response to Black Lives Matter protests, these events of cultural and racial unrest further gave way to the ways in which cities, people, families,

institutions, and students moved through their lives and spaces. Given the prevalence of the amalgamation of these circumstances, the co-researchers were each asked how COVID and global cultural unrest impacted their experiences and engagement at Midwest Acres College.

Each Black male's experience with, and perceptions of, these circumstances differ. Despite quarantine, some of the Black males reported thriving in their social engagement efforts. For example, each Afro and Lightning obtained beneficial internships. Panther and Lightning mentioned still making connections with others on campus. Panther mentioned that despite the pandemic, there were still great opportunities to plug into a community on campus. Lightning and Cyborg also noted that they made strides in getting better acquainted with others during the pandemic, per their following statements:

> Cyborg: I think I've just been more open to talking to people that I might not have otherwise. I think also it has to do with the COVID situation. Black people just, kind of, regardless. So I think those two things have mostly been at play in, kind of, my social behaviors. I would say in terms of being a Black man I kind of would, like, be less inclined to talk to certain people before now because of based on how people tend to judge based on appearance first. And so like, "Oh, I might not get along with that person because maybe they seem like they'd be interested in different things." But I think probably part of the COVID situation, and also being a senior, I think has also made me just be more like, "Maybe we won't get along, but I'm going to talk to him anyways. Let's see what happens." I feel like I've kind of met like a lot of cool people that way.

Lightning: Mostly I was able to hang out with friends a lot more. You know, talk

to them and meet new people. Especially over these last few months, it's been a

little hectic. I was able to just kind of engage more with the other students that

were here and learn more about them and kind of make more relationships here.

As previously noted, Cyborg indicated that the racial events aided in re-evaluating the

performance of his Black male identity. However, Cyborg and Afro both declared that

quarantine—especially in the cooler months during which much of the academic year

takes place—interrupted not only social engagement, but also interrupted worrying about

being Black:

Afro: I feel like life slowed down a whole lot more as the temp also went down.

So everybody was inside or away more. So, still rarely talking to people. I talked

to people in passing, but social life itself, it can't be gauged. So my stance as a

Black man probably wouldn't be any different from a White person right now

because we're inside. It's kind of hard to think about how things are now, cuz

most days don't even feel human. You feel me?...It's more so just being a student

right not because we can't see much representation. It's still a bunch of Black

students around here that I've yet to be able to meet. Why? Because COVID and

everyone's busy…It's like, representation has gone down because nobody can see

anybody and there's nothing to really get involved with. Everybody's just a

student now. It's not much of a focus as far as who's who, like anybody's

ethnicity, racial identity, anything that goes along with that. Can't pay attention to

that so much. We want to survive the winter, we want to survive COVID, and we want to survive the semester for the most part.

Cyborg: There's been other things that have been going on that it's kind of hard to just have [the campus racial climate] isolated and, like, think about it in that way. So I think it's just honestly been hard for me to tell just cuz I haven't hung out with that many people. But I would say that it has changed in that I feel like people have been just lonely and so they just want anybody to hang out with. So I would say that people have been more open to just kind of talking to people.

2020 brought on global changes that impacted people on various levels. For the Black male co-researchers at Midwest Acres College their lives on individual levels and at the academic level were impacted in so many ways. Not only did they note being afraid of the circumstances surrounding COVID, they also highlighted being uneasy about the circumstances surrounding the 2020 election and 2020 racial unrest. While quarantine during the pandemic interrupted their focus on their Black male identity, the co-occurring global racial unrest brought their Black male identities to the forefront in ways that the co-researchers had not previously considered.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Implications

Reiterating Macfarlane and Tomlinson (2017), "the role that students play as co-constructors of university quality enhancement also needs exploration and how such roles are potentially conditioned by the institutional context" (p. 1). Through critical race methodology (CRM), a bounded case study was employed to address this idea to explore how Black male student engagement decisions—as the bounded case—were influenced by the context of small private liberal arts colleges (SPLACs). This study utilized a race-space framework, shaped by the junction of CRT (Matsuda et. al, 1993) and the concept of campus ecology (Banning & Strange, 2001, 2015) to survey how Black males at Midwest Acres College, a SPLAC in the Midwest United States, make meaning of their college experiences and how these experiences may shape their engagement decisions while attending the college. Four co-researchers, Afro, Cyborg, Lightning, and Panther, provided insight into these questions through their counterstories.

One of the base concepts for this study was that of student engagement, which was defined in Chapter 2 as the time and effort students invest behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally in purposeful academic and social developmental experiences. This effort, however, relies on a transactional relationship between the student and the institution (Astin, 1985; Harper, 2009a; Kuh, 2016). Student engagement has been reported to impact a variety of success factors for students (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003). Though, how students are educated and engaged occurs by means of the environment—created by chance or intentionally designed—both within and outside of the institution (Dewey, 1916; DuBois,

1903). As our American campus ecology is steeped in machinations of American racism, the transactional relationship for Black males at PWIs mimic the social transaction and environment of being Black in White American spaces that Black males work through daily. This, thus, negates the ecological neutrality that PWIs claim to provide (Wilkins, 2007) and the consideration of how Black males may experience campus space and campus racial culture differently socially, culturally, and developmentally than their peers of other races and ethnicities (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Brooms, 2017; Cuyjet & Meriwether, 2016; Fleming, 1984; Samura, 2016). In turn, Black males are likely to engage differently, depending on the cultural supportiveness of the campus environment (Fleming, 1984).

Discussion

The themes which emerged from the Black males' counterstories at Midwest Acres College were: (a) experiences of being a Black male; (b), constituents of Black male bonding; (c) aids in the performance of Black male coping at a PWI; and (d) attributes of the campus ecology. These themes, constructed by semantic relationships (Spradley, 1979), were also connected by sub-themes and other domains which described the transactional relationship between the co-researchers and Midwest Acres College. These themes and relationships answered the questions of Black male meaning-making of their college experiences and how these experiences influenced Black males' engagement decisions and further illuminated the transactional relationship that takes place in attempting to answer the research questions separately. Thus, it furthers that the Black male engagement at Midwest Acres College and each Black male's experience within the college ecological system is a relationship based on race and space-making.

The themes themselves, while separated, were also related by sub-themes and Black male meaning-making.

Prior to attending Midwest Acres College, the Black males in this study expressed their engagement in school, their conceptions of their Blackness, and even their decisions for choosing to attend Midwest Acres College. This data was imperative in understanding how the co-researchers' pre-college perceptions and environment may have played a role in the way that they made meaning of their college experiences. Each of the Black males expressed being actively engaged in academic spaces which maintained a significant White population, similar to Littleton's (2001) report of the students in his study on Black students at SPLACs. In contrast, though, to the research of Littleton (2001) and Ariza and Berkey (2009), the co-researchers didn't choose their SPLAC according to parental desires. They noted that they chose to attend Midwest Acres of their own volition of wanting to attend a small college, wanting to attend a college that was close to home, yet not too close, and their interest in the academic programs offered at Midwest Acres. Upon being accepted to Midwest Acres College, two additional deciding factors to attend Midwest Acres College was the amount of scholarship money that was offered to them as well as their initial comfort in the campus space.

