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West Chester University

Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs

THESIS



Black Men Can: Changing the Narrative of Black  
Male Students

Levi A. Tucker II

May 2021

Black Men Can: Change the Narrative of Black Male Students in Higher Education

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science

By

Levi Albert Tucker II

May 2021

## Dedication

First and foremost I dedicate this thesis to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Without his power I would not have been able to do any of this. I cannot stress how important my relationship with Him is to my academic journey. It is by faith that I rose after falling and continued on my academic journey.

Next, I dedicate this thesis to my wonderful wife who has supported me as I set out to finish my bachelor's degree and not my masters. She knew me before any of this seemed possible and she always believe in my ability to achieve at this level. I love and appreciate you Mrs. Tucker.

My next dedication goes to my son Mansa (yes like Musa I). You mother was pregnant with you one month into this program. You instantly became as huge inspirations and a motivation. I wanted to make you proud, and I also want to be able to help you navigate this road in the most efficient way, that is if you choose this path. You will do great things no matter what path you choose, and I will be there to love, support, facilitate you. I love you son.

Last but certainly not least. I dedicate this to every Black boy that is in the American education system now or was in it in the past. You are not what they say you are. You are who you say you are. There isn't anything wrong with you it's the system and it needs an overhaul. Whenever you feel down remember the BALM Creed:

I am STRONG  
I am EDUCATED  
I am POWERFUL  
I am INTELLIGENT  
I am WONDERFUL  
I am of HIGH VALUE  
I am a BEACON of LIGHT  
I am a REVOLUTIONARY  
I am a BROTHER of ACHIEVEMENT  
I am a BROTHER of LEADERSHIP  
I am a BROTHER of MASTERY  
I AM THE BALM THAT WILL HEAL THE WOUNDS OF OUR COMMUNITIES.

## Acknowledgements

First, I want to acknowledge my beautiful wife. You agreed to let me go back to school full time to complete my bachelors. Once I did that in 2018 you then asked me what was next. I felt it was my responsibility to work but I also felt the strong pull to work in higher education. I struggled to make the decision to apply to the HEPsA program, but you assured me you stood behind me 100%. You work full time as a nurse, mother, and a wife all during a pandemic and you didn't break you got stronger. The way you support me only propels me to continue to grow. I love you forever!

Next I would like to acknowledge my mother, father, Brother. Mom you've also known that I was greater than I felt I was. You are a true Queen mother and just when it seems like I am done for you also yell out "Show them who you are" just like T'Challa's mothers did in Warrior Falls fight scene. This exhortation helps me remember the greatness within me and causes me to be great. I love you. Dad you have been my biggest cheer leader since you named me the "Biggest Boy in the State" your consistency and presence has shaped me as a man, and I can't thank you enough. I love you. Jordan you are one of my top three inspirations. You never let me doubt myself. You've helped me recognize myself as highly competent and capable. Your affirmation, love and care as helped me overcome a lot in my life and this thesis is part of that. Love you "Cap"!.

I want to thank my whole Care View Community Church family for checking on me throughout this journey. Your belief in me often outweighed my disbelief and helped stay the path and finish well. I love you all and thank you. I would like to highlight Pastor Paul J. James, Pastor Christine O. James as they have been a crucial part of my upbringing and

development from childhood through college and graduate studies. Not only have they nurture my spiritual growth but my mental growth as well. I love you both.

Dr. Kendrick Mickens you are the most direct reason why I have reached this milestone. You pushed me to go beyond my comfort zone and strive for greatness. Your dedication to the field of higher education and the Black community has had a direct impact on me. I am honored and privileged to call you mentor and I look forward to work with you going forward. You are my Yoda and you helped find and wield the force within me to make positive change in higher education for our people.

Dr. Tammy James I appreciate you offering me this opportunity so quickly. You took a lot of stress off my plate. You are a dynamic woman and a force to be reckoned with. It has been a privilege to work for and with you. You weren't just my boss you are sage in my life. The wisdom that you've communicated to me will stick with me well beyond my time in the HEPSA program and under your supervision in the COMPASS Mentor Program.

Last but certainly not least. To Dr. Hodes, Dr. Mohajeri, and Dr. Wozniak, you all are revolutionary beings. Superheroes in the flesh and you do an excellent job helping us discover our superpower and develop it in a way that we can be revolutionary as well. You made learning enjoyable because you took the complexity out of what it means to learn. I consider you all permanent members of my Tribe and I look forward to work with you going forward.

## Abstract

The master narrative about Black male students has impacted their experience in the education system from the early elementary level through undergraduate studies. This narrative was birthed out of the same racial attitudes that deemed the Black community inferior in every aspect of society. The idea that Black men are academically inferior is backed by research that focuses on Black men who are failing to graduate from college. This type of research and reporting perpetuates the idea that Black men can't be successful at anything outside of athletics and entertainment and if they are not good at that they are likely to be criminals. My concern is aimed at the negative impact the master narrative has on the way Black men view themselves and how those thoughts play a role in their academic achievement. I connect the Black male experience on college campuses with self-efficacy, Black Identity development, and representation to address this issue.

Keywords: Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework, Self-efficacy, Master Narrative, Sage, Protégé, BALM

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

My name is Levi A. Tucker II. I am Black man in my early 30s from a middle-class family in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. My thematic concern for this thesis is the impact of the negative stories created about Black male students due to their low college graduation rate. In 2010 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted a study of a cohort of students who started college in 2010, which looked at their 6-year graduation rate. The 6-year graduation rate is 150 percent of the normal time for degree completion. For full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions the results were:

Asian students (74 percent), White students (64 percent), students of Two or more races (60 percent), Hispanic students (54 percent), Pacific Islander students (51 percent), Black students (40 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native students (39 percent).

While my focus is on the low graduation rate of Black male students, I will touch on the Black community because this crisis is not happening in a vacuum. Any issue that impacts one segment of the Black community also impacts the whole Black community. The NCES also collected data at the intersection of gender and race, and Black men (34 percent) are graduating at a lower rate than Black women (44 percent) in comparison to white women (67 percent) and white men (61 percent), Asian women (77 percent) and Asian men (70 percent), and Latina women (58 percent) and Latino men (50 percent).

The state of Black male academic achievement is labeled a crisis because academic achievement, or the lack thereof, impacts a person or group's upward mobility. We base this on the average income of people with a 4-year college degree which is \$64,896 vs. people without a 4-year college degree, which is \$39,754 a year (Career Outlook, 2020, n.p.). This

crisis causes Black male students to stay at or below the socioeconomic status they were born into. While I could continue into the depths of how Black male students' low rate of graduation negatively impacts our ability to change our financial standing in positive way, I will not. I could also write about reasons why Black men are failing to keep up and come up with a comprehensive intervention geared at fixing the problem we have so that we can get back on track and become competitive. Instead, my primary concern is how Black male students are viewed by administrators, faculty, staff, and peers, and how this impacts their retention at the university.

In my experience these views are aligned with the portrayal of Black men in society particularly through media platforms. In my time on this earth, I've grown accustomed to seeing men who look like me, Black men, as athletes and entertainers. I've also grown accustomed to seeing Black men as drug dealers and users, thieves, and murderers. The former is bad because it generalizes what we as Black men can be and do. Those roles take a combination of special talent, skills, and hard work. What happens when a little Black boy realizes they are not gifted in those areas or when they realize that they are not interested in pursuing careers in those areas? They have very few prominent examples of Black men who are successful in other professional areas. Not only that, but our sense of self-worth can also be diminished with the idea that they are not Black enough, potentially causing us to lose interest in setting and striving to achieve our goals. The latter is very dangerous because it portrays us up as the monsters and deviants. If you think of a person or group as deviant monsters you can also rationalize the mistreatment of them to the point where the mistreatment is viewed as justifiable. Justifying the mistreatment not only distorts the culprits mind, but it hurts us as Black men. If we are constantly shown & told that we are,

bad, scary dangerous, and inferior, we are likely to believe it. That belief can negatively impact our ability to achieve academically, professionally, and socially. Harper (2012) introduces the anti-deficit achievement framework. In this report he discusses the aforementioned data about Black student outcomes in higher education. He also critiques how the research about Black male students has been focused on failure so much that anyone who takes time to read about us would only think we were failing to succeed. After reading Harper (2012) I firmly believe the conversation surrounding Black male students in higher education must move from “why are Black male students failing to graduate?” to “how are we failing to facilitate Black men on their journey towards graduation?” To give some more insight I will share my journey from my senior year of high school through present day. It is important to share my story because my experiences as a Black male student, both good and bad, are relevant to my concern and my intervention in many ways.

### **My Road to Earning a Four-Year Degree**

#### **Academic Setback to Academic Comeback**

It was the last semester of my senior year; I was being recruited to play basketball and many of the schools that were interested in me were sending me acceptance letters. My GPA was a 1.97 but they were willing to work with me to find academic success. I met with my guidance counselor to get some advice and she told me that I wasn't college material based on my GPA and that I should go to job corps. She was a Black woman, and up until that day I had the utmost respect for her. This is an experience I will never forget and in fact, it traumatized me and negatively impacted my confidence. The reality was my GPA wasn't great but that didn't have to dictate my future. Encouragement goes a long way, as

well as the challenge and support, all of which I received very little of in my neighborhood school. This conversation would impact me throughout my academic journey.

My undergraduate journey was unconventional. It all started at Delaware County Community College (DCCC) in 2007. In the first two years I averaged nine credits per semester and was able to manage the course load. I earned a 2.84 grade point average (GPA), which was good enough to be accepted to West Chester University for the spring 2010 semester. In my first semester at WCU I did well. My academic decline began in the fall of 2010. Managing schoolwork, a job and a social life was difficult. This was my first time, so instead of getting the assistance I needed to achieve, I allowed the shame I felt to keep me isolated. I used social involvement to distract me from my struggles in school. I was on the board of an organization, and I made sure to attend the events of other organizations. This helped me feel competent, which made me feel good. Filling my social agenda up left little time for studying and or going to tutors. Leading me to failing a couple classes and earning Ds in a few others, which hurt my GPA tremendously. I ended up on academic probation with one semester to pull my GPA up. I failed to do so and was ultimately dismissed from the university.

During this time my advisor, who was a very kind person, did not engage and support me in a way that promoted my academic success. She seemed to be preoccupied whenever I reached out for advising and then she also abruptly went abroad to teach the same semester I was on academic probation. By the time she came back, I was dismissed. Every time I contacted her to meet, she would either say the timing was bad or she would schedule and then contact me to reschedule the day before the planned meeting. I felt disregarded by the main person on campus who I believe should have been in my corner

academically. I believe my experience with this advisor was highly miseducative (Dewey, 1938) because I perceived it as a sign to give up, which led to me prioritized my social life on campus to cope with the shame of my failure. While there were resources that I could have accessed to assist me in my pursuit of academic success, I believe more could have been done to engage and support me the moment I enrolled to the university. The low graduation rate of Black men in 4-year institutions has been a topic of concern for at least two decades, so it is time for someone to take a proactive approach to providing Black male college students with resources and opportunities that promote achievement.

After being dismissed in Fall 2011, I took off one semester to clear my head and reevaluate what I wanted from life. Being that I had a support system at home with my parent and in my church family, I was able to get the advice and encouragement I needed to propel me forward into the next chapter of my life. This is important to mention because it speaks to my intervention. I am surrounded by educated people, particularly Black men who have earned between a bachelor's degree and a doctoral degree. There are some who are my peers, others who are a little older than me, and some who are the same age as my parents or older. They encouraged, motivated, challenged, and inspired me so that I did not to wallow in my sorrows. Rather, the consistent theme was that being knocked down happens, but I had to choose to get up and finish what I had started. Having a strong network of men who looked like me and have earned degrees was a game changer. The motivation they gave me wasn't just feel-good talk, it was authentic and relatable. They were able to speak to me from experience as well as understanding. This experience highlights the importance of representation, which I believe includes and transcends school personnel.

