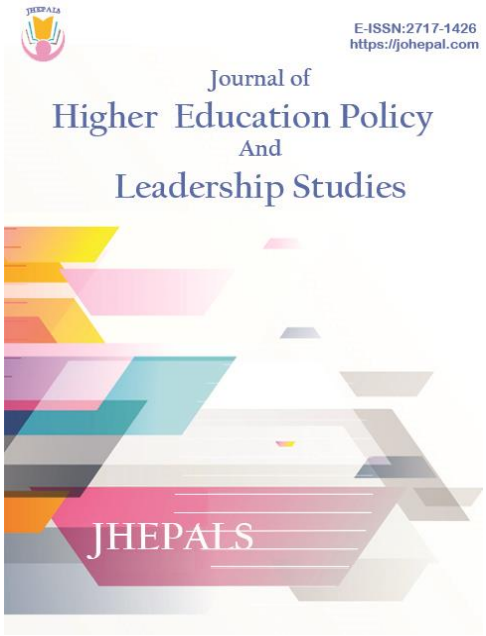
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Men of Color Initiatives and Programs (MOCI) as Sites for Leadership Development

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Highlights

- Men of color initiatives and programs (MOCI) are asset-based, anti-deficit sites of enormous growth and development for college men of color.
- One underappreciated area with MOCI is their potential for leadership learning and education.
- By utilizing social justice approaches in MOCI, college men can further develop essential leadership skills to help them and the communities they advocate for succeed inside and outside of the classroom.
- Utilizing the culturally relevant leadership learning (CRLL) model and prior literature, this article will discuss the implications of how MOCI may enhance the leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy of the students they serve.

Keywords: Leadership Education; Masculinity; Men of Color Initiatives (MOCI); Culturally Relevant Leadership Approaches

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Introduction

A majority of higher education institutions in the United States are primarily white institutions (PWIs), which often may be sites that enable microaggressions, racism, profiling, and other harmful practices (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). In fact, Hurtado and Alvarado (2021) highlight that 20% of Black students and 15% of Latinx/é students report experiencing discrimination at PWIs, which often leads to decreased engagement and sense of belonging. Given the historical deficit framing and problematizing of cultural values for men of color in educational institutions, there have been established equity gaps with opportunities for building learning skills, leadership, and belonging. By bringing their strengths and cultural capital into higher education institutions (HEIs), men of color persist to graduation despite systemic barriers and deficit framing that exist to limit success, persistence, and construction of leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy. One approach to this that several institutions have done is create men of color initiatives and programs (MOCI). These asset-based, anti-deficit initiatives and programs that center college men of color have the potential to address systemic inequities impacting them, allowing for identity exploration and development, and fostering a sense of belonging through community (Huerta et al., 2021b). MOCIs provide fertile spaces for men of color to expand their leadership identity, capacity and efficacy through said initiatives, programs, and/or leadership opportunities focused specifically on the narratives and experiences of men of color. Utilizing the culturally relevant leadership learning (CRLL) model (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016), this article discusses how MOCIs enhance the leadership identity, capacity and efficacy of the students they serve.

Men of Color Initiatives

Previous scholarship across MOCIs and programs in the United States discuss the positive outcomes of participating in said programs, ranging from increasing belonging, persistence, noncognitive skills, and reducing graduation gaps for Black, Indigenous, Native American, Latino, Asian American, and Pacific Islander men (Huerta et al., 2021b). From 2012 - 2022, the status dropout rate for men of color between 16 - 24 years in educational institutions has gradually decreased (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). This decrease informs targeted approaches to decrease equity gaps that perpetuate the gradual dropout on the national level (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017), and on several institutional levels in the form of initiatives and programs that allow for holistic identity exploration, professional development, community building, and academic success (Brooms et al., 2015). In addition to these outcomes, men of color programs have also shown to hold space for cultivation of well-being and increased emotional support as a result of the resources, tools, and communal support that transform traditional notions of masculinity and how it intersects with other identities (Huerta, 2022). These supports enable MOCIs to serve as sites to enhance the leadership capacity through peer relationships and development of social capital (Robles, 2024). The cross-cultural and collective experiences of MOCIs allow not only opportunity for personal growth, but holistic, collective progression as a group through the construction of relationships and engaging in expanding community interactions. Though the benefits of participating in these programs and initiatives are not

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limited to the aforementioned outcomes, these results contextually create the space for the holistic leadership development of identity, capacity, and efficacy for men of color.