Through existing research on Black student experiences, campus racial composition has been tied to student satisfaction (Allen 1992), student involvement (Allen, 1992; Brooms, 2017; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014), student sense of belonging and departure (Strayhorn, 2013; Tinto, 1987) student integrations (Davis, 1994; Tinto, 2013), and academic success (Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984). For Black students at SPLACs, having

previously had meaningful relationships with someone who is White was reported by Davis (1994) and Woldoff and associates (2011) to have aided in Black student integration and sense of belonging at a PWI. For Black males at Midwest Acres College, how campus diversity was perceived influenced sense of belonging depending on their previous meaningful relationships with White persons, as well as their self-perception of their Black male identity. Panther, having attended a predominantly White high school, lived in a predominantly White community, and never having had a meaning relationship with a Black person outside of family allowed him to perceive Midwest Acres as very diverse. The other co-researchers who had been in more diverse high school and community environments perceived the college as much less diverse.

Whereas Panther found success and enlightenment in his perception of a diverse campus at Midwest Acres, some of the co-researchers recognized the racial primes and embedded Whiteness of the campus ecology. For them, Midwest Acres was the least diverse place that they had attended. For students such as Lightning and Afro, the lack of diversity and onlyness that they experience presented feelings of discomfort around the White campus community and even thoughts of departure from the institution. However, the co-researchers identified the ways in they mitigated these feelings of discomfort and even grew from them through their connections with campus community members of various identities—especially those who were Black.

The co-researchers for this study were very aware of the Whiteness which permeated the campus ecological system of Midwest Acres College, to include the surrounding city. Although White racial primes were reported to have been present within the campus ecological system of Midwest Acres College, the co-researchers

reported that they had not experienced the Black misandric microaggressions overtly on campus. However, they understood that the potential for these microaggressions to be present and engaged in coping mechanisms to avoid these experiences, as well as ways of thriving and the positive impact of connections with faculty, staff, and peers on campus.

Research conducted by Strayhorn (2013) aligned with the co-researchers' illustrations that, in addition to pre-college factors, supportive resources and caring relationships of faculty and staff, peers, and close community connections were beneficial to the retention of Black males at Midwest Acres College. The co-researchers for this study each stated that they developed and maintained close relationships with peers and teachers prior to attending Midwest Acres College. These behaviors continued into their presence at Midwest Acres. Allen (1992) also reported that students who reported positive faculty relationships and felt positive about peer connections with a diversity of students reported the greatest social involvement. The Black males at Midwest Acres suggested that race did not play a role in the friendships that they developed on campus. In this study, beneficial faculty and staff relationships and previous meaningful relationships with Whites seemed to help mitigate the raced-gendered factors that may affect Black men at PWIs.

Regarding specifically attending a SPLAC, Astin (1999) argued that what sets these institutions apart are the positive effects that they have on students' bachelor's degree completion, quality of instruction, and satisfaction with their faculty are attributed to their small size, residential program, strong faculty commitment to student development, student-administrative trust, and generous expenditures on student services. The Black males at Midwest Acres expressed the important role that attending their

SPLAC played in their success as a student. Of particular note was the impact of faculty and staff commitment to their development as students and as Black males. They reported that many of their professors made themselves available outside of class for academic assistance. Those professors who engaged the Black males in learning and achieving success were reported to have encouraged a stronger performance of academic engagement. Those faculty members who did not engage the students as well encouraged more of a negative engagement in the class. Though, this negative engagement did not take away from the Black males' strive for success.

Of an important note regarding Black males and faculty and staff relationships at Midwest Acres was that of developing informal relationships with faculty and staff on campus. Each of the Black males noted the positive impact that developing these informal relationships had on their sense of belonging, academic engagement, social engagement, and even validation as a Black male at a SPLAC. Personal touches that faculty brought to these relationships such as guiding the co-researchers in their field and their skills through internships, exposure to identity-related aspects of their major, and even in asking Black males for understanding of their needs were reported to be of extreme value to the Black males at Midwest Acres College.

Astin (1985) characterized a *highly involved* student as one who is active in studying, campus activities, and interacting with faculty and other students. On Trowler's (2010) engagement continuum, this would place a student as positively engaged. The co-researchers' counterstories implicated various engagement behaviors which demonstrated a continuum of engagement. However, the Black males at Midwest Acres also

demonstrated that Trowler's (2010) continuum does not account for a variety of circumstances which were associated with the Black males at Midwest Acres College.

The co-researchers in this study at Midwest Acres College reported being active in studying, campus activities, interacting with faculty, and interactive with other students. Per Trowler (2010), this would place them on the positive engagement side of the continuum. Harper (2012) identified seven benefits of active engagement for African American males, which included (a) aiding a strong identity development, which aids in personal activism and advocacy on predominantly White campuses, (b) overcoming previous social and educational disadvantages, (c) acquiring the social capital and resources which help them to navigate social and academic success, (d) crafting productive responses to racist stereotypes, and (e) negotiating peer support for achievement. The Black males in this study identified ways in which their engagement at Midwest Acres correlated with these benefits noted by Harper (2012).

Being actively engaged at Midwest Acres led to Cyborg's and Panther's growth in their Black male identity and the ways in which they performed according to their identity. This also aided each of them in crafting productive responses to racist stereotypes. Panther's increased engagement in more in discussions of race and politics aided him in this space. One of the Black male researchers identified having been managing ADHD throughout his life. Attending Midwest Acres College and engaging with faculty, staff, and peers aided him in his success at Midwest Acres College. Regarding negotiating peer supports for achievement, Panther voiced the importance of being engaged on campus and how it may even lead to assistance in writing an essay or doing a peer review. This engagement is also a testament of acquiring capital and

resources in the aid for social and academic success. Additions to this are the relationships that the co-researchers developed with faculty and staff as well as the networking that they were privy to due to their active engagement which provided them things such as mentors, internships, and research opportunities.

One element of engagement for the Black males at Midwest Acres College which challenges Trowler's (2010) concept of negative engagement is the idea of alternative engagement (Krause, 2005; Trowler, 2010). Lightning and Afro identified ways in which they engaged alternatively within the campus ecology of Midwest Acres. For each of them their alternative engagement was a coping mechanism in response to alienation and racial battle fatigue as a result of White racial primes and Black misandry both within, and outside of, the college. However, another form of alternative engagement for Lightning was his desire to work, which didn't provide him room for social engagement on campus. This form of alternative engagement was not born from alienation, but out of necessity and duty in assisting his father in paying for college. This form of alternative engagement, rather, led to what may be considered negative engagement on Trowler's (2010) engagement continuum.

Of particular importance to Black male interactions with the SPLAC campus ecology and the influence on engagement is that of Black kinship. Black kinship was portrayed in various ways in the co-researchers' stories. Black kinship in this study is defined as the relationships that Black students develop with other Black students, faculty, and staff on campus. The Black males reported that, despite their connections with others of various identities on campus, Black kinship was one of the most important aspects of attending Midwest Acres College. Research conducted by Harper (2009a) and

Brooms (2017) indicated that seeing other Black males involved could influence the involvement and engagement of other Black male on campus. The Black males in this study at Midwest Acres college reported that seeing other Black males on campus engage in certain ways which inspired them motivated the co-researchers in their own success and engagement and provided them with a greater sense of pride and encouraged Black kinship between the co-researchers and other Black males on campus. For the co-researchers, Black kinship aided in Black male coping, Black male thriving, and sense of belonging. In turn, Black kinship was a key element in successfully navigating being Black at Midwest Acres College.