In the spring of 2012, I enrolled back at DCCC to complete my Associates Degree. Looking back, this experience at WCU tainted my perception of advisors. So much so, I only met with an advisor once during my time back at DCCC to get a hold off my account so that I could schedule my classes for my final semester. In spring 2014, I was enrolled at Eastern University to finish my bachelor's degree but decided after one semester I didn't want to acquire that much debt to finish my undergraduate degree. In those three semesters between DCCC and Eastern University, I earned a 3.46 GPA. Between the two institutions I only met with an advisor twice. In fall 2017 I applied for readmission at WCU, and I was accepted. This is where a program counselor in the Psychology Department, Johny Tadros, came into my life academically. I was excited, nervous, and ready to finish my undergraduate journey. I was skeptical but my wife encouraged me to meet with an advisor to make sure my journey towards graduation was as focused as possible through strategic scheduling. Johny Tadros helped me map out my path to graduation in three semesters with one summer course. Not only did he meet with me to schedule classes, but he checked in on me to make sure I was tracking well in my classes and to see if I felt that I needed extra support. The experience I had with Johny was so excellent that I decided I wanted to join a profession that facilitates and supports students as they work towards academic achievement. Johny Tadros set an excellent example of what it means to make a higher education experience great for students by providing access to resources that benefit them in their life and career.

### **Becoming a Student Affairs Professional**

My interaction with Johny led me to do a senior field experience in the last semester of my undergraduate journey that was under the supervision of my mentor, Dr. Kendrick

Mickens, the director of the Student Resource Center at Delaware County Community College (DCCC). Dr. Mickens empowered me to take the reins of the Multicultural Male Achievers Alliance, an organization under the Black and Latino Male Empowerment Initiative. I was tasked with creating programs and events with the goal of engaging Black and Latino male students in a way that promotes academic success. I came up with a weekly series called Shop Talk. We provided food and a safe space for the students to engage in riveting discussions. Each week had relevant themes with the intent to inform students about resources and opportunities they could access on their journey towards graduation and to engage them in conversations about their goals, uplifting them in a manner that propels them towards academic success. I invited professionals from various fields to speak with the students as well as facilitated discussions. This allowed students to interact with professionals with 4-year degrees, graduate degrees, and sometimes terminal degrees. This worked as a form of motivation for them. We also found that the more we opened the space for discussion, the more engaged the students were. Through dialogue students began to learn how to advocate for themselves. This also created an opportunity for us as student affairs professionals to hear directly from this group of students what they need from us as they work toward academic achievement. This is vital because it informs my philosophy of education and what I believe are the best practices for addressing the low graduation rate of black male students.

I obtained a graduate assistantship as a mentor in Athletic Mentor Program (AMP) and the C.O.M.P.A.S.S. Mentor program (CMP). My duties for both programs were to hold weekly one-on-one meetings with various students and student-athletes to track their academic progress and make sure they on a path to academic success while striving towards

the goal of graduation. I was a direct contact for them in event that they need help locating academic resources. For the CMP, all the duties above apply but the difference is the student. The CMP was created as an initiative to address the retention issue of Black male students on campus. Some students were on academic probation and others were close to it. One of the key components that separate the CMP from the student success coach representation. Black male graduate students, like myself mentor Black men in undergraduate programs. This is important because of representation which shows the Black men in undergrad that they do belong. My main takeaway from serving in these two programs is that it is vital for Black male undergraduates to be mentored by Black men who are in graduate you school or beyond. Many of the students I interacted with were first generation college students and do not have a direct example of a man who looks like them and has successfully enrolled and graduated from an institution of higher education.

My experience working with and under Dr. Mickens and Dr. James are great contributors to the increase of my passion for working with marginalized, underserved, and underrepresented students in higher education. Their dedication to students is one that I admire, and my hope is that I can make a significant impact on the lives of every student I encounter. Dr. Mickens has become one of my mentors teaching me how to use the tools I acquire and my personality to be the most effective higher education practitioner/student affairs educator that I can be. One thing I believe strongly is that Student Affairs educators are the hearts of higher education because we focus on the whole student. While I have had some negative miseducative experiences in higher education, my educative experience with Johny Tadros led me to pursue a graduate degree in the Higher Education Policy and



Student Affairs program. It also inspired me to be a student affairs professional who causes students to learn.

### **A New Framework**

Instead of asking why Black men fail we need to shift our attention to the Black male students who succeed. It is there where we will find the solution to the low graduation rates amongst these young men. This is an empowering approach in that it allows Black male college students to help their same race peers move from struggling to achievement. In studying the successful Black male students, we learn what tends to work for them and what hurts them so we can properly mitigate the issue (Harper, 2012). There are a few things I will look at in the chapters that follow. First, I will look at how the negative perception of Black male students follows from early education through higher education. Furthermore, I uncover how racism contributes to the stories told about Black men and how they work to the detriment of Black male students. These stories negatively affect the experience of Black male students on campus because they dictates how everyone perceives them. The perceptions lead to the poor treatment of Black male students. While higher education should be a realm where these students are seen in a positive life like their white counterparts. Much of the research has only perpetuated the stories. Asking the question “why do Black male students fail?” places the onus on Black male students, opposed to the education system that pigeonholed them in the first place.

It is our role as student affairs professionals to lead the way in changing the narrative about Black male students in academia and in society. We are also responsible for providing Black male students with support that balances the challenges they face in society and on campus. This support most effective when it comes primarily from those who look like them.

This is called representation, which higher education needs to work on as it pertains to Black men. But until then we will need to utilize those who do not work at the institution of higher education to provide Black male students with representative support for inspiration, motivation, and empowerment. I believe that by building a relationship with a Black male professional, particularly one who has graduated from the same university, these young men will have a personal reference for what Black male success looks like and that will allow them to believe that they too can and will succeed. Not only that the mentors will be able to provide practical advice, necessary support, and advocacy for the student.

### **Thesis Trailer**

In Chapter two I will discuss my theoretical frameworks used to explore this crisis. One is John Dewey's theory of experience. I believe this crisis is significantly impacted by the experience of Black male students in education. Not just in higher education but in the whole education system. Often the experience provided is based on narratives about the recipient. Another framework I will also be using Dr. Shaun Harper's Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework, which talks about changing how we research and report about Black male students, not neglecting to mention the struggles but balancing them with the success. Until now the research has been lopsided and focused on the failing Black male students leaving those who achieve in obscurity. Harper (2012) looks to highlight the achievers in efforts to understand what was different about their journey. Utilizing this information helped me develop my intervention. In chapter three I will breakdown of some foundational concepts that will help make my thesis concern clearer. In chapter 4 I will introduce and share details about my program intervention. Then, in chapter five I will share

my implementation strategies, leadership style, my assessment approach, some limitations and then a conclusion.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks**

Education is a foundational aspect of every person's life. Many people focus on schools and other traditional forms education, but learning is not bound to any particular setting. Instead, education is happening in every area of our lives. That is why it is vital to create a philosophy of education that transcends the classroom and is useful in people's everyday lives. This philosophy of education acknowledges the interconnection of life and the university, which is far more beneficial to students and society. My philosophy is built on the idea of empowered learning, which is made up of two pillars. The first one is facilitation; this philosophy reframes how the teacher, and the students operate in the learning environment. The teacher is not the all-knowing authority, rather they are educational conduits whose goal is to guide students in a way that not only prepares students for future learning experiences but also excites them for those experiences. The second pillar is mutual respect. This is another shift from the hierarchical nature of tradition education. This sets the precedence for continuous learning for everyone including teacher. Mutual respect also focuses on valuing the insights and perspective of everyone in the learning space no matter their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. It also accounts for those whose identity intersects with any of those identities. When combined, facilitation and mutual respect create a philosophy of education that encourages social change, positive experiences, and meaningful interactions for all involved, regardless of race, creed, or sexual orientation.

### **Foundation of My Philosophy of Education**

Traditionally the student-teacher relationship is hierarchical, which comes from the banking model. Freire (1970) states, in the banking model of education “The teacher teaches

and the students are taught...The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing...The teacher thinks and the students are thought about...The teacher talks and the students listen—meekly” (p. 66). In brief, teachers deposit, and the student receive. Yet as Freire explains, “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (Freire, 1970, p. 68).

The use of the banking model in education keeps society's power structure intact because it perpetuates dominant ideologies and agendas shaping how the students feel, think, and behave. Traditionally, education has allowed the oppressors to maintain control over the oppressed. The focus is on intaking as much information as possible, with no concern for whether the students can apply it in manner that is relevant and useful for making a change in their lives and in their communities. Furthermore, the dynamic created sets a precedence for students to adapt to oppressive conditions without question. According to Freire (1970):

The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better “fit” for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it. (p. 70)

The banking model greatly serves the oppressor because it allows them to operate with very few impediments. Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects (Freire, 1970, p. 85). Freire saw traditional education as a place where the status quo was maintained,

which kept the oppressor in power and the oppressed powerless. Taking inquiry off the table and maintaining a system where the students listen and adapt. Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression (Freire, 1970, p. 72). This shows education, not as the tool for endless possibilities and liberation, rather a tool of the elite to promote assimilation as ideal. The banking-model is a conduit of oppression. While some institutions of education have begun to shift away from the banking model, there are many who maintain this model. Problem-posing education can be viewed as the opposite of the banking model but that would be an oversimplification. The next section will give a breakdown of what problem-posing education is and how it could help Black male students on their quest for academic success.

### **Problem-posing education**

Problem posing education is the opposite of the Banking-model in every way. For every effort to suppress inquiry and oppress the student in the banking-model, there is an effort for the liberation of thought, questioning and difference of opinions in problem-posing education. There is also a distancing from the traditional relationship between students and teachers. According to Freire (1970):

Indeed, problem-posing education, which breaks with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education, can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom only if it can overcome the above contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn

while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on “authority” are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are “owned” by the teacher. (p. 73)

Problem posing education is vital to my philosophy of education because of its liberating construct. Whereas teachers in the banking model are conduits of the infrastructure of power in society, in problem-posing education they are conduits of critical thinking and empowerment, which liberates themselves and the students they are facilitating.

Higher education is the perfect place to execute problem-posing education. Moving from lectures to discussions is the path towards problem-posing education. Lectures perpetuate the banking model, whereas discussion promotes problem-posing through an exchange of ideas and creating space for inquiry, which can undo what was taught in K-12 as opposed to perpetuating it. This will be important in majors like education because it will create a new culture perspective for teachers. The goal will be to change the K-12 model of education from banking model to problem-posing education by changing how aspiring teachers are taught. This will lead to the cultivation of critical thinking skills early in the academic journey. In my experience, traditional education, particularly in K-12, is not about learning the content presented to you and applying it to your everyday lives. This would cultivate critical thinkers who are not satisfied with the status quo in society seek to use understanding and knowledge to change the world for the betterment of all people. Rather traditional K-12 education has been carried out in a way that learners are conditioned to

receive information and follow orders. The goal is to create well adapted individuals. I believe higher education operates in a space of duality. On one hand it is a continuation of the training that happens in K-12, on the other it is deconstruction of that training. There is an effort in higher education to cultivate critical thinking in students but with the replication of the hierarchy learned in K-12, teachers still pose as superior and students as subordinate.