Black Male Initiatives

As a subsection of MOCIs, Black Male Initiatives (BMIs) have been created to counteract the broad hypermarginalization and systemic inequities in HEIs for Black/African American men. Discussing supportive opportunities for Black college men, Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) point out that systems of support may range from resources to creation of sites that specifically focus on the culturally specific, varied experiences of said students. Offering intentional, holistic, identity-informed support through BMIs fostered engagement in various forms of cultural capital, improved academic outcomes, built community connection, and bolstered empowerment for Black men (Brooms, 2018). Notably, several BMI programs employ peer-to-peer and/or seasoned professional support, which in specific for the students in said programs, positively impacted development of noncognitive skills, personal growth, communal collaboration, and accountability (Zell, 2011). Strayhorn (2008) further validates these results, finding that supportive relationships could encourage college satisfaction, increasing retention and leadership qualities for students in BMI programs. Positive impacts from building social and navigational capital through support networks have also been represented in literature broadly talking about men of color initiatives and programs as a whole (Richburg-Hayes et al., 2023; Huerta et al., 2021a).

Model: Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning

With the discussion regarding the goal of MOCI to develop men of color, the culturally relevant leadership learning (CRLL) model (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021; Bertrand Jones et al., 2016) provides an exemplary approach towards contextualizing the leadership experiences that mold their experiences in these initiatives. CRLL is a social justice, asset-based approach to leadership education that draws specific attention to the "learning experiences of marginalized populations and their experience of oppression" (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016, p. 10). It centers the lives of marginalized students in emancipatory perspectives while critiquing traditional approaches to leadership, such as structures and language in place that continually perpetuate inequities in leadership learning. Lastly, CRLL looks to address and disrupt complexities in leadership learning in order to further lead to social change.

CRLL centers the student and their experiences as critical to learning and engaging in the leadership process. Specifically, CRLL looks to bring in how the identity (who am I), capacity (what do I know), and efficacy (what do I believe) of leaders develop to allow them to participate in the leadership process. For marginalized students, using their lived experiences (Yosso, 2005) as a filter to their leadership experiences at their institutions allows them to better engage in the leadership process. Also, CRLL has five environmental domains that affect this engagement: historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion, compositional diversity, psychological, organizational/structural and behavioral. By engaging in these domains, students can better understand and question hegemonic norms on an institutional level to take part in leadership.

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Discussion & Implications

Identity

Practical Applications

MOCIs have various applications that can be used to inform the identity of their students, such as mentorship. Staff and faculty mentors who reflect the identity of their students can utilize their own cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) and rich educational experiences to help guide students in the program through their own leadership experiences. For example, a Black man mentor for a BMI Black college student can provide critical, historical advice for their mentee on navigating student organizations at a predominantly white institution as a Black man. Using these opportunities allows students to listen, internalize, and reflect on these representations of their identity through their mentor, creating positive associations and flexibility on how their identity is represented in leadership spaces.

Limitations

One limitation is that the identities of those who lead the program must be considered in all aspects of developing MOCIs. For instance, MOCI should have passionate staff who understand their students' needs as they develop their leadership identities. That includes having opportunities to continually learn from their students and staying current with research. For instance, discussing a leadership topic impacting men of color as a discussion topic in a MOCI or reading current literature on men of color. Additionally, MOCIs should also consider the various identities of the students they represent. Various authors (Huerta et al., 2021a, 2021b) have discussed how MOCI has possibilities for other men of color populations outside of Black and Latinx men, such as Indigenous, Asian, LGBTQ+, disability and other intersecting groups that are not as prominently focused in literature and in practice.