The Importance of Naming and Voice

As suggested by Delgado (1989), reasons for counterstorytelling are that (1) much of reality is socially constructed; (2) stories provide members of out-groups a vehicle for psychic self-representation and lessening their own subjugation; and (3) the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help transcend dysconscious (King, 2015) and ethnocentric worldviews. Counterstorytelling provokes a humanizing experience through which the voices of others invite us to understand what life is like for them (Delgado, 1989). Of equal importance regarding counterstorytelling is naming. Through the naming of a thing, an identity is created. In qualitative research, participants are sometimes given a pseudonym—either through their own selection or by assignment of the primary researcher. In this study, naming—through the selection of a pseudonym—further constructed co-researchers' counterstories.

In an effort to protect the identity of the Black males in this study, the co-researchers were asked to choose a pseudonym. However, when I decided to take this

measure, I wasn't quite sure how I wanted to approach this practice. The number of ways that names could have been chosen were extremely vast. Decisively, I asked the Black males in this study to select a name of a Black male superhero or historical figure which he best identified with. His pseudonym would then be created by using part of the name that was selected. This was decided in order to (a) protect the co-researchers from selecting an identifiable pseudonym, (b) to give them parameters and decrease the vastness of pseudonym possibilities, and (c) to aid them in identifying in a way that defied Black misandric societal views and gave power and positive focus to their identities. Surprisingly, each of the Black males in this study selected the name of a superhero.

Out of curiosity, at the conclusion of each preliminary interview, each co-researcher was asked why they chose their names. While not an intended part of data collection, it became very clear that it was imperative to include the importance of this request for naming, and the selection for names, when considering the counterstories of the Black males in this study. The reasons for why each co-researcher selected his pseudonym follow:

> Afro: So when told that we had pick pseudonyms for this, I was like "Okay. Yeah. that makes sense" and I was given a list, or a website, that showed most Black heroes and comic history. Immediately thought about…I was like Afro Samurai because he is just cold..cool with the voice of Samuel Jackson with this badass ronin, Wu Tang songs in the background, and all this, like, Japanese infused hip hop beats and stuff. It just works out so well. I was like, "That's the one for me right now." I could have chose any other name, I would have went further. I

would have went further and chose another Black character in anime that's just way off to the side that would go way over your head. But I was like, "No. Afro works." It's one of the hardest symbols as a Black man too cuz we wear our hair with pride.

Cyborg: So I chose Cyborg because, I was looking through all the different Black superheroes and I have a lot of favorites. I like Blade. I like Black Panther. I like, a lot of them. And so it was honestly really difficult for me to choose a favorite. So, I guess, one of the things I just used to determine which one I wanted to choose was, like, "Well, who was the first Black superhero that I saw?" And I think Cyborg from Teen Titans was the first example of a Black superhero that I ever saw. And I just thought that was something that was important because being Black is a part of my identity. And growing up in this society where it's almost seen as it being as a handicap, I think, being Black. And so seeing the fact that there was a Black superhero, and that being Black was something that could be powerful, that was something that was important to me.

Lightning: So, I was thinking about it and one Black character that has been really inspirational for me lately is Black Lightning. And I was just thinking, well Black Lightning, he is someone who had a pretty hard childhood but was able to overcome that. I mean, with his abilities he could have gone down a really dark path, but he didn't. He did everything in his power to protect his home, his community and his family. I think that's pretty amazing because I'm not so sure that I had those same

abilities that I wouldn't abuse them. He could have done anything with his powers but he didn't. He the right thing. I think that's amazing. So I think it's more about the kind of person that I want to be, because I want to be someone who helps others—even though it's hard, even though there are a lot of things riding against them, even though it's so easy to just do the wrong thing even if it's for the right reasons. But he's kind of persevered through all that, and it makes him a stronger person for it and I think I want to possess that same kind of strength. Also because I'm a bit of a comic nerd. So when you said like a Black superhero, I was like, "Black Lightning. Right there." I was like, "He is the one to go to."

Panther: So, there was Chadwick Boseman, he like passed and I was completely surprised about that. And he was just really a positive person. I just ended up just watching even more interviews of him and how he treated people, and even the character he played. He had a just kind of a regalness or nobility about how he carried himself, and he kind of always just left in good energy with people that he went around. And just the fact I remember going to watch Black Panther just being so hype—at the end the whole theater is clapping, applauding, stand up after it—and being proud being African. And that culture you got of Wakanda being the most advanced nation, just throwing away the stereotypes that people have of Black people. I think just that Black Panther was more than just some Marvel movie. It was a movement. That's what really made me proud to choose that name.

Here, the Black males in this study illustrate how there's so much in a name. A name tells the story of their personalities as Black males. The names they chose tell the story of Black male pride and the empowerment that each of the Black males in this study received from the characters' as well as how the co-researchers, as Black males, seek to embody each superhero's character. The pseudonyms that the co-researchers chose tell a counterstory of their own. The Black males in this study could have chosen any name. However, given the right parameters, choosing a pseudonym aided in provoking and illuminating a voice and a being of empowerment and pride.

Limitations, Challenges, and Provisions

Participant and Site Limitations and Challenges

As previously noted, one of the limitations regarding data collection pertained to that of the nature of the structure of SPLACs and the criteria for the study. The criteria for SPLACs selected for this study meant that Black males, an already small population at PWIs, would be selected from a very small student population of less than 1500 students. Further, the criteria for co-researchers to not be on an official college athletic team during the time of this study and to be in sophomore standing or above further greatly limited the number of participants that were able to be reached for this study.

Of an extremely important note is that of the conditions surrounding the country during the time of this study. The world, the country, the states, the cities, and the education institutions were under quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that recruitment measures changed regarding posting flyers and being present on campuses. This also meant that faculty, staff, and students at colleges would be displaced. Therefore, the ability for me and relevant staff at the SPLACs identified for this study to

connect with each other and with Black males for recruitment and participation in this study was challenging.

Technical Challenges and Provisions

Under the conditions of quarantine during this time, and the requirement for video interviewing, a few conditions were created during data collection with the co-researchers which either aided or hindered the data collection process. The condition which created a great benefit was that of increased protection of confidentiality. Video interviewing allowed the co-researchers and I to meet in spaces where they were comfortable speaking with me without concerns of anyone seeing us in any possible meeting in-person places. Since Black males who are not athletes on campus are a very small population, this eliminated the potential risk of the co-researchers being identified. Some co-researchers were in their homes for virtual learning, and some were on campus during interviews.

Conducting video interviews also created some conditions that were somewhat problematic. One of the most prevalent conditions was that of internet and electronic interruption. There were times at which I could not fully hear a co-researcher's response or a time that his microphone may not have picked up his voice well. There were also times where the internet connection caused a freeze in video and communication. These conditions created an issue later with the recorded audio and the potential to fully capture the transcript. However, this issue did not create a major concern in the validity of transcription. It did, however, take a longer time in fully verifying the transcript.