This is problematic for Black male students in particular because it reinforces the ideology of white supremacy. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018):

Faculty include professors, associate professors, assistant professors, instructors, lecturers, assisting professors, adjunct professors, and interim professors. Of all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2018, some 40 percent were White males; 35 percent were White females; 7 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males; 5 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander females; and 3 percent each were Black males, Black females, Hispanic males, and Hispanic females.

Focusing in on Black male faculty members we see they make up a small percentage (3%) of the total of faculty members. Not only that, so do any other minorities or marginalized groups. The fact is that in 2018, it was found that 75 percent of the “full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions” were white, with 40% being White males and 35% being White females. Not having representation is bad enough. The message from the lack of representation is even more sinister. Teachers are considered the authority, which can convey a message of superiority vs. inferiority in the classroom. When Black male students are taught by White teachers all of their lives it ingrains the sense of inferiority in



them. As explained by Woodson (1933) the thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies (p.192). In this culture misconceptions or stereotypes about Black male students become facts, which is detrimental. As explained by Harper (2009):

The typical Black boy in a K-12 educational setting is taught almost exclusively by White women who combine an insufficient anticipation for his academic achievement with high expectations for disruptive behavior, intellectual stupidity, and a dispassion for learning that will ultimately culminate with high school dropout (Davis 2003; Davis and Jordan 1994; Jackson and Moore 2008; Noguera 2003; Toldson 2008)...Those who view and treat Black males in such troubled ways associate us, perhaps unconsciously, with one of the most racially offensive terms in American history: Niggers. (p. 697-698)

The expectations that teacher tend to have for Black male students are all negative and come from the historical characterization of Black men in America. These negative expectations follow Black male students through K-12 into and through higher education.

### **My Philosophy of Education: Empowered Learning**

To understand what I call Empowered Learning you must first understand the meaning of empower. Empower is word best described as the act of strengthening someone in a way that increases their belief in their own ability to control their life and claim their rights. Think of it like a teenager learning how to drive. You must teach them the basics and provide them with experience behind the wheel to prepare them for the driver's test. The empowering part is the driving practice because you are entrusting them with your vehicle. To be most empowered you should allow them the space to make decisions while you are

out. Create an atmosphere where they can ask questions when they feel the need, but not feel like you will reprimand them for doing something outside of what you may have taught them. Maybe they drive a different way than you taught them, but in the grand scheme it is no less safe. So, instead of telling them to do it like you told them, you wait until the session is over and say “I noticed you looked right twice before you turned. Why did you do that?” This gives them the opportunity to share their reasoning and gives you the opportunity to provide constructive feedback if necessary. Empowered Learning leaves little room for assumption and a lot of room for understanding. The facilitator and the student are both the student and the teacher simultaneously. Next, I will talk about the two pillars of Empowered Learning which are facilitation and mutual respect.

### **Facilitation**

The first pillar of this philosophy is facilitation. Teachers are to be facilitators on the educational journey instead of the dictators that have been prevalent in and throughout the traditional education banking model. Facilitation is being free from difficulty or impediment. For the sake of this pillar, we use "freeing from impediment," which is interpreted as clearing the pathway from unnecessary obstacles leaving the student and the teacher with endless opportunities to teach, learn, and evolve. One may ask, what does a facilitative teacher look like? In the introduction of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Donaldo Macedo (2014) states:

Paulo Freire’s invigorating critique of the dominant banking model of education leads to his democratic proposals of problem-posing education where “men and women develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality

but as a reality in the process of transformation.” This offered to me—and all of those who experience subordination through an imposed assimilation policy—a path through which we come to understand what it means to come to cultural voice. It is a process that always involves pain and hope; a process through which, as forced cultural jugglers, we can come to subjectivity, transcending our object position in a society that hosts us yet is alien. (pp. 10-11)

Macedo’s interpretation of Freire’s problem-posing education show that the teacher’s role isn’t to dictate, it is to facilitate. When teacher assume a facilitative role, they become more like guides and less like instructors. This deconstructs the authoritarian nature of the student-teacher relationship with the intention of building a collaborative relationship that values the insights of all parties.

For the facilitation pillar to be successful, the facilitator must clearly communicate their intention for how the learning environment will be conducted. This is important because to successfully transform the minds of those entering the new modality must state the new way of engagement. A great model for this is Dr. Jason Wozniak. At the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester, he made it clear that the classroom experience relied heavily on class participation, sharing, and learning from everyone in the classroom. This approach also allowed every student to explore their thoughts and feelings and be heard in the class. Not only that, but it also gave us the chance to consider the thoughts and feelings of our fellow learners. This is an essential step in teachers being the facilitator because it sets clear intent, which helps the students to release the old paradigm and receive a new way of learning and being in an educational environment.

## **Mutual Respect**

Institutions of higher education are often focused on diversity and inclusion. While it seems noble to encourage diversity and inclusion, one must question the motives of these institutions. Is this an effort to manage public relations in light of the recent social justice movements? Do they seek to appear progressive while maintaining the system as it always has been? This section focuses on a vital component of true diversity and inclusion, mutual respect. Mutual respect accepts others' differences but takes it further, appreciating those differences and utilizing them to broaden one's way of thinking. According to hooks (1994), "our solidarity must be affirmed by a shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth" (p. 33). Another way of interpreting the previous statement is that we do not need to agree on everything to have meaningful social encounters and educative experiences. Instead, what we need to decide on is the fact that diversity should be celebrated, respected, and embraced as crucial to the learning process.

White supremacy is the enemy to mutual respect. It is a lie that has been told and reinforced for so long we subconsciously believe it to be true. White supremacy is the ideology that being white is superior to any other race. Therefore, white culture is the only culture acceptable in society, which forces anyone who belongs to cultures outside of the dominant or white culture to assimilate and denounce their native culture. We must actively fight to change that narrative and reveal the truth. All people and the different groups we belong to have great things to offer to education and society. To combat this, we must expose master narratives as one perspective, not the only valid and acceptable point of view. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), "Master narratives are dominant accounts that

are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups (e.g., Black guys don't care about education)—such scripts usually caricature these groups in negative ways” (p. 23). The existence and perpetuation of the Master narratives as it pertains to Black male students makes the pursuit of mutual respect imperative. The aim should be to counter the master narratives exposing the truth about the people whom they are said to represent. In regard to the purpose of the counter narrative, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) state that it “exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color. Although social scientists tell stories under the guise of ‘objective’ research, these stories uphold deficit, racialized notions about people of color” (p. 23). When these ideas about people of color are upheld the best anyone from the dominant culture can do is pity them. If a group of people is considered pitiful, it is near impossible to respect them. Empowering the group deemed pitiful is difficult when you don't respect them. Mutual respect promotes diversity of thoughts and feelings, allowing us to experience and participate in each other's cultures and helping us view the world from many different perspectives, which gives us the ability to approach and solve some of the world's most challenging issues in a way that is beneficial to all people, not just the dominant culture. Not only that, but it allows us to evolve in the way that we think about the world.

Mutual respect is essential within the educational process. Teachers must respect students as autonomous beings and the primary participant in their educational experience. Classmates must respect each other as resources of great perspective, which will allow them to gain a diverse insight into the topics or issues in consideration. It is essential to realize that having credentials alone does not warrant respect. Still, a willingness to give respect while engaging with the students will inspire them not only to respect the instructor and

their peers, but themselves. It is likely students will learn more in an environment filled with mutual respect than when the teacher carries themselves like the all-knowing, all-powerful being, who will give the information. Mutual respect can also help students learn more because the fear of participation will be lower. When they know that the classroom is an atmosphere where everyone and their beliefs, thoughts, and feelings are respected and valued, it creates a space where vulnerability is embraced instead of avoided. When creating a norm of vulnerability, we make the learning experience more rewarding for everyone involved. Instead of being consumed with anxiety around what others, mainly the teacher, may think of them, they will be more engaged in making discoveries with their classmates and their teacher. "If we fear mistakes, doing things wrongly, constantly evaluating ourselves, we will never make the academy a culturally diverse place where scholars and the curricula address every dimension of that difference" (hooks, 1994, p. 33). We must move ahead with our goal of transforming education into a culturally diverse place. Fear of failing or messing up should not lead our action more than the danger of keeping things the same.

In the pillars mentioned, the aim is to create educative experiences in every moment of learning. Dewey (1938) asserts, "experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some, experiences are miseducative. Any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experiences" (p. 61). Dewey's point here was that education is not just learning new information or acquiring new skills. Instead, there are two primary outcomes in educational experiences. Educative experiences leave students with a desire to learn more. Whereas miseducative experiences cause that desire to fade, making future educational experiences less educative. When focusing on things, like performance on exams and assignments, we make the students objects. When we

make the students objects, we are more likely to create miseducative experiences because their education will be saturated with stress. When we facilitate students and encourage mutual respect, they can be *empowered learners* who have a significant stake in their education. This would create a world made up of empowered individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, cultures and racial groups who work together and consider everyone's perspectives when resolving complex issues.

I believe the purpose of higher education is to educate, facilitate, and cultivate every student, faculty, staff members and society. Education is life long and is best when it is conducted with diversity and inclusion. Diversity and inclusion respects all people from all cultures as experts in their own regard, especially on matters concerning their culture and people they identify with. This changes the goal from having people from diverse backgrounds just be seen at the table to having them be seen, heard and respected. When we commit to practicing diversity and inclusion in higher education, we can shift the practice of society because higher education is a highly respected institution in Western civilization.

### **Action Research**

Action research (AR) is a collaborative stakeholder driven method of research. In AR the people and the issue(s) concerning them are of the utmost importance and the researcher must be invested. This investment must be attached to the connection to the stakeholders and empowering them to be participants in seeking out solutions to the problems they face. Reason and Bradbury (2001) defined Action Research as:

a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together

action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (As cited in Brydon-Miller et al pp. 10-11)

The immersion of the researcher into the community they are conducting their research on is another element of AR. In this collaboration not only is the community of focus made better, but the action researcher is also transformed having worked with the people of the community. According to Brydon-Miller et al. (2003), “working collaboratively with others leads not only to community and organizational changes, but also to personal changes in the action researcher. As action researchers reflect on their experiences, they acknowledge being profoundly changed by those experiences” (p. 14). To be an action researcher is to have a willingness to get dirty and do the work not just collecting data. In this instance getting dirty is referencing being up close and personal with the people you are conducting research with. You are actively pursuing answers while building relationships with the people who are directly impacted by the issues. As cited by Brydon-Miller et al. (2003), “Fundamental to action research is the idea that the social world can only be understood by trying to change it” (p. 15). There needs to be genuine connection, which is built on respect and commitment to action that will change conditions and all the people involved. Communities cannot wait for theories and concepts, rather they need researchers to learn while acting. Another concept is community member or stakeholders as experts. Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) asserts:

A respect for people and for the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social



change, and a commitment to action, these are the basic values which underlie our common practice as action researchers. (p. 15)

Researchers often consider themselves experts, which can present in the form of a savior complex. This is when a person or a group feels the need to rescue another person or group. To take it a step further, when a researcher takes on the savior complex, they decide that they know what's best for the person or group and they prescribe solutions based on statistics and observations. That is eerily close to the banking model mentioned in the philosophy of education section of this chapter. There is nothing empowering about an individual swooping in to tell people why they struggle and what they need to do to stop the struggle. While the research and the theorizing may be well thought out it cannot replace the knowledge and experience the people going through the problem have. In AR the researcher acknowledges the importance of having the people participate in the study.