Capacity

Practical Applications

MOCIs can develop the leadership skills, values, and attitudes of their students through proactive, culturally relevant programming. For instance, leadership training that centers the experiences of men of color helps leadership educators not only to align learning experiences more effectively but also to provide guidance on navigating hegemonic structures on an institutional level (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016). One approach for this can be a MOCI program that creates career development workshops, such as networking and professional communication, that help men of color better connect with and navigate institutional administrators and develop collaborative partnerships. Additionally, volunteerism and service provide grounded opportunities for college men of color to practice leadership skills in their community, such as collectivism (Bordas, 2016), emotional intelligence, stewardship, and followership by actively engaging in the community. Opportunities such as cleanups, working in soup kitchens, and assisting at food banks provide avenues for men of color to practice these skills with their peers.

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Limitations

When creating culturally relevant leadership learning opportunities, it is essential to be knowledgeable and open to the type of leadership skills a student may bring in leadership spaces (Yosso, 2005). Without centering this as a value, leadership educators risk perpetuating the same norms that culturally relevant approaches such as CRLL look to address. Extending this, not centering critical values in leadership and relationship development, such as collaboration and collectivism, can hinder skill development. Without these, individualism is emphasized which harms not only the development of the students but also the 'brotherhood' component that is cultivated within MOCIs.

Efficacy

Practical Applications

Providing opportunities for college men of color to practice their leadership skills can develop their efficacy in robust ways. For instance, MOCIs that provide a leadership course cultivate an intimate environment where students can reflect and practice their leadership skills. Additionally, the class environment allows for peer-to-peer interactions, which helps develop bonding and sharing opportunities for different leadership approaches. Another approach to developing efficacy would be connecting students to partners who work with men of color. Whether these are student organizations, offices on campus, or guest speakers representing the students' identities in the community, leadership educators can showcase how leadership can be defined in many different ways on and off campus. Through this reflection, men of color can see themselves in various fields and ultimately enhance their ability to be leaders in their own right.

Limitations

A limitation to developing efficacy is diminishing the cultural capital that students may bring into the space. Not only does this conflict with the tenets of CRLL, but it also dehumanizes the student through a lack of belief in their abilities. This impacts their belief in being part of the leadership process. Another limitation is not developing partnerships on and off campus. Developing these partnerships helps not only build support for MOCIs but also helps develop the students by partnering them with allies on and off campus. This type of allyship strengthens retention efforts and provides spaces for college men of color to build their leadership efficacy.

Call to Action

In reflecting upon the climate of higher education- especially for men of color- now is the time to begin the transformative institutional changes to foster pathways to develop identity, capacity, and efficacy through men of color initiatives and programs. Our discussion highlights important and nuanced conversations for developing MOCIs on campuses that seek to expand upon how they support development alongside men of color, as well as ways in which current campuses may build upon existing MOCIs. Whether it is a developing or existing MOCI, it is imperative that these programs implement opportunities for mentorship, peer-to-peer conversations, critical and culturally informed leadership curriculum, community engagement, cultural programming, and engaging in strengths-based practices

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to advance the understanding of self and cultural wealth. We further posit that prioritizing these practices through the lens of the CRLL model creates leadership learning opportunities for men of color that may be contextually informed by experiences, narratives, and campus environments. Given gaps in the existing praxis of supporting men of color through programs and initiatives, we further urge campuses to consider intentionality with planning around campus context, having supportive and passionate staff, centering culturally informed programs and curriculum around the expansiveness of identity (especially the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation), and using cultural capital as a way to empower men of color.

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Originality Note

The authors confirm that the manuscript is their original work, and if others' works are used, they are properly cited/quoted.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The authors claimed that there is "No Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies" in preparing this research.

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Mr. Darius A. Robinson is a doctoral candidate in thei higher education program at Florida State University (FSU). He is a graduate teaching assistant at FSU's Leadership Learning Research Center. Through a lens of understand students of color and leadership experiences, Darius' research entails detailing liberation as a revolutionary phenomenon to create change in communities. He seeks to understand how students of color, especially Black students, learn, utilize and impart leadership practices to serve their constituents and advocate for change. His current focus for his dissertation concerns how Black students use leadership to enact critical hope, creating the change they want to see in their environments while serving their members and communities.

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