Another condition that was created through COVID regarding data collection was the opportunity for family interruptions where co-researchers were home with family, despite a co-researcher notifying their family of being occupied. For example, two of the

co-researchers were interrupted by siblings, with one of those two also being interrupted by a parent in the same session. These interruptions caused us to briefly pause the interview, which, in turn, disrupted the flow of the interview. However, this disruption was minor and did not diminish the richness of the conversations.

Limitations and Challenges in Counterstory Representation

In representing the counterstories of the Black males in this study, I was guided by the ethical considerations which protected their confidentiality while also ensuring that very important aspects of their counterstories were told. One ethical concern regarded the small student population of Midwest Acres College, its residential nature, and the small percentage of Black males at Midwest Acres College who met the study criteria. Due to these elements, it was important to mask or exclude some parts of the co-researchers' stories and direct quotes. This was done to further protect the confidentiality of the co-researchers' and their institution, particularly as others may be able to identify the Black males and the institution. Further, the Black males may be able to identify each other. Doing so meant that valuable aspects of the Black male's counterstories were not shared.

Another ethical concern which was regarded during the data analysis was that of negating the "voyeuristic search for 'good' stories" (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. 48) in an effort not to create the potential one-sided story of the Black misandry and hostile campus environments shaped by previous studies (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Yet, my theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) allowed me to utilize the existing research on Black males, particularly Black males at SPLACs, to make relevant associations between existing research and the co-researchers' counterstories. Regarding

both ethical practices of theoretical sensitivity and masking for co-researchers'

confidentiality, the responsibility and the task of deciding which aspects of the co-

researchers' counterstories were to be shared to create the greater text were challenging.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The counterstories of the Black males at Midwest Acres college addressed the

institutional environmental factors that aided in their success as well as ways in which it

contributed to a race-space framework. Thus, this study presents an important

opportunity in higher education practices by offering a foundation for engaging in an

ecological analysis of college campuses with historically marginalized student

populations in mind. The data and counterstories of how Black males may make meaning

of their interactions with the messages conveyed through dominant campus culture may

provide insight into consideration of how students of the non-dominant campus culture

are "othered", as well as how they are affirmed and supported, within the campus ecology

through institutional history, policies, and practices.

Each Black male in this study was asked about things they believed could be done

to better engage Black males. Their suggestions, in addition to other implicative data,

drive the foundation for implications for professional practice at SPLACs. The below

statements provided by the co-researchers suggest the following implications and

considerations for faculty, administration, student affairs, and other staff at institutions

like Midwest Acres: (a) find ways to increase the number of Black students on campus;

(b) increase the number of Black faculty; (c) enhance programming and opportunities for

Black kinship; (d) consider the specific interests of Black males regarding engagement;

and (d) make opportunities for Black male engagement more known on campus for Black males. Each co-researcher suggested the following:

Afro: In part, I want to say like [we] really just need more Black males. With it just being like a pocket, just a very small pocket of a few Black men, they all say they want to join Greek groups and stuff like that. But two want to peel off and join this other Greek group. Another wants to join this other Greek group. Two want to stay here and one is just solo in the other Greek group. They all get split up and into their different factions. You gotta think about, like, the personal interest. You gotta think about the major interest as far as education and everything like that. And it has to be more opportunities for people to stick out instead of just becoming another number in the majority, if that makes any sense.

Lightning: Honestly. The one thing, I think, is to have more black professors at the school. Because, like, especially in my STEM classes, it's like the teachers—there's not a lot of diversity there. Basically, all my professors at the school happened to be White. And I think that if we did have just a few more black professors here, then, other black students would feel more comfortable speaking up and engaging more just in classes in general. And who knows, maybe if they have more professors to talk to here at Midwest Acres then other things could have happened.

Cyborg: I think that a big part of it is just having things that would be of interest to Black males in general. I feel like for me, before I had the Language Club, and before I decided that I wanted to be part of Slam Poetry Society, I'd actually been

thinking about it for a while. I just hadn't joined just cuz I just didn't want to dedicate myself to that and place at the time. A big part of it was, like, just confidence cuz poetry is, like, usually a very personal thing. And just, like, putting myself out there in terms of just putting my art out there, it just wasn't something that I think I was ready to do at that time yet. But I think just kind of having the resources available for things that we would be interested in. Because, like, with Stewarts business thing, like, he kind of just come up with his own resources and just kind of had to do it himself. But just thinking of things that might be of interest to the people on campus and maybe just listening more to things that people are interested in might create those opportunities better.

Panther: I think just them using the multicultural place more. I feel like you can enjoy the multicultural life place because I feel like if you have those kind of interests, those kind of questions and there will be someone there to guide you. I think it takes an effort on the student as well as the school because the school could have so many opportunities, but if the student is just not used to participating then, I mean you can't force a horse to drink water. I really butchered that quote. But yeah, I think it has to be a two-way street. But I think the things I guess the school could do better, is just…I actually think the school does a good job. I think it does. I think it's kind of a given that, like, "Hey this is for everyone." I think there are a lot of students that take it upon themselves to make sure like, "Hey, we're bringing those places where we're attracting Black students here." But I guess at the same time students are going to do what they're going to

do. I think so far the school has done a good job of providing opportunities. I feel like they'd also make them pretty public. I was gonna say maybe make them more public, but yeah you have to also search too.

Accompanying these suggestions are implications through Black male counterstories of the importance of informal faculty and staff relationships to Black male academic success, personal success, and engagement on campus. Other implications from the Black male's suggestions are to encourage students to start their own organizations or activities to create Black male kinship. This falls in line with Harper's (2009a) claim that the environmental press of the institution could influence Black male students' perceptions of involvement when other Black males are seen being involved. Although co-researchers may have highlighted the need for the college to have more informed engagement opportunities for Black males, many students may not fully understand that the creation of student organizations is done at the suggestions of the students. As Panther also mentioned, part of the responsibility of this engagement is that of the student. However, it is within the practices of the institution to ensure to better inform students of their opportunities.

Research presented by Flowers (2007) revealed that the Black males who were seniors in his study were more engaged with the campus ecology than those who were freshmen. The Black males in this study echoed this engagement trend in that they had gotten more engaged as they spent more time at Midwest Acres. However, they all discussed still desiring to do more with their social engagement. This presents an implication toward encouraging the importance of engagement, and not just involvement, early on in the college experience. Although the co-researchers described new student

orientations and other ways they were introduced to engagement opportunities, the institution may better formulate the way in which engagement is discussed and viewed. For example, rather than requesting that students simply get involved on campus, engagement may be strengthened by framing it as building equity.