Action research is vital in this thematic concern and is evident in Dr. Shaun Harpers Anti-Deficit Framework. The aim of this thesis is to shift the focus from the doom and gloom narrative perpetuated about the state of Black male students in higher education, towards the Black male students who succeed and allow them to be part of the solution. The intervention, which will be proposed in chapter four, is a commitment to action. In this intervention, successful Black male students are the source for solving the issue of low graduation rates amongst their peers. Regarding a study he conducted, Harper (2012) asserts:

This national study moves beyond deficit perspectives on achievement by highlighting persons, policies, programs, and resources that help Black men succeed across a range of college and university contexts. Instead of adding to the now

exhaustive body of literature and conversations about why Black male enrollments and degree attainment rates are so low, this study sought instructive insights from engaged student leaders who did well and maximized their college experiences. Emphasis in the study was placed on understanding how Black male achievers managed to gain admission to their institutions, overcome hurdles that typically disadvantage their peers, and amass portfolios of experiences that rendered them competitive for internships, jobs, and admission to highly- selective graduate and professional schools. (p. 6)

Much of the research and intervention regarding Black male students don't include insight and direction from successful Black male students. Inverting the questions to how Black male students achieve and ultimately graduate, gives us clear understanding on what works and what doesn't work regarding their journey toward academic success. Dr. Harper's Anti-Deficit framework relies on successful Black male student's experience and knowledge to address this pervasive issue of the graduation rate of Black males. Harper (2012) found:

Participants did not deem themselves superior to or smarter than their less accomplished, disengaged same-race male peers. In fact, most believed lower-performing Black male students had the same potential but had not encountered people or culturally relevant experiences that motivated them to be engaged, strive for academic success, and persist through baccalaureate degree attainment. (p. 17)

There's a level of understanding, compassion, and investment successful Black male students and professionals bring to the table that can only come from related experiences.

Critical action research is very important to my thesis concern because it sets a precedent for changing the narrative that has followed Black male students through K-12

into college. It is my belief that when changing the narrative from deficit to excellence we acknowledge that Black male students can and do achieve despite the obstacles they face. Another byproduct of the Anti-Deficit framework is the creation of leadership opportunities for successful Black male students to facilitate their peers who struggle towards academic success. Students from Harper's study shared that they have never been asked about their journey toward academic achievement. Harper (2012) found:

Most surprising and most disappointing is that nearly every student interviewed said it was the first time someone had sat him down to ask how he successfully navigated his way to and through higher education, what compelled him to be engaged in student organizations and college classrooms, and what he learned that could help improve achievement and engagement among Black male collegians. As noted earlier, 219 of the 221 men who were nominated for this study agreed to participate; this alone confirms that achievers are willing to share insights into success if they are invited to do so.

This speaks to the engagement part of the narrative about Black male students. Claiming Black male students aren't engaged perpetuates a highly negative message about their relationship with education. The reality is they are rarely engaged with. In higher education engagement must be reconfigured as a two-way street. If the environment isn't welcoming, higher education professionals will never know about the true experience of Black male students. They will continue to use statistics and observations from afar which will lead to continued perpetuation of the dominant narrative regarding Black males and education. When it comes to higher education Black male students are stakeholders. As mentioned above stakeholders deserve to have input regarding research and interventions. As a scholar,

it is tempting to drive the research and intervention, but we must realize that the stakeholders have more to lose and gain in this process than the researcher does. Where we can change this is to allow people who come from the groups we are studying to lead the study. In this case, scholars that are Black males, like Dr. Shaun Harper and I, should be the primary researchers in matter concerning Black male students. Our shared identity with the group we will research and implement interventions for will give us a level of empathy and care that may not come from those who do not come from the same identity group. That is why it is important for this field to use Critical Action Research.

### Chapter Three: Literature Review

In education, and more specifically in higher education, there has been a crisis of low graduation rate among Black male students. As the research shows, more than two-thirds (67.6%) of Black men who start college do not graduate within six years, which is the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006). According to Fullard (2019), the graduation rate for black men is just 35%, nearly half of the 62% rate for white students (p. 122). The first reason why this problem needs to be considered a crisis is because the difference in pay between individuals with college degrees and individuals without is large. “This education gap virtually ensures that men of color...will continue to have less earning power than their white counterparts and be underrepresented across a broad spectrum of high-paying professions” (Valbrun, 2010). The Black community makes up a large amount of the population that comes from low socioeconomic communities (Serna and Woulfe, 2017). If Black men are graduating from college at a very low rate, they will either be stuck at the economic status they come from or drop below it as time goes on and the cost of living keeps climbing.

The second and more focal reason why this issue is a crisis is because of the master narrative, which reinforces negative beliefs about Black male students. While it is important to understand the issues Black male students face in our pursuit of academic achievement, to focus solely on the obstacles and the low graduation rate is to perpetuate another impediment for us, a deficit perspective. The choice to constantly research and present information about Black men who are academically *unsuccessful* while spending little to no time on those who are academically *successful*, sends a message to people, including Black men, that we are intellectually inferior, educationally uninterested, and academically

irredeemable. This only furthers the existing racism and oppression in the world. Anyone who takes time to read about them could confidently conclude that Black male undergraduates are troubled, their future is bleak, they all do poorly, and there is little that can be done to reverse longstanding outcomes disparities that render them among the least likely to succeed in college (Harper, 2009, pp. 699-700). Researchers have an interest in studying why Black male students are graduating at a rate that is not on par with their female counterparts and at a tremendously lower rate than their White male contemporaries. There is also a clear apathy for us. In the rest of this chapter, there will be an overview of racism and its impact on Black male students' experiences in education, and how those experiences decrease the belief in their abilities personally, socially, and academically and ultimately their graduation rates. I will also discuss the importance of counternarratives as inspired by Dr. Shaun Harpers Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework. Lastly, I will talk about neoliberal ideology, as well as its presence in President Reagan's policies which help perpetuate poor thinking of people from marginalized communities.

### **Ever Present Racism: Power of the Master Narrative**

Higher Education is part of American society. Therefore, it is not exempt from the ills of racism, which, in theory, is the origin of this crisis. Racism, in this case, is not just one group of people being prejudiced and acting rude or violent towards another based on their skin color. For the sake of this crisis, I want to focus on racism as a power construct, wherein people of color are either kept away from—or put in circumstances that make it extremely difficult to access—resources and opportunities that can change their lives for the

better (academically, professionally, financially, and socially). Racism is a conduit of White supremacy. Ansley (1997) describes the concept of White supremacy, stating:

[By] 'White supremacy' I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (p. 592)

White supremacy is way more sinister than harsh derogatory words and brash acts of violence. While those things may be concerning and disheartening, they are just the tip of the iceberg as it pertains to the impact that White supremacy has had on the Black community in general and, more specifically, Black male students. There is a culture of racism that exists in society and within the higher education system. Harper (2009) asserts, African American males at PWIs, which are extensions of the larger society, constantly endure a process of dehumanization called niggerization (p. 700). In the USA, the label Nigger (also referred to as 'the N-word') has been long assigned to a person of African ancestry who is thought to be of a lower social class and possesses a strong predisposition toward civil disobedience and failure, especially in comparison to White Americans (deCoy, 1967). While the use of nigger may shock you and even make you feel uncomfortable, Harper (2009) explains the reason for its use:

Using Nigger instead of the euphemistic N-word was not compelled by some desperate attempt to add shock value to this article. Instead, being called a Nigger,

especially by a White person, usually incites emotional hurt and a range of other injurious feelings within the insulted Black person (Kennedy 2002). It is possible that being continually treated like a Nigger engenders a stronger, more cumulatively aggravating series of responses than simply being called one. Protecting readers from the penetration of this word and all that is associated with it (historically and presently) seemed unfair to those of us who are persistently harmed by it in schools, colleges, and society. To understand, even partially, how Black men are niggered on college and university campuses requires some grappling with the very word that characterizes their experiential realities. (p. 699)

Racism conceives and gives birth to stereotypes, which result in Black male students being niggered. Stereotypes in this instant are negative characterizations of Black men in education. Master narratives are generalized stories that that tend to portray people and the groups they identified with in negative and marginalized ways (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). The master narrative of Black men is constructed of stereotypes. These stereotypes put limitations on the way administrators, faculty, staff, and our peers view and treat us:

This process entails a perpetual and less than edifying “reinforcement of racist stereotypes that stigmatize them as dumb jocks, black male criminals from the local community who do not belong on campus, affirmative action beneficiaries who were undeserving of admission, and at-risk students who all emerge from low-income families and urban ghettos.” (Harper, 2009, p. 700)

Stereotypes also impact the willingness of the aforementioned group to forge meaningful relationships with us, which negatively impacts our feeling of belonging to the university



(Strayhorn, 2008). This is detrimental to Black male academic achievement and true diversity and inclusion within the university. This view can also impact the way Black male students think and feel about themselves. Steele and Aronson (1995) coined the phrase “stereotype threat” which speaks on the great stress that Black male students feel about the possibility of confirming negative stereotypes. Harper (2012) conveyed, stereotypes are especially harmful when students internalize and agonize over them; those who identify most closely with academic achievement are especially vulnerable to stereotype threat (Steele, 1997; Taylor & Antony, 2001). It was clear that we must change the narrative to address the issues Black male students face in higher education.

The master narrative of Black male students starts in elementary school and travels with the students all the way through grade school and college. The condition and state of Black male students are researched and viewed with a deficit approach, meaning researchers and educators tend to approach them with the preconceived notion that they are incapable of academic achievement and generally uninterested in learning. Rather than seeking ways to reach these students, they divest in them, which increases the likelihood of academic failure (Harper & Davis, 2012). Many Black male students internalize this narrative, taking on the negative attributes they are given. Behaving in a way that fulfills the prophecy. It’s not hard to believe since this deficit-oriented narrative is one that follows us from grade school through undergraduate studies. Woodson (1933) states:

The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies...If you teach the Negro that he has

accomplished as much good as any other race, he will achieve and aspire to equality and justice without regard to race. (as cited in Harper, 2009, p. 697)

The master narrative drives the issues that Black male students face in graduating, rather than this being a result of our predisposition to failure. Research tells educators that we are inferior, and they are treated as such. With this treatment, it is likely that we will believe that we are inferior and behave as such. That belief can and does result in academic failure, so it very important to use counter stories or narratives to combat the master narrative that has been thriving in the Western world for many centuries. Counternarratives come from elevating Black male students who are successful. This is not for showing the dominant group that we are willing and able to do the work and achieve. Rather it is to show other Black men that we are more than what we have been told that we are. As mentioned before, this is often not discussed in the research and literature focused on Black male students (Harper, 2012).

Based on the key concepts, there were some critiques that arose; the main one was that there is a lot of information on Black male students that were failing or not enrolling in college but very little on those who enroll and achieve academic success; the idea is that by focusing research on the failure we are only perpetuating the narrative. Fries-Britt asserts:

The images created of Black men in our society often confine them to environments shaped by drugs, crime, athletics, and academic failure. In education, we have contributed to this negative portrait by the disproportionate amount of research that emphasizes remediation and disadvantage. (as cited in Davis II and Harper, 2012, p. 103)

With very little research on Black males who achieve in higher education, one may conclude that the narrative mentioned earlier in this overview is simply true about all Black males. Black male students have had little to no say in their portrayal societally or educationally. Ultimately, we are whatever those who belong to the dominant culture say we are. More specifically, knowledge produced about us by those in power via various outlets (i.e., research, education, politics, media, and entertainment).