Finally, DuBois (1903) suggested, "Education is that whole system of human training within and without the school house walls which molds and develops men" (p. 85). This sentiment was echoed by the co-researchers regarding their concerns of how life may look outside of their campus "bubble". While this may not have any immediate implications for campus practices and policies, it plays a role in the importance of Black males being able to find like-community and in being able to share in their stories and counter-spaces for circumstances within and outside of the immediate campus ecology. Thus, this provides implication for student affairs staff to reach out to local or national Black male organizations such as 100 Black men. This may also provide implication for academic departments to learn more about relevant Black male organizations and invite the organizations into campus spaces in order to make Black men aware of their presence and potentially spark interest-as student org onus is typically on the student body to create.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

At the time of this study, research on Black collegiate male engagement has largely focused on Black males at larger public PWIs and HBCUs (see Harper, 2009a; 2012). The existing research that I have encountered regarding Black males at SPLACs is grossly limited. However, given the limitations of this study, further research can be extended in a number of ways to contributes to the growing scholarship on Black males

at SPLACs. First, future research may be conducted to extend the Black males to include all Black males at SPLACs, to include athletes. Future research may also focus specifically on Black male athletes at SPLACs to capture their experiences and how they may differ and align with Black males at these institutions who are not athletes. Second, research may be further conducted to include more SPLACs within the Midwest and even more across the country. Another way that future research may extend the scholarship on Black males at SPLACs could be to include a study which compares the experiences and engagement of Black males at SPLACs which are HBCUs and those which are PWIs. The most recent study regarding this work was done by Watson and Kuh (1996). Thus, providing the cultural and institutional comparisons between these types of institutions could further their scholarship. These are simply three suggestions for ways in which the scholarship on Black males at SPLACs may be extended. However, the potential to further extend this research is vast as both SPLACs and Black males at these institutions are greatly under-researched.

While not originally an aim of this study, global contextual circumstances allowed me to inquire, slightly, into the ways in which the global COVID-19 and racial unrest pandemics impacted the co-researchers. This inquiry provided very valuable knowledge. Thus, further research may also be done on the impact of these each of these pandemics on Black male collegiate experiences in general, and Black males at SPLACs more specifically. This research may be extended in the same ways as suggested above regarding the research on Black males at SPLACs. In light of the extensive virtual learning that took place during this time, the researcher may also be furthered to include virtual learning spaces within the campus ecology.

Conclusion

Critical Race Theory provides a lens through which the stories of those who are racially "othered" are viewed as legitimate and important and how the embeddedness of race and racism in the structural and cultural aspects of the systems of our country create this othering through majoritarian storytelling and oppressive behaviors. When applied to education and the campus ecology, the principles that Yosso and Solórzano (2002) ascribed to CRT in education seek to (a) explain how the campus ecology is steeped in the machinations of American racism and create a raced-gendered space for Black males, (b) challenge the view that campus ecology is racially neutral and rather is one that frequently "rewards and perpetuates White-normative behaviors" (Muñoz, 2009), (c) address ways in which campuses can commit to create socially just spaces for Black males, (d) empower the voices and experiential knowledge of Black males and their race-space interactions at their SPLACs, and (e) analyze Black male interaction in the campus ecology through the areas of study such as education, psychology, sociology, architecture, and geography and add to the accuracy of campus racial contemporary and historical contexts.

Utilizing Critical Race Methodology, the counterstories of the Black males in this study at Midwest Acres College provided the vehicle through which their experiences were brought to light outside of the majoritarian narrative that has been provided in existing research regarding SPLACs and the students that attend these institutions. This research concludes that while the campus ecology of SPLACs were reported by the co-researchers to influence highly regarded performances of academic and social engagement, racial primes and the race-space dynamic were still reported to have given

way to Black misandric racial microaggressions, stereotype threat, internalized othering, alienation, and racial battle fatigue. Combined with the Black males' experiences of onlyness, these experiences should be considered when understanding and identifying how Black males make meaning of their experiences at SPLACs and how the institution intentionally or passively influences their engagement decisions and, ultimately their academic and personal success.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Authorization to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Research Study: Campus Ecology Influence of the Engagement Decisions of
Black Males at Small, Private Liberal Arts Colleges
Institution: Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas
Principal Investigator: Tiyah Western
Research Advisors: Dr. Ricardo Montelongo and Dr. Paul Eaton

Dear Young Black Man,

My name is Tiyah Western, and I am a doctoral student of the Educational Leadership
department at Sam Houston State University. I am conducting research for my doctoral studies
for which I am requesting your participation. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the
ways that the campus environment influences the engagement of Black male students who attend
predominantly White small private liberal arts colleges. The key to this research is to hear your
story and to determine factors which may influence your decision to be engaged on campus. The
information gained from you will be used not only to inform this dissertation, but may
subsequently be published in various forms. You will be encouraged to speak freely, though
pseudonyms may be used in place of your name throughout the entire process in order to protect
your anonymity.

Procedure and Duration
Your participation in this study will involve the following commitments:
- A brief orientation that will last approximately 15-20 minutes at which you can ask any
  questions you may have regarding this letter, will be better informed about the research
  process, and will schedule your primary interview.
- An individual interview. The primary interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes
  and will take place via Zoom video conferencing. The second interview be a follow-up,
  will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes, and will serve as an opportunity for you to
  review and clarify anything from the primary interview. The interviews will be recorded
  with your permission.

Potential Benefits, Risks, and Withdrawal
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The hope for this study is that it may be
beneficial to leaders of your institutions and other higher education leaders to understand how
Black males experience their campuses and find ways to best support Black male students'
success on campus through programming, practice, and policy. You are free to withdraw from
this study at any time or to refuse participation altogether without penalty.
There are no perceived physical or psychological risks associated with participating in
this research study and all precautions will be taken to maintain your anonymity. The questions
and discussions of this study pertain to your raced-gendered experiences and perceptions
regarding college and your specific institution. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions and
topics discussed during the interviews, it is advised that you select a more private space for
interviews to take place. It is also advised that this space does not put you at risk of being
identified as participating in this study as it may risk your confidentiality.

Costs and Incentives/Compensations

There will be no costs to you for participating in this study. However, there is a $10 gift card provided for students who are chosen for this study and complete the full study.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Tiyah Western, or my research advisors, Dr. Ricardo Montelongo, Ph. D and Dr. Paul Eaton, Ph. D. using our contact information below. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as research participants, please contact Sharla Miles, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, using her contact information below.

Tiyah Western Principal Investigator (doctoral program student) Sam Houston State University Email: txw025@shsu.edu	Ricardo Montelongo, Ph. D. Assistant Professor Higher Education Administration Department of Educational Leadership Sam Houston State University Teacher Education Center 319A Huntsville, TX 77341-2119 Email: rxm059@shsu.edu Phone: 936.294.1155	Paul W. Eaton, Ph. D. Assistant Professor Higher Education Administration Department of Educational Leadership Sam Houston State University Teacher Education Center 319J Huntsville, TX 77341-2119 Email: pweaton@shsu.edu Phone: 940-367-3607

Sharla Miles
Office of Research and
Sponsored Programs
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX 77341
Phone: (936) 294-4875
Email: irb@shsu.edu

Participant Agreement

I have read this consent document, have had the opportunity to discuss any concern or questions with the researchers, and totally understand the purpose of this investigation and my involvement as well as any risk or discomfort. I agree to participate in this study as described above. Upon this agreement, and the signature of both the Principal Investigator and mine, I will receive a copy of this informed consent.