Much of the research and information produced points to the inferiority of Black men. In my experience this is a pervasive societal message. What does this messaging do to our psyche as Black men? How does this impact our ability to believe that we can succeed academically, professionally, and socially? What I am talking about here is self-efficacy, which in my experience is a vital part of achievement in general and academic achievement specifically. What is self-efficacy? Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in given situations (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in how we think, feel, and behave. Not only that, but it is also a thermostat for our motivation (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is built by four sources, (1) mastery experiences, (2) vicarious experiences, (3) social persuasion, and (4) psychological and emotional states.

Mastery experiences focuses on the importance of success when completing goals and the positive impact it has on their belief that they can complete future goals. It is important to set students up for success by not put them in situations way beyond their preparedness. We believe it to be vital to engage, equip, and empower students as they develop and strive for success. The engagement aspect speaks to support. We will not shelter students from challenge we will support them through it. Vicarious experiences

focuses on representation as a means to promote self-efficacy, meaning that when people can see success in others who look like them they will in turn believe they are capable of success. In my experience growing up playing basketball and baseball I gravitated towards basketball because my father played through his thirties and the NBA is dominated by Black men. I firmly believed I would be an NBA star until I was sixteen years old. Imagine if images of Black male medical doctor, lawyers, business owners, and therapist were prominent. Many little Black boys would believe they were capable of pursuing those careers. Social persuasion is next while very important this is simple if we tell someone they can, they will believe that they can. As mentioned earlier in this paragraph there is a rationality behind this source. You can just tell a Black male student they can you must strategically place them in situation they are prepared to manage. As they achieve they will remain engaged for the next situation. Lastly, physiological, and emotional state focuses on the perception of the physical and emotional reactions we have to different circumstances.

Why is this important to Black male students in higher education? Self-efficacy is important because of what Woodson (1933) asserted about the constant drilling of “inferiority of the negro” and how that impacts how we think of ourselves, individually and collectively. If we are constantly being told that we are inferior and scholars back this up with research detailing our short comings neglecting to highlight those of us who succeed this lower our self-efficacy in the realm of education. The knowledge about Black male students’ failures are researched and reported very intentionally. The power is in the hands to the researcher, and they produce what society knows about us. I believe we, Black male scholars, must be equally intentional about make sure that our young Black boys and men are being developed in a manner that counters the current knowledge. I say power-

knowledge is one pertaining Black men because we are seen as inferior globally and much the researching and reporting to data supports that. That is why it is important for Black male scholars to demand the power to work with our peers and define who we are. We are many things, most of which are good, we just need time and space to be without being labeled by people who do not want to invest in our well-being and success.

### **Power Produces Knowledge (What comes first? The chicken or the egg?)**

All our lives, we are told that knowledge is power. It is a phrase used to encourage us to read or to sit still and listen. This, in theory, feels right, but that is because we have been conditioned to believe so. The idea that knowledge is power causes us to believe that if we gain knowledge, we increase our power. Those who do not have power did not want it or were too lazy to work for it. According to Foucault (1991):

‘We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces, it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production’ (p. 194).

When we consider Foucault’s assertion we see that knowledge and power go together. Power creates or produces what we deem to be real. That is why it is easy to say things like “it is what it is” in response to the conditions of our society particularly regarding inequities that plague certain populations. Now with this in mind think about grade school, we are taught to pay attention our teacher, they represent authority and are considered wells of

knowledge whom we learn from. This knowledge goes well beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic and on to conduct. The subject's that teachers instruct on are used to smuggle the real lessons. These lessons shape how we think, talk, and behave, adding to our marketability, which is often correlated to our profitability. Those who do not strive to be marketable are deemed lacking in values, lazy, and incompetent. Those who question authority are considered shiftless, rabble-rousers, rebels, troublemakers, and insubordinate. Subordination is a primary objective of those in power, which has the goal of sustaining power. Being a line leader and the privileges and power that come with it may be small in the grand scheme of life, but the message is gigantic. It teaches us to collect appropriate information to become marketable within the dominant culture, which tends to control access to resources and opportunities that provide a better life.

In lieu of all this, my theory of power is that it shapes who you are and how you see others. Jackson and Moore (2008) assert that most discourse on Black male school achievement focuses on deficits and advances a “doom and gloom trajectory for these individuals in the educational enterprise ... In the research literature, there has been little attention given to solving educational problems for [Black] males, but more emphasis placed on documenting it” (pp. 847-848). If scholars discussing the state of Black males are not looking for solutions to their problems, then what is the point of their discourse? By releasing these findings, how have these scholars been marketing Black male scholars? How does this impact their experience in higher education? Their discourse seems to be evidence that Black male students are inviable, which would seem to have a goal to “drill the thought of the inferiority into him” (Woodson, 1933). Not just that, this messaging also conditions society to believe in the inferiority of the Black man and treat us based on that knowledge.

Another question that arises from this construct is who decides what information is appropriate and therefore marketable? This question is important because it makes you rethink the validity of the ideology that knowledge is power. If the dominant culture dictates what knowledge, speech, and behavior are appropriate, marketable, and profitable, is knowledge really power? Or does power (predominantly those who belong to the dominant culture) produce knowledge? My theory stated earlier in this section is of Foucauldian influence, and that is that power produces knowledge that shapes who you are and how you perceive others. For instance, professionalism, which pertains to things like the appropriate attire for interviews and jobs, how you should speak, and what posture and body language are appropriate, is all decided by the dominant culture. This is also seen in the collection of data on Black men and our struggles in higher education. While the numbers do not lie, the stories created using the numbers do.

These are pressing problems that indisputably warrant ongoing scholarly examination, aggressive intervention, strategic institutional leadership, greater transparency and accountability, and bold policy responses. However, also needed are instructive insights from Black men who have experienced college differently—those who actually enrolled, were actively engaged inside and outside the classroom, did well academically, graduated, and went on to pursue additional degrees beyond the baccalaureate. Who are they, and what can they teach us? Unfortunately, their journeys to and through college have been overshadowed by the alarming statistics reported in this section. (Harper, 2012, p. 4)

Contrary to popular belief, which is backed by data, Black men do graduate from college despite all the obstacles they may face. If you are part of a marginalized group, you must work hard to collect knowledge about this way of conduct and commit them to your very being this is called assimilation. While Blacks, Latinos, and Asians, to name a few, must learn how to seamlessly code-switch to have a chance at financial, professional, and social elevation. Whites can generally be themselves and operate in a fashion that is natural to them. I say generally because poverty can separate whites from those upper-middle-class norms and values deemed appropriate knowledge for success. The hope is that by the end, we will see how it is a tool used to keep a system intact and prominent in our society; that ideology is neoliberalism which principles are used in the structure of capitalism. In capitalism, power is associated with marketability and profitability in that those who appease power increase their value.

The term ideology has been used quite a bit up to this point. I will share some insight as to what ideology is and how it is disseminated to the masses. According to Althusser (1970), “ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group.” This is directly tied to what was mentioned earlier in the ideology that knowledge is power versus power produces knowledge, as well as the ideology that Black male students are academically inferior. The former insinuates that we are free to acquire any knowledge, and it will convert to power. That does not match up with the reality, though. Experience shows us there are specific pieces of knowledge deemed desirable and appropriate. This knowledge helps inform our thoughts, behavior, and speech in a way that is often obtuse to our nature, driven by the culture with which we identify. Ideologies are used to shape the thoughts and conduct of society. These ideologies are



created and/or used by the powers that be to cause the people to subconsciously govern themselves in a manner that is suitable to those in power. Ideology isn't enough to make people govern themselves in a manner that is deemed desirable to the power structure. That is why practices of an Ideological State Apparatus (e.g. education, religion, and the government) are vital for *interpellation* (Althusser, 1970). As Backer (2018) states:

“When you are interpellated, you get with the program of a dominant imagined relation to real conditions. When you are interpellated, you become a subject of that ideology, recruited to the ideology, so that you “go” all by yourself and follow the ideology without any force compelling you.” (p. 2)

Ultimately the goal for any vehicle of power is interpellation. An Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) is ideal regarding interpellation because they are more subtle and utilize areas of our lives to reinforce the dominant or state ideology. Ultimately, the goal is to ingrain people into the state ideology so that they just get with the program and make sure anyone who goes against the grain is corrected by everyone else or ostracized as deviant, crazy, incompetent, and lazy. This sets up a scenario where an institutional construct is rarely considered problematic. It's the idea that the system isn't dysfunctional; rather, the people within it are. The state ideology referred to in the next section is neoliberal ideology but historically Reaganomics and the values and principles that undergird it.

### **The Production of knowledge Incites Ideological Warfare**

This section will take a broad look at neoliberal ideology as a source of societal control and how it was the foundation of President Reagan's platform during his successful

run for office. During his time in office, he created policies and spewed rhetoric reinforcing neoliberal ideology in our nation. All of this caused people to look down on those who struggle as if they were the primary source of their hardship. David Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices the proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade... there has everywhere been an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s (pp.18-19).

A particularly powerful aspect of neoliberal culture is its power to influence individual perspectives to the point of making neoliberal political ideology and economic policies seem “natural” (Somers, 2008). I interpret that as the idea that “it is what it is,” which is an idiom to say things happen because they were intended to happen. Furthermore, we must accept and adapt to these happenings to remain productive and competitive. This distracts the subject of the ideology from those who create and/or perpetuate it. Harvey (2005) explains how neoliberalism has had “pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (p. 3). Meaning we are in neoliberal autopilot where our thoughts and behaviors are automated through the principles that make up neoliberalism.

## **The Reagan Era**

Reagan's rhetoric was bathed in neoliberal ideology, mainly the idea of each person and family being responsible only for themselves. Meaning the welfare of the people is the responsibility of the individual or each respective family. This is seen in the idea that it was necessary to get the federal government off the backs of the people. This seems great, being that it was packaged in the idea that the federal government was taxing the people too much for the welfare of others who are presented as lazy and unwilling to work, but that was merely the tip of the iceberg. Reagan would propose and put into action budget cuts to programs that helped families with an array of needs. All this was made possible by the idea that if they are willing and able, you can dictate your own success financially, socially, and academically. According to St. Pierre (1991):

Again, in sympathy with its policy of survival of the fittest and free enterprise, the Reagan government announced its intention to increase the amount of discretionary income that families must contribute in support of students, to raise the eligibility ceiling of Basic Education Opportunity Grants (BEOG), and to decrease the maximum grant to \$1,800 (OMB, April 1981, p. 103)...It is evident that the policies of the Reagan administration - based on a philosophy of hard work, independence, thrift, minimum government intervention in the lives of citizens, and making America strong again affected the poor, many of whom are Black, more negatively than the economically better-off. (p. 337-338)

This meant that families would need to provide more financial input for the education of their children. While this works for a few, many people do not have the "discretionary

income” to contribute. This pits survival against advancement, creating a conundrum for these low-income families. These policies impact the lower class the most, and many Black people also come from this background. Serna and Woulfe (2017) state:

Research indicates that people of color are overrepresented in low-income families. According to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau compiled by the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as of 2012, 27.2 percent of Black and 25.6 percent of Hispanic individuals lived below the poverty threshold as compared to only 9.7 percent of Non-Hispanic Whites. (p. 7)

The issue with this ideology is that it normalizes looking down on or thinking less of people who are poor, many of whom are Black, because we view their condition as self-inflicted, which alleviates any outside forces of responsibility and maintains power structures—never considering the circumstances beyond the control (politically and culturally) of Black people, that have caused them to be in their financial situation. Without regard for the people and their circumstances, budget cuts were made in programs that gave aid to those with low socioeconomic status, the most relevant to this thesis being cuts made to funding in higher education. Reagan, while promoting “making America strong again” was simultaneously hurting people who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds access to higher education. This is problematic because college is seen as a route to life achievement, financial security, and social elevation. Simply stated, higher education has been historically thought of as a major key to upward mobility so in complicating access to it Reagan added adversity to a group of people who has already had their fair share. Furthermore, even if they do gain access to higher education, they are likely to acquire great debt, which can

bring them to financial ruins, making attending college fiscally irresponsible as it could set them back even further than the generations that proceed them.

Reagan was great at convincing his base that they need to be worried about being taken advantage of by people whom he deemed “leeches.” As recounted by Cooper (2017):

Drawing on his experience in California, Reagan and his advisors fought hard to position free tuition as a burden on the taxpayer and a form of “perverse incentive” akin to public welfare... Terrel Bell, secretary of education under the first Reagan administration, “was instructed to “pull those leeches off the backs of decent, hardworking people.” His successor, the cultural conservative William Bennett, insisted that the costs of education (like those of welfare in general) should be primarily a family responsibility. (p. 240)

Reagan’s Administration marking tuition-free colleges and universities as well as grants and minimum loan usage as a burden on the taxpayer and a benefit to “leeches,” the educational and the wealth gap between the haves, people from wealthy families (predominantly white), and they have nots, people come from families in a low socioeconomic status (predominantly Black). Those who attend college have higher earning potential than those who do not. Perna (2006) said, “the average lifetime earnings of individuals with bachelor’s degrees is 73 times higher than individuals with a high school diploma.” (as cited in Serna and Woulfe, 2017, p. 10). If they do not attend college, they will avoid student loan debt, as well as the stress of maintaining an extensive work schedule and keeping up with the rigors of college, but they will also earn significantly less than those who do go to college and obtain a degree. If they do go and earn a degree, the salary bump they will see from earning

a degree will be offset and negatively impacted by the loans they needed to take out to attend college. This may seem to present options for a sensible adult to pick the best path for their lives, but that is not the case. The truth is they will struggle either way, and this struggle gets passed down, much like wealth, from generation to generation. This is all due to neoliberal ideologies that gave way to budget cuts in education and promotion of the private sector for student loans. The idea that education, along with welfare, was a personal/family investment and responsibility spread like wildfire. Instead of assistance, people who are from low-income backgrounds get shamed and deemed unamerican. There needs to be a shift away from this ideology very soon because it only benefits a few people with power and privilege while it harms many people at the bottom of the caste system.

### **Connecting the Dots**

As the reader, you may be wondering, “How does this relate to the thesis concern?” Well, focusing on the ideology used by the Reagan administration to promote less funding for higher education, we see the similarities between that and the master narrative of Black male students in higher education. As stated earlier in this chapter, the statistics show Black male students are graduating college at a lower rate than every other group of students. There is extensive research on what may be causing this to happen, some of it is used to intervene, but much of the data is collected and reported with little effort to address the issues in a way that is sustainable. Many researchers gather information and use it to postulate the idea that there is something inherently wrong with the Black community and, more specifically, Black men. For instance, after reading nine pieces of literature, George Keller (1989) comes up with ten reasons for the decline in area of academic achievement of

Black students, but the three most relevant reasons are “4. The decline is mainly among Black males; something is wrong with Black men, probably drugs, prison, and unemployment...8. The high incidence of drug use inhibits study and 9. Attitudes of Blacks, such as a lack of effort, are a problem” (as cited in Feagin, 1992, pp. 546-547). These three reasons stick out for two reasons they put the onus of academic decline on the Black community, and they reiterate common beliefs about Black male students.

Keller concluded these three things from reviewing literature aimed at studying the decline of academic success in the Black community. This means that these were popular thoughts among scholars of this time. Keller acknowledges racism in college subculture in his first reason and then gives three more reasons outside of the Black community-academic decline. Out of his ten reasons, six of them placed the blame of academic failure on the Black community. What can be interpreted here is that he and the scholars he reviewed believe that the Black community deserves the lion’s share of the blame as it pertains to this crisis.

White educators and do-gooders outside academe must move beyond their naive pieties onto the treacherous, unknown ground of new realities. Petulant and accusatory black spokespersons will need to climb off their soapboxes and walk through the unpleasant brambles of their young people’s new preferences and look at their young honestly...They will need to encourage, lift up, and argue with those youths who do not see the urgency of education in a scientific, international, and information-choked world . . . where knowledge is the principal sword and shield against decline, poverty, and inferiority. Critics will need to stop the fashionable

practice of lambasting the colleges as if they were the central problem. (Keller, 1989, p. 55)

Keller's statement is filled with misconceptions that fit into the master narrative about the Black community and our relationship with education. Those assumptions are first, that Black leaders (spokespersons) are complaining about something they have control over, insinuating a lack in self-awareness and disregarding institutional factors in this issue. In fact, he admonishes critics (Black spokespersons, "White Educators and "do-gooders outside academe") to stop what he calls the "fashionable practice" of critiquing colleges as the main factor in this issue (Keller, 1989, p. 55). Secondly, he assumes that young Black students prefer everything but education. Keller makes it clear in his ten takeaway's that Black men and the Black community have a proclivity for drug use. Another significant thing to point out here is that his indictment on Black men was the most specific reason on the list, and a high level of disgust can be inferred from reason number four. Society has associated Black people, mainly men, with drugs, crime, violence, and poor work ethic since at least the 70s during Nixon's war on drugs but continued through Reagan's Administration. This master narrative about the Black men is evident in higher education and often justifies the poor treatment of us.

### **It's Imperative Because It Doesn't Fit the Narrative**

You know they hate when you become more than they expect.

Jay-Z

According to Harper (2012),



For nearly a decade, I have argued that those who are interested in Black male student success have much to learn from Black men who have actually been successful. To increase their educational attainment, the popular one-sided emphasis on failure and low-performing Black male undergraduates must be counterbalanced with insights gathered from those who somehow manage to navigate their way to and through higher education, despite all that is stacked against them—low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college-level work, racist and culturally unresponsive campus environments, and the debilitating consequences of severe underrepresentation, to name a few. (p. 1)

This thesis is largely inspired by a report on a study about Black male Success from Dr. Shaun Harper, where he calls for a new approach to the crisis of Black male low graduation rates. Harper (2012) employs the Anti-deficit Achievement framework, which aims to counterbalance the popular narrative of the Black male student graduation rate by focusing on successful Black male students. This focus on successful Black male students is not to negate the crisis of low graduation rate and the factors which cause this group to struggle the most. Rather it's a shift in the approach of addressing the issue—an approach where successful Black males are considered valuable in solving this crisis. Successful Black males aren't exempt from the stressors derived from racism, financial issues, and lack of college preparedness, but they have successfully overcome them. More research should be a focus on the reasons why Black men succeed as opposed to dwelling solely on their lack of success, which is detrimental to Black men and the Black community.

## **Internship Experience**

My internships with the Athletic Mentor Program (AMP), COMPASS (Commitment to the Objective of Mentoring, Perseverance, Achievement, Sustainability, and Success) Program (CP) and the Black and Latino Male Empowerment Initiative (BLMEI) has shaped my perspective of my thematic concern. My program intervention, which I will lay out in Chapter four, is directly inspired by my experience in both initiatives.

As I mention in Chapter one my role in the AMP and the CP was to meet with students and student-athletes to facilitate them as they set academic and personal goals, track them in weekly meetings as well as provide them with resources to mitigate any issues they may be having whether that be academically or personally. Our focus was to guide to them on their road to academic success. In the CP we work with students who were on academic probation. Our goal with them was to make sure their grade point average (GPA) rose about a 2.0 and continued to climb. A lot of what I did was try to figure out the circumstances that cause this decline and help them address those issues so that they can focus on their academic responsibilities. What I like to call representative mentorship is the catalyst for the CP. Representative mentorship in simple terms is the act of being mentored by someone who looks like you. In the CP, Black male graduate students are paired with Black male undergraduate students. This is an intentional effort to give the Black male undergraduate students an up close and personal look at Black male success. This method is in alignment with Harper (2012) and is exhortation to move from a deficit to achievement framework when looking to increase Black male academic success.

In the BLMEI we sought to implement cocurricular activities and events on campus for Black and Latino male students in efforts to engage, equip and empower them so that they can be successful. We didn't just focus on academics we talked about mental health, social justice, cultural awareness, and career options. We also just created space for the Black and Latino men to be themselves get something to eat and socialize. We cared about the whole student. One example of what we did to engage the Black and Latino men is a panel with Black and Latino male professions. They shared stories about their academic journey which was relatable to the student's current journey and the spent time interacting with the young men after the panel. Many of the young men said the paneling was eye opening because they never interacted with so many men of color who have degrees and are working in careers.

### **In Conclusion**

There were a few key concepts that showed up throughout my research, and they are interconnected. The first one, which I have already laid out in this chapter, is racism within academia which impacts how educators (faculty, staff, and administrators) and peers view Black male students and the impact it has on their transition in and through higher education. Racism gives way to a master narrative of Black male students regarding their relationship with education. The narrative is that we do not care about education. This narrative of inferiority wasn't created in but is reinforced and perpetuated through higher education which a) paints us as a monolith, and b) prophesizes a bleak future for us academically, professionally, economically, and socially. There is a need to counter this narrative with the stories of Black men who are successful in earning a college degree. The

example of successful Black men will help Black male students begin to trade the internalization of failure for success. In chapter four I take this a step further by not only providing Black male students with examples of Black men who have earned academic achievement by graduating and acquiring an undergraduate degree or greater but connecting them with these men.

## **Chapter Four: Program Design**

The Brothers of Achievement, Leadership and Mastery (BALM) uses a mentoring model that connects Black men who have earned a four-year degree or greater to Black men who are just starting their college journey. It is important to state that the level of degree is not what qualifies a man for the role of mentor, because the level of degree needed in each field varies. Some fields only require a four-year degree with certifications and licenses. Other professions may require an individual to obtain a graduate degree or greater. The focus of the BALM Initiative is not quantifying success by level of degree, it's the quality of the wisdom, understanding, and care that a mentor can provide to a mentee based on their relatable experience in higher education.

Existing mentoring programs apply a representative support method but with a reactionary approach. The Black male students enrolled in the program, are either close to dropping below a 2.0 or they have already dropped below a 2.0 by time they are in the program. The program's goal is to provide students with the support to return to good academic standing, thus increasing the retention and persistence rate of Black male students. I don't mention this to disparage the COMPASS Program, but rather to show the distinction between those like it and my organization. The BALM Initiative is proactive organization that aims at supporting Black male students as they navigate the challenges on their journey towards academic achievement from start to completion. That support will come by way of a Black male mentorship, which will promote achievement, leadership development, and self-mastery. The reason the mentors need to be Black men is because we seek to create connection, inspiration, and motivation by way of shared identity. That identity comes with similar experiences, giving mentors the understanding of what it takes to successfully

persevere through undergraduate studies reaching academic and professional achievement. Using that experience they will be able to facilitate and encourage students in ways only they would know how.

### **Breakdown of the Acronym**

BALM is an acronym standing for Brothers of Achievement, Leadership, and Mastery. This section includes an interpretation of each primary word in the acronym and then the meaning of the word balm which is what the acronym constructs.

#### ***Brothers***

Brothers is a colloquialism commonly associated with the Black community, which represents the familial nature of Black folks. We call people who have no biological relationship with us brother, sister, cousin, aunt, uncle and even mom and dad if we are so inclined. In my experience, relationships are just as significant, if not more, to our well-being as education. I would even go as far to say that learning, whether good or bad, is a primary result of relationships. Using the word Brother in the name of this proactive intervention is important because it shows the target audience, Black male students, and it shows the nature of this Initiative, which is unity in the belief that Black men can and will achieve, lead, and master individually, socially, and professionally.