Printed Name of Student   Signature   Date

Tiyah Western

Principal Investigator   Signature   Date

APPENDIX B

Participant Information Form

Research Name:_____

Phone Number: (   ) _____

E-mail address: _____

Academic Information

Year in College: ☐ Sophomore   ☐Junior☐Senior

Major(s): _____

Minor(s): _____

Current College GPA _____/4.0 scale (please be as accurate as possible)

Aspirations After Undergraduate Completion (check all that apply)

☐ Master's_____ (field)

☐ Doctorate_____ (field)

☐ M.D. _____ (specialization)

☐ J. D. _____ (area of practice)

☐ Career _____ (occupation field)

☐ Other _____

☐ Undecided

High School Demography	Hight School Type
☐ Predominantly Black	☐ Public
☐ Predominantly White	☐ Private
☐ Predominantly Latin/Hispanic	☐ Other _____
☐ Diverse	

APPENDIX C

Research Interview Protocols

Pre-college & Orientation to College: used to establish pre-college engagement experiences, expectations about college engagement, introduction to the college, and experiences orienting to the college.

1. Tell me about [Pseudonym] in high school.
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - What was the racial make-up of your high school and community?
   - What were your academic experiences prior to attending College
     - Study habits
     - Classroom interaction with peers
     - Classroom interaction with teachers
   - What factors helped you to succeed in high school
   - What were your social experiences with teachers and peers?
   - What types of activities did you participate in outside of class?

2. What did it mean to you, prior to coming to [Name of Your College], to be a Black man?
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - How do you view yourself compared to other males/Black males/others students?
   - Teachers?
   - Community Members?

3. What were your expectations about college?
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - How have previous educational experiences affected your expectations for [Name of Your College]?

4. What were your expectations about [Name of Your College]?
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - How did you find out about [Name of Your College]?
   - What made you decide to come to [Name of Your College]?

5. Describe your experiences and perceptions as a new student at [Name of Your College].
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - Narrate for me what you saw, heard, and thought?
     - What spaces did you interact with and how?
     - What messages did you receive from these experiences?
     - How did this experience match your expectations?

6. How do you believe being a Black man has contributed to your experiences on campus?
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - How has your performance of your Black male identity changed since you became a student at [Name of Your College]?
   - How do you view yourself compared to other males/Black males/others on campus?
     - Faculty?
     - Student Affairs Admin?
     - Other students?
   - What have been your experiences:
     - In the classroom?
     - Outside of the classroom?
     - In social spaces?

7. Describe your experience in getting connected to [Name of Your College] environment.
   Possible Probing Questions
   - Describe the opportunities that were presented to you and other Black males entering [Name of Your College] in getting connected to your college environment.
   - What were the resources, events, activities, and other offers to developing yourself
     - Academically
     - Regarding peer relationships
     - To connect with the local community
     - To connect with the campus environment
   - How did you perceive these opportunities?
   - How did you get involved in these opportunities?
   - Could you please describe any challenges that you may have had in getting connected to your college environment?
   - How did you overcome those challenges?
     - Academically?
     - Socially?
     - With faculty or staff?

8. How have you gone about creating friendships and other relationships on campus?
   Possible Probing Questions
   - How has race and gender been considered in establishing these relationships?
   - Describe for me how your race and gender influence your relationship building on campus.
   - Describe your friendships and associations with others on campus.
   - How would you describe the level of ease that you had getting to know people outside of your racial/ethnic group?
     - Other Black people?

      ○ Other Black males?

Defining and Perceiving Engagement: used to gain students' ideas of engagement, previous extracurricular engagement and disengagement decisions, and perceptions of Black male engagement on campus.

1. Define what it means for you to be engaged as a Black man on this campus
    Possible Probing Questions
- How do you define "being engaged" on campus
- How important is being engaged on campus to you?"
- Before coming to college, what expectations did you have of being involved in campus activities?
- What do you believe the perception is of you as a Black man who is less involved/engaged on campus?
- What do you believe are the similarities or differences between you and Black males who are more involved on campus?

2. Please draw me a timeline of critical moments in your time at [Name of Your College] that have influenced your current engagement decisions.
    Possible Probing Questions
- Describe any current and/or previous involvement with campus events or activities that you may have had
  - What made you get involved?
  - How long were you involved?
  - Describe the dynamic and make-up of the group
  - (If applicable) What made you become disengaged?
  - If not previously engaged, what influenced your decision not to become involved in campus events or activities?

3. What are the opportunities for Black students to get engaged on campus?
    Possible Probing Questions
- In what spaces-academically and socially, do you see Black males on campus being engaged?

4. What do you think is needed to better encourage you, and other Black males, to be more engaged on campus?
    Possible Probing Questions
- In the classroom?
- Academically?
- Outside of Class?

Academic Engagement: used to identify academic experiences and engagement

1. Describe your academic habits.
   Possible Probing Questions
   - How well are you doing academically?
   - How do you go about studying?
     - Who do you typically study with, why, & where do you typically study?
   - Walk me through a typical day.
   - What has motivated you in your academic work here at [Name of Your College]?
   - Describe how your approach toward your academics may be similar to or different from your approach in high school.

2. How does being a Black man and being in this campus environment influence your academic beliefs and behaviors?
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - How would you describe your classroom environment?
   - How do you interact in class/perceive the classroom environment?

3. Tell me about a time that you struggled academically
   Possible Probing Questions
   - what do you believe influenced this struggle?
     What helped you to overcome this struggle?

4. How would you describe your level of engagement with your professors?
   Possible Probing Questions
   - How do you interact with them within the classroom?
   - How do they make themselves available outside of class?
     - Describe how you take advantage of these opportunities?
   - How might you interact with your professors outside of class?

5. How do you think your relationship with your professors affects your academic performance?
   Possible Probing Questions
   - How have they influenced your ability to achieve academically?

6. How would you describe the level of cultural awareness that professors have about Black male students?
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - In what ways do you believe they consider your needs? How do they exemplify this?
   - How does this contribute to your academic experience?

7. Describe how you utilize campus academic resources?
> *Possible Probing Questions*
> - What resources do you find most helpful on campus? How/why?
> - What resources do you find least helpful on campus? How/why?

Campus Ecological Interactions & Social Engagement: used to identify Black males' experiences with the campus ecology

1. Describe the racial climate and community on campus.
   Possible Probing Questions:
   - In what ways to you see people across various cultures interacting
     - Black students together?
     - Black males together?
   - Describe the ways you think the institution values and embraces you or the population you identify with?
   - How fairly do you feel you are treated on campus by: (Organizational Environment)
     - University Police
     - Resident Hall Personnel
     - Faculty/Teaching Assistants
     - Administrators/Staff
   - In what ways do you believe the campus environment-whether physical, social or political-may send conflicting messages?

2. How would you describe being included at [Name of Your College]?
   Possible Probing Questions
   - Describe any activities that are geared toward your racial or ethnic needs?
     - Academic needs or other needs?
   - Describe ways that you embrace the campus and what it has to offer.
   - In what ways do you feel accepted at [Name of Your College]?
     - Where do you feel most accepted here?
     - Where don't you feel comfortable or accepted here?
   - How do you cope with some of the issues that come with being a Black man on campus?
     - How might you feel that you have to hide parts of your identity to fit into certain circles?
       - If so, how would you go about doing so?
       - For what reasons?
       - In what spaces?