#### ***Achievement***

This word is heavily used in higher education and other realms. Achievement is a thing done successfully, because of courage, effort, and skill. The intention is to inspire courage, motivate a high level of effort, and develop skills for success through mentorship. Using S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) goals as a model, mentors will facilitate students as they set goals, track the progress of the goals, and

the successfully complete the goals they set. This will positively impact the self-efficacy of the Black male students and the belief that they can achieve will result in their achievement.

### ***Leadership***

The BALM Initiative is committed to cultivating transformative leaders who bring healing change to our families, community, nation, and the world. This is based on the Social Change Model of Leadership (Astin, 1996). This leadership training will also look to increase the amount of Black male students who are engaged in student organizations on campus, even the organizations that are predominantly white. Black male students should engage in all organizations, not just in organizations that they identify with. So, the BALM Initiative will equip them with training and encouragement to be actively involved in leadership and difference making on campus and in their communities.

### ***Mastery***

Mastery is the obtainment of skill and knowledge that makes one master of a subject. It is important to note that mastery in this context is not about controlling people or even things. The BALM Initiative aims to facilitate students in their quest towards self-discovery and mastery through the strengthening of their self-efficacy. The BALM Initiative believes when an individual masters their self, they can in turn master external areas of focus: becoming a highly impactful transformative leader, actualizing academic and professional achievement, and forming high quality relationships both romantic and plutonic. Self-efficacy is the desired outcome of self-mastery in the BALM Initiative. Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in their ability to accomplish a task (Fife, Bond, & Byars-Winston 2011). As students' progress in self-mastery, they will increase self-knowledge,

understanding, efficacy which impacts the quality of relationships, your capacity to lead, and your ability to achieve.

### **BALM Initiative Mentoring Organizational Make-up**

#### **Director**

This position is to be filled by a Black man who works in student affairs. It can be created and filled through job recruitment, or it can be filled by a Black man who is already working within student affairs at the university. The director will oversee all the functions of the organization. He will make sure everyone has a clear understanding of their role and the expectations therein. He will also be a point of contact for Sages and Protégés. The director will supervise graduate assistants and he will be the primary advisor for the Protégés to keep track of their academic progress. (Appendix A)

#### **Two Graduate Assistants**

One graduate assistant will focus on planning, scheduling and execution of all programs and events. The other will be responsible for content creation and maintaining a consistent social media presence. They will also conduct bi-weekly check-ins with the Protégés to track their academic progress and overall well-being. (Appendix B)

#### **Sage**

A sage is a person who is honored and respected for the experience, judgement, and wisdom. In the BALM Initiative, a Sage will be a Black man who has completed at least a bachelor's degree and has worked in his field for five or more years. It is important that the Sages have at least their bachelor's degree because they need successful college experiences to provide the appropriate level of support to the Protégés. This experience gives them knowledge and understanding about what it takes to overcome the many challenges Black



males face in college. The Sage does not give the Protégé the answers. Rather they provide personal experiences and support that aide Protégés in their own self-discovery. This allows the Protégé to come up with solutions that fit who they are and where they are going.

### **Protégé**

A protégé is a person under the protection, patronage, or tutelage of another person. In my experience the word protégé is used regarding someone of great promise. A mentor, or Sage in this case, would see a young person's character, ability and recognize their potential for great success and develop a relationship with them that promotes growth and prepares them to actualize their potential. In this organization a Protégé will be a Black male undergraduate student, preferably in their first year of college. Protégés must be protected so that they can realize their protentional and bring it to fruition. Protégé's will benefit from wisdom, support, and advocacy, both academically and socially. The BALM Initiative will not forsake students who are in their second through sixth year.

### **Theory to Practice**

#### **Nigrescence: Black Student Identity Development**

Student Identity development is a prominent theory. Jones and Abes (2011) defined student development as “some kind of positive change [that] occurs in the student (e.g., cognitive complexity, self-awareness, racial identity, or engagement)” (p. 153). All the positive changes listed are what student affairs professionals aim to cultivate and facilitate for college students. There is a need to facilitate Black male students in all those things, but from a position of cultural awareness and understanding. That means we must fully understand the impact race and racism has on Black male students. In America race plays a

major role in the construction of our society and the formation of group and individual identity. According to Adams (2005):

Race is the sharpest and deepest division in American life, and because of the long standing divide, achieving equal access to and benefits from institutions of higher education has been an ongoing struggle for people of color in general, but particularly for African Americans. (p. 285)

As I discussed in Chapter three, the struggle for Black male students surrounds master narratives that impact how we are treated (i.e. being niggered) and how we view ourselves and our academic capability. Proper identity development is essential to mental and emotional health and self-efficacy. Vandiver et al (2002) asserts:

If Blacks accepted being Black then, they were assumed to be psychologically healthy and to have a high self-esteem. In contrast Blacks who accepted the values of White society were believed to suffer from self-hatred and, as a result, low self-esteem. (p. 71)

The primary goal of the BALM Initiative is to increase the self-efficacy of Black male students, which I believe will improve the graduation. As noted by Ritchey (2014), William Cross developed Nigrescence Theory in 1971 (p. 101). Cross (1991) referred to Nigrescence Theory as “an identity change process as a Negro-to-Black conversion experience, the kind of process that could be seen in Black behavior during the Harlem Renaissance” (p. 189). Cross (1991) re-considered the theory as a resocializing experience, one that transforms a preexisting identity (e.g., non-Afrocentric identity) to one that is Afrocentric. Using the Sage and Protégé relationship the Balm Initiative aims to help Black male student develop their pride in being part of the Black community and being a Black man.

The Sage mentor represents the counternarrative in the greatest way. Having navigated earned a degree and being well within their career. They will be able to encourage and the Protégé in a way the promotes self-efficacy which is belief in one's ability. This will happen through representation; every Sage will maintain a posture of if I was able to do it so can you. Sages will facilitate an increase in self-efficacy is through support which will be conducted with mutual respect. Mutual respect requires a partnership which is based on the premise that everyone is valuable and has a lot to offer.

### **Why is the BALM Initiative Needed?**

This program is necessary because it moves current practices around addressing the state of Black male students in higher education from a deficit to an excellence framework. Instead of waiting until Black male students fail to provide them with support, the BALM Initiative would have support in place from the start of their college journey. It promotes success and improves upon the college experience of Black male students. Research details the struggle of Black male students in higher education mainly surrounding our graduation rate, which is 35% and is the lowest amongst all groups whether that be racially or by gender (Fullard, 2019, p. 122). What this Initiative aims to do is provide a representative support system that will enhance Black male's view of themselves, their peers, and the possibilities they have. Representative support means support from a person or group who you can identify with based on ethnic make-up, cultural belonging, and physical features. Representative support is crucial because it highlights the importance of mentors being a person who looks like and has similar experiences as their Protégés. In my experience the intersection of coursework, fiscal responsibilities, and self-discovery already makes the transition into college challenging. Now add carrying the burden of a master narrative

created through racism and that transition becomes even more difficult. Jackson et al. (2008) explain:

Black males frequently report experiencing microaggressions (e.g., negatively nuanced suggestions of affirmative action) within a myriad of social and academic environments. These experiences can saturate everyday life, making microaggressions difficult to avoid, ascertain, and abolish, and possibly leading to decreased self-efficacy, increased attrition, and psychological distress. (p. 5)

The BALM Initiative will increase self-efficacy, decrease attrition, and heal psychological distress through mentoring, equipping, and empowering Black male students as they navigate the academic environment. The Sage will have a general understanding of what it means to be a Black male student in college allowing the Sage and Protégé to go deeper, focusing on building a meaningful relationship. Another benefit to representative support through mentorship is that it aligns perfectly with Dr. Harper's (2012) Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework. The Sage represents the highly successful Black men who have achieved through school and into their careers. They are the best example to Black male students that academic achievement is not only possible, but also probable, and it leads to professional achievement. It is vital to make a shift away from asking why Black male student's fail to focusing on how Black male college students face and overcome obstacles to succeed (Harper, 2012). Harper (2012) sought these answers from successful undergrad students, with the BALM Initiative I look to Sages as the top tier of achievement. Being that Black male students face racial stereotypes in higher education, on top of the new rigors of college, Sages will be able to provide their Protégés with relevant insight and resources while supporting them as they navigate environments that are hostile towards them. Sages

will facilitate their Protégés in a manner that increases their self-efficacy. Sages will also advocate for the Protégés ensuring they are having an equitable and educative college experience as well as support Protégés in developing self-advocacy skills. This will help the Protégés as they pursue leadership roles and increased influence with the goal to make their campus conducive for the progression and success of themselves and their peers. The BALM Initiative also seeks to address what Harper (2011) calls, “onlyness,” which is defined 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” (Harper et al., p. 190). Removing the barrier that comes from support programs and entire institutions where representation is not prevalent, the hope is that the BALM Initiative will be highly successful in reaching all its goals.

### **Organizational Mission: A Soothing Restorative Agency**

The BALM Initiative aims to inspire and facilitate Black male students towards achievement, cultivate leadership skill, and motivate the pursuit of self-mastery which proceeds all other types of mastery. The word “balm” was intentionally chosen as the name for the intervention. Merriam-Webster defines balm as, a soothing restorative agency. The BALM Initiative is intentional about healing the minds and the hearts of Black male students in a way that helps them reject the master narrative which projects a future of failure and accept the reality which is that we are destined for achievement. This is a nod to self-efficacy which in my belief is a result of self-mastery. You cannot write your own story without dispelling the master narrative and having a clear understanding of who you are what you are capable of.

The BALM Initiative will utilize mentorship and networking to foster mental and emotional healing, academic and social engagement, and life progression (initiatively and individually). Mentors will be representatives of achievement, not someone to copy, but rather someone to be inspired by. Connecting Sages with a Protégé will provide an up-close example of academic and professional achievement that many Black male students do not have direct access to, nor can they read about or see on TV. The need for this soothing restorative agency, the BALM Mentor Program, is prevalent because for too long Black men have endured academic environments that promote low self-efficacy. Woodson (1933) states, “The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies” (p. 8). It is the intent of the BALM Mentor Program to mute the volume on that which sends the message of the inferiority of Black male students and turn up the volume on that which promotes competence, capability, and viability as it pertains to Black men in general, and Black male students specifically.

### **Better Late than Never: Developing Self-Efficacy**

While self-efficacy begins in early childhood and continues as you progress through life. The Master narrative spoken about in detail in chapter three has stunted this the development of self-efficacy in Black male students. The BALM Mentor Initiative will use three of Bandura (1995) four sources to boost self-efficacy in the Proteges. The three that I will use are (1) Mastery Experiences, (2) Social Modeling, and (3) Social Persuasions (Bandura, 1977).

### ***Mastery Experiences***

These are pivotal because like Bandura (1997) asserts, “Successes build a robust belief in one’s personal efficacy. Failures undermine it...” (p. 23). When a Protégé can overcome

obstacles to accomplish a goal that they set. Their confidence and belief that they can and will achieve future goals is increased. To facilitate the Protégés, the Sage and the administrative staff will equip them with the knowledge and resources to be successful in whatever they set out to do. This will come by way of a bi-weekly meeting called Shop Talk. Shop talk will address topic surrounding mental health, financial literacy, leadership development, cultural appreciation. The students will not only be able to attend this meeting, but they will be given the opportunity to plan them with the support of the administrative staff and their Sages. This will give them the experience at leading an event from the planning stage through the execution stage. While failure may undermine personal efficacy with the proper support Protégés will learn to repurpose any failures that occur as an opportunity to learn and get better, rather than internalizing them as character flaw.