3. Currently you are a [class i.e. sophomore…]. What factors at [Name of Your College] have facilitated your continuing your education here in the past years of college?
   Possible Probing Questions
   - What would you say are the most advantageous kinds of experiences you've had since enrolling at [Name of Your College]-on campus and off campus?

- Tell me about a time you thought about leaving [Name of Your College].
    - What kept you here?
    - Who influenced your decision?

4. Tell me about people who have impacted your experiences here a [Name of Your College]?
    Possible Probing Questions
    - How have they impacted you?
    - Describe their impact in detail

Physical Environment/Campus Spaces: used specifically to identify how the physical environment is perceived and experienced by Black males.

1. Where on campus do you feel most connected to campus?
    Possible Probing Questions
    - to [Name of Your College]?
    - To other students?

2. What campus spaces encourage your interactions?
    Possible Probing Questions
    - with faculty and staff?
    - With your peers

3. Please explain your personal interactions with campus spaces?
    Possible Probing Questions
    - What are some spaces that you are encouraged to engage in on campus?
    - Where do you feel the safest/most at ease on campus? Most vulnerable/ uneasy?
    - What are some of the spaces that you frequent on campus? For what purposes?
    - What are some spaces that you avoid on campus?
    - Describe for me the spaces that you go to relax, to restore, and to build community.
        - Are these on campus or off campus?
        - When do you go to these spaces?
        - Who else is there?
        - Why these places?
    - What is your favorite place to hang out with friends?

4. Describe your familiarity with the [Name of Cultural Center]
    Possible Probing Questions
    - Where on campus is it located?
    - How do you use this space?

5. Tell me about your experiences in your residential spaces on campus.

> *Possible Probing Questions*
> - What were you roommates like?
> - How satisfied were you with your arrangements?
> - What was your experience with residential staff?
> - Describe your experience with residential programming?

6. Describe your experiences in spaces in the general community outside of the campus?

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval Letter

Date: Jun 11, 2020 12:14 PM CDT

TO: Tiyah Western Ricardo Montelongo
FROM: SHSU IRB
PROJECT TITLE: Campus Ecology and the Engagement Decisions of Black Males at Small Private Liberal Arts Colleges
PROTOCOL #: IRB-2019-398
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial
ACTION: Approved
DECISION DATE: June 11, 2020
ADMINISTRATIVE CHECK-IN DATE: June 11, 2021
EXPEDITED REVIEW CATEGORY: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

SPECIAL IRB UPDATE REGARDING THE COVID-19 CRISIS: **Although this study is approved, please note that face-to-face human subject research must be paused until the CDC and SHSU has determined that the current COVID-19 crisis has passed. This pause is effective immediately. Approved online human subject research may continue. If you have an approved face-to-face study and deem it feasible to move the study to online data collection, please submit a Modification through Cayuse. Indicate in the Modification that the change is being implemented as a COVID-19 safety precaution to help the IRB prioritize the submission. The IRB will continue reviewing applications unless we are advised to do otherwise.**

Greetings,

The above-referenced submission has been reviewed by the IRB and it has been Approved. Because this study received expedited review and the IRB determined that a renewal submission is not needed, this decision does not necessarily expire; however, you will be receiving an email notification on the anniversary of this study approval, which will be on June 11, 2021 (NOTE: please review the reminder information below regarding Study Administrative Check-In). This study approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Since Cayuse IRB does not currently possess the ability to provide a "stamp of approval" on any recruitment or consent documentation, it is the strong recommendation of this office to please include the following approval language in the footer of those recruitment and consent documents: IRB-2019-398/June 11, 2020/June 11, 2021.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Modifications: Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please submit a Modification Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure.

Incidents: All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please submit an Incident Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Study Administrative Check-In: Based on the risks, this project does not require renewal. Rather, you are required to administratively check in with the IRB on an annual basis. June 11, 2021 is the anniversary of the review of your protocol. The following are the conditions of the IRB approval for IRB-2019-398 Campus Ecology and the Engagement Decisions of Black Males at Small Private Liberal Arts Colleges.

1. When this project is finished or terminated, a Closure submission is required.

2. Changes to the approved protocol require prior board approval (NOTE: see the directive above related to Modifications).

3. Human subjects training is required to be kept current at citiprogram.org by renewing training every 5 years.

4. If incidents (i.e., adverse events) or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSO) (e.g., data collected unintentionally without obtaining informed consent) have occurred during this approval period, you are required to submit a Incident to report the adverse event or UPIRSO to the IRB.

Please note that all research records should be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project. If you have any questions, please contact the Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or irb@shsu.edu. Please include your protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Chase Young, Ph.D.
Chair, IRB
Hannah R. Gerber, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

VITA

Tiyah Western

EDUCATION

Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX
Ed.D. in Developmental Education Administration
(Expected Completion: Dec 2021)
Dissertation: "How the Campus Ecology of Small, Private Liberal Arts Colleges
Influence the Engagement Motivations of Black Males"

Avila University, Kansas City, MO 64146
MBA in Marketing (2009)
M.S. in Organizational Development Administration (2009)

University of Missouri, Columbia, MO
English (2004)

RESEARCH INTERESTS

•Student Success and Development-especially for historically marginalized student
populations •Social Justice Education •Critical Race Scholarship •Campus/School
Environments and Inclusion •Developmental Education

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

	Cornell College**,** Mount Vernon, IA
2018	**First Year Student Success Instructor-** *Immigrant Experience In American Culture*

Educated 12 international college students regarding institutional culture and personal, academic, and language development

- Modified student success curriculum for first year international students with below-intermediate English language proficiency, resulting in 100% of students passing the course with a C or above

	Kaplan Inc**.,** Kansas City, MO; Hephzibah, GA
2015 - 2017	**Pre-College Instructor-ACT, SAT**

Instructed students on ACT and SAT test preparation strategies

- Prepared lessons according to prescribed course curriculum guidelines and student needs assessment
- Proctored practice college entry assessments

Metropolitan Community College, Kansas City, MO

2015   **Adjunct Instructor-*First Year Seminar***

Educated college students regarding institutional culture and resources and ways to maximize their student and life experiences

- Developed critically relevant and engaging curriculum for 25 first-year students, resulting in 91% of students passing the course with a C or above, including students who had previously failed the course
- Developed the course syllabus and learning objectives to align with program learning goals
- Facilitated strengths development and talent recognition via StrengthsQuest-based goal setting activities, resulting in higher student morale and increased student retention
- Guided students through leadership development and self-exploration training through problem-based teaching
- Engaged students in online learning through Blackboard for coursework and group communication

Van Horn High School, Kansas City, MO

2007   **Long-Term Substitute Teacher - 9th Grade Remedial English**
2006   **Long-Term Substitute Teacher - 9th Grade Remedial Math**

Filled teacher vacancies on a semester-long basis in a local high school classroom.

- Developed culturally relevant and engaging lessons and activities in math and English language arts
- Developed lesson plans and course syllabi to align with State Standards
- Established and implemented academic plans of action and incentive plans to promote academic success and student retention, resulting in the increased academic performance 9th grade students
- Mentored students in academic, career, and leadership development

Kansas City Middle School of the Arts, Kansas City, MO

2005 - 2006   **Long-Term Substitute Teacher - 7th Grade Math/Algebra**

Filled teacher vacancies on a semester-long basis in a local middle school classroom.

- Developed a critically relevant and engaging curriculum for mathematics, including interactive life skills integration and peer teaching
- Created creative lesson plans in alignment with prescribed program guidelines and Missouri State Standards

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Cornell College**,** Mount Vernon, IA
2020 – Present Associate Director of Intercultural Life, PDSO
2017 – 2020 Assistant Director of Intercultural Life, DSO
Provide resources and coordinate programs which help facilitate Intercultural communication, understanding of diversity, and support for international and historically underserved students at the college level.

- Doubled programming and co-curricular offerings within the first year
- Directly supervise and mentor 6 student interns
- Co-Manage International Student Affairs and SEVIS records
- Co-curricular education includes:
- Critically Conscious Leadership Development
- Brain-based impact of inequity and exclusion
- Intercultural relations, diversity, equity, and inclusion

Metropolitan Community College- Penn Valley, Kansas City, MO
2014 – 2016 College Relations Coordinator
Guided and supported students, families, high school counselors, and other community constituents through the enrollment process and informed them of institutional policies, academic offerings, practices, and resources-including support services and career resources

- Increased student enrollment and retention by creating more informed and informational programming and marketing materials
- Enhanced and coordinated new student programming such as "Scholar's Day" for new student premiere scholarship awardees and "Senior Day" orientation and enrollment for local high school seniors
- Informed students on developmental coursework options and aided in pathway planning
- Developed and set learning objectives for co-curricular college access and success activities and education sessions both on and off campus

Missouri University of Science and Technology, Rolla, MO
2012 - 2014 Freshman Admissions Counselor
Advised prospective students and families regarding college programs, requirements, policies, procedures, opportunities, and resources – including preliminary career advisement and needs assessments

- Provided educational presentations on college preparation strategies and STEM career options
- Assisted in the development and facilitation of the Building Leaders for Tomorrow early college summer leadership program

High Tech Institute*,* Kansas City, MO

2007 - 2008   Senior Admissions Representative
Developed and maintained relationships with students and families and advise career-seeking students on career pathway planning and certificate and degree program completion

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Western, T. (2020) *Building an Equitable Community.* Connect, Absorb, Respond, and Empower (C.A.R.E.) conference for Mount Vernon Community High School. Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T., & Hebel, S. (2019) *Transformative student leadership by design: Designing Intentional student leadership roles and employability skills* [Experiential Program]. Annual conference for the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). Boston, MA.

Western, T. & Collier, H. (2018). *Building student engagement through specialized employment and leadership roles*. Multicultural Student Services Regional Conference, Ames, IA.

Western, T. & Weaver, C. (2016). *First in line: The characteristics and methods for supporting various groups of first-generation college students*. MOACAC-GPACAC Conference, Kansas City, MO.

Western, T. & Ayala, P. (2015) *Catch me if you can: Early intervention through early college access and outreach programs for underrepresented students*. MOACAC Annual Conference, St. Louis, MO.

Western. T. (2015). *G.R.I.N.D.: Self-elevation through education*. Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley Back 2 Sisterhood Summit, Kansas City, MO.

Western, T. (2014). *Can you hear me now?: Communicating college access to underserved students.* (Adapted the Johari Window for College Admissions). MOACAC-GPACAC Conference, Kansas City, MO.

PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

Western, T. (2021, January). *Building an Equitable Sisterhood.* Training; Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T. (2020, August). *Responding to Biased-Related Incidents.* Training; Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T. (2019, August). *Building an Equitable Community.* Training; Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T. (2018, October). *Building a Critical Consciousness.* Critical Social Justice Workshop Series; Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T. (2018, December). *Identifying and addressing systems and structures of power and privilege.* Critical Social Justice Workshop Series; Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T. (2018, March). *Black Panther and brown equity: Building equity as a man of color.*
Presented at Diversity Week; Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T. (2018, March). *This is your brain on inequity: The effects of inequity on the brains.*
Presented at the Diversity Week Teach-In; Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T. (2018, March). *Out of our minds: Building equity with mental challenges.*
Presented at Diversity Week; Cornell College, Mount Vernon, IA.

Western, T. (2016). *SMART Goal setting and words for perspective.* Presented to high school and college students, Kansas City, MO.

Western, T. (2015, October). *Navigating your GPS: Guiding your pathway to success.* Presented at the HBCU Experience college fair; Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley, Kansas City, MO.

Western, T. (2015, September). *Adventures in edunomics: Demystifying the college cost monster.* Presented at the 20/20 Multicultural Leadership Symposium; Metropolitan Community College- Penn Valley, Kansas City, MO.

Western. T. (2015). *Picture me rollin: Navigating your college pathway.* Presented to various high school groups, Kanas City, MO.

Western, T. (2015, February). *True colors of leadership: Leading with personality.* Presented at the Multicultural Leadership Symposium; Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley, Kansas City, MO.

Western, T. (2014, November). *Aspire to think higher: How to be a college prep rockstar.* Presented at the Kansas City National College Fair, Kansas City, MO.

Western, T. (2014, November). *Future forward: Career exploration and you.* Presented to 6th graders at Kids2College, Kansas City, MO. (Includes career exploration terms and the True Colors® personality assessment)

HONORS & AWARDS

2019	**Hilliard Sizemore Fellow,** 12th Asa G. Hilliard III and Barbara A. Sizemore Research Course on African Americans and Education
2018	**Outstanding Student in Developmental Education Administration Doctoral Program**, Sam Houston State University
2018	**Nominated for the Raven Scholars**, Sam Houston State University
2016-Present	**Graduate Bridge Program**, Sam Houston State University
2016-Present	**Phi Lambda Theta Education Honor Society Member**
2013	**Imagine Grant Recipient,** National Association of College Admission Counseling

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

2020-Present	**Member**–Diversity Strategic Planning Committee, Cornell College
2020-Present	**Member**–Strategic Planning Recruitment Working Group, Cornell College
2020-Present	**Member**–Cornell College Diversity Committee, Cornell College
2020-Present	**Chair**–Education and Campus Climate Sub-committee, Cornell College
2020-Present	**Member**–Programming & Retention Committee, Cornell College
2019-2020	**Member**–Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Training Planning Committee, Cornell College
2019	**Reviewer**–2020 Conference Proposals, National Organization for Student Success
2019	**Reviewer**–2019 Conference Proposals, Association for the Study of Higher Education
2018	**Interviewer**–2019 Cornell College Fulbright
2018	**Reviewer**– 2019 Conference Proposals, American Education Research Association
2018	**Reviewer**–2019 Conference Proposals, National Organization for Student Success
2018	**Member-**American College Personnel Association Nominations and Elections Task Force
2018	**Chair -** Committee on First Year Student Development Training for Peer Leaders, Cornell College
2017	**Member-**First Year Student Success Pilot Committee, Cornell College
2017	**Reviewer** – 2018 Conference Proposals, National Organization for Student Success
2015 – 2016	**Member-**Scholarship Committee, Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley
2013 - 2016	**Chair/Co-Chair** – Inclusion, Access, & Success Committee; Missouri Association for College Admission Counseling

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American College Personnel Association
American Psychological Association