### ***Vicarious Modeling***

Many young Black men look up to athletes. You go to any Basketball court, and you are bound to hear, “Kobe!”, “Curry!”, or “Bron Bron!” as the individuals in the game make plays reminiscent of their favorite player. While that’s fine and the BALM Initiative isn’t looking to deconstruct that the reality is very few playground ballers end up following in their idol’s footsteps. Many more could follow in the footsteps of social workers, therapist, student affairs professionals, lawyers, police officers, entrepreneurs, and educators who look like them. “The impact of modeling on beliefs of personal efficacy is strongly influenced by perceived similarity to the models” (Bandura, 1997, p. 24). Vicarious modeling is crucial to this program because the Protégés will have someone who looks like they can look up to. Someone who went to college, graduated and is doing well in their career. Protégés will not only have a front row seat to see how the Sages achieve reach achievement they will have a

personal relationship with them. The idea here is that by witnessing the success of their Sage and simultaneously having a relationship with them. The Protégés will believe that they too are destined for success.

### ***Social Persuasions***

One of the most important components of being a Sage is encouragement. Protégés like the Sages before them have traveled through a society and education system that has done nothing but remind them of their inferiority, subordination, and marginality. So it is necessary to a culture of “To the extent that persuasive boosts in perceived self-efficacy led people to try hard enough to succeed, self-affirming beliefs promote development of skills and a sense of personal efficacy” (Bandura, 1997, p. 26). It’s not just about feel-good speech there is practicality to this component that is necessary for its success. Bandura (1997) states:

Successful efficacy builders do more than convey positive appraisals. In addition to raising people’s beliefs in their capabilities, they structure situations for them in ways that bring success and avoid placing people in situations prematurely where they are likely to fail often. They encourage individuals to measure their success in terms of self-improvement rather than by triumphs over others.

Sages will not just tell Protégés they are capable they will make sure that they are in situations that back that encouragement up. Not making things easy for them but making sure that the Protégés are equipped mentally, emotionally, and physically where it applies to handle the circumstances. To make it plain the coordinator, administrative staff, and Sage mentors will always prepare Protégés for success and never set them up for failure. Things



like, making sure students are aware of all resources that can help them develop the skills and acquire knowledge that will help them achieve the S.M.A.R.T. goals that they set.

### **Mentoring Process**

This seven-step mentor process, inspired by Peggy Peppers My New Next mentor process, embodies all the BALM Initiative represents and promotes:

- (1) the mentor supporting the mentee as they gain understanding about their identity, (2) what the mentees believe (3) and value, (4) the mentees' vision for their lives, (5) the mentees' goals they must set, (6) using what the mentees learn to make necessary adjustments, (7) and celebrating the mentees' accomplishments along the way.

Taking a facilitative approach to mentoring empowers the Protégé to craft their own story about themselves, instead of being subjects of a narrative created for and about them. This is completely relative to the BALM Initiative.

### **BALM Initiative Mentor Program Goals, Objectives, and Learning Outcomes**

The primary goal of the BALM Initiative Mentor Program is to promote self-efficacy of the Black male student (Protégés). This will positively impact academic achievement (enrollment, retention, persistence, and ultimately graduation rate), encourage leadership development and engagement, and promote a culture of individual and Initiative mastery.

#### **Objective 1**

Recruit Black male faculty, staff, administrators, members of the Black Alumni Chapter (if we do not have one we will need to create one with this program), and members of the surrounding community to be Sages.

- Email, Phone Calls, and Text messages (Only as follow up to initial contact for reminders about approaching dates).
- Digital Flyer with link to form for men who are interested.

This form will be brief, but it will ask for their full name, email, and phone number, as well as undergrad major, graduate major (if applicable), profession position, residence (for administrative use only), and brief explanation as to why they are interested in being a Sage Mentor (Appendix C)

### **Objective 2**

Connect with admission office to get information about how many incoming Black male students there are for the upcoming academic year. Recruit 5 incoming Black male student and 5 current Black male students to enroll in the program. This will be an at-will enrollment because mentorship is best when both parties are personally invested.

- Communication via email, phone calls, and text message (Only as follow up after initial contact for reminders about upcoming events and deadlines).
- Building a relationship with organizations to be able to come to events and invite Black male students to enroll in the program in person.

This form will be brief. It will ask for their full name, email, and phone number, as well as major, residence (for administrative use only), and a question about their high school experience or their undergraduate experience so far? Appendix C)

### **Objective 3**

Organize three information sessions for potential Sages and Protégés, and the parents/guardians of incoming Protégés. This session will explain the purpose of the

organization and will go over goals, objectives, and format. Recording the session may be useful for anyone who may be interested, but unable to physically attend.

#### **Objective 4**

Match Sages (10) with Protégés (10) 1:1 ratio. Mentorship match is based on the profession of the Sage and major of the Protégé. The reason for matching Sages and Protégés based on career and major is that the Sages' professional experience has netted them a great amount knowledge to share about the field that the Protégé is interested in. Being that the Sage is in the field, he will also be able to provide them with internship opportunities to accrue experience and network expansion to diversify the experiences.

#### **Objective 5**

Organize the Protégé and Sage Orientation

Sage Learning Outcomes

- Sage Learning Outcomes 1: Identify the importance of the Anti-Deficit Achievement framework and self-efficacy and how they will be manifested through their role and relationship with their Protégé's.
- Sage Learning Outcome 2: Demonstrate an understanding of Bandura (1997) sources of self-efficacy and its role in this program.
- Sage Learning Outcome 3: Explain the S.M.A.R.T. goals approach to Protégés as they set, track, and assess their goals.

Protégé Learning Outcomes

- Protégé Learning Outcome 1: Articulate an understanding of what the BALM Initiative stands for and the benefits they gain from being part of the mentor program.

- Protégé Learning Outcome 2: Demonstrate an understanding the importance self-efficacy by intentionally seeking opportunities to increase theirs and actively doing things that will help their increase their peers' self-efficacy.
- Protégé Learning Outcome 3: Use S.M.A.R.T. goals approach to set, track, and assess their goals.

### **Objective 6**

Sages and Protégés will meet 8 times throughout the semester.

### **Objective 7**

Establish partnerships with the campus' Multicultural Center, Black student organizations, and the diversity and inclusion department. The aim here is to create a conglomerate of resources, leadership opportunities, and relationships that work in conjunction with the BALM Mentor Initiative to improve the experience of the Black male students on campus. These departments and organizations provide Black students with a place to gain support from professionals and one another, assume leadership roles, and develop professional skills. Students will be encouraged to attend events and engage in programs promote self-efficacy and achievement.

### **Relative Core Professional Competencies**

The core competencies that are articulated throughout my program are leadership, social justice and inclusion, and student learning and development. The main way leadership shows up in my intervention is the advocacy for change that removes barriers to student success. The call for change is in the way we research, report, engage, and educate Black male students. Social justice is prevalent all throughout my program. In seeking to address

the issue of low self-efficacy, which I have shown has a tremendous impact in achievement in general, academic achievement specifically, I am making sure the needs of Black male students are being met in higher education. The BALM Initiative also seeks to heal the hurt of Black male students which is from their past and present. Student learning and development play a huge role in this program intervention. Applying theories of self-efficacy and Black identity development is crucial to the BALM Initiative. Identifying the master narrative, which through research and personal experience, I expose as a hindrance to the development of self-efficacy in Black male students is imperative success of the BALM Mentor program. This program intervention provides representative support, that will increase the self-efficacy of Black male students, and ultimately increase the graduation rate for them as well.

## **Chapter Five: Implementation and Evaluation**

Chapter 4 detailed the functions of the Brothers of Achievement, Leadership, and Mastery (BALM Initiative). I explain what BALM means in general and as it pertains to the goals and objectives of the program. There is also a breakdown of roles where traditionally those who do the mentoring work are called mentors and those being mentored are called mentees. The BALM Initiative calls mentors Sages and mentees Protégés. This is all relevant to the purpose of this Initiative, which is to increase the self-efficacy of Black male students. Using the terms Sage and Protégé takes away the hierarchical construct typically used in these types of relationships inserting mutual respect.

In this chapter I will discuss the implementation of this program intervention. This discussion will cover when the components of the program will happen, budget needs and funding methods, and lastly the leadership approach in bringing this organization to life. I will then move into the method of assessment and evaluation that will be used to track the effectiveness of this organization. I will share some limitations to my work and then I will share the vision I have for the full expression of this organization. In closing I will briefly mention how the social climate today makes this organization important.

### **Implementation**

After doing my due diligence I found an organization formerly called the Black Male Initiative (BCI) at the University of Illinois Springfield. This organization is now called the Men of Color Initiative (MCI) and it started in 2010. MCI is very similar to what I want to do through the BALM Initiative at State University. Many of my professors encouraged me not to "reinvent the wheel" if I do not need to. I will utilize the components of the MCI and give credit to those who have originated the methodology. I will not be using everything the

MCI has put forth, yet I will be borrowing the goals and objectives as well as the methods of operation, assessments, and outcomes.

### **Program Timeline**

In the Spring 2021 we will plan, solicit, and secure human resources. All these activities will happen at the same time. The BALM Initiative will be putting together a team. I would serve as the coordinator and will need to use Handshake (virtual employment platform) to recruit and hire two graduate assistants; this will be completed by Spring Break. The next thing we will do is recruit the ten Sage men. These men will be recruited from the staff and faculty who work at the State University, with a Black Alumni Chapter, and the surrounding community. This recruitment will be ongoing because we will need to create a pool of men as this program grows. As we look to add more Protégés we will need to have Sage men on deck to match them with. We will also be recruiting five incoming Black male students and five current students to be Protégés.

During Summer 2022 we will match Sages with Protégés and have a welcome brunch for Sages, Protégés, and their immediate family. We will follow this event by having an orientation weekend on campus where Sages and Protégés will be able to connect and begin to form a relationship. They will also grasp a clear understanding of the purpose and expectations of this program. During this time Sages and Protégés will work through to S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reasonable, and Timely) Goals.

Fall 2022 will be the full roll out of the BALM Initiative Mentor Program. Each Sage and Protégé will meet eight times through the semester. The initial meeting will be to set S.M.A.R.T. Goals for the semester. We will attend a leadership conference that is through similar to the Robert D. Lynch Student Leadership Development Institute which takes place

annually. In the Spring 2023 semester things will look the same and we will attend a conference geared towards the enrichment and encouragement of Black male students, which will be in collaboration with the Multicultural Center and is a great opportunity to expand the network for the BALM Initiative.

### **What Will It Cost?**

When considering a budget, I wanted to make sure to consider all the resources both human and material that we would need. I came up with a budget of \$154,500 (See Appendix D). The BALM Initiative Coordinator's salary will be paid through the Division of Student Affairs, so it is not reflected in the budget presented in Appendix D. The intervention will need administrative support. An administrative assistant will be hired. They will be paid \$40,000 per year to keep the coordinators and organizations scheduled, book rooms and areas on campus for the semester and the year for Shop Talk, Study Halls, and the end of the year Cook Out, and approve of the marketing material created by graduate assistants. Hiring graduate assistants (GA) is also important. We will have two Graduate Assistants working 20 hours per week for a total \$20,500 per semester for each graduate assistant and \$82,000 combined for the year. Covered in this amount is graduate tuition, a stipend, and a voucher for books. The budget reflects \$7000 for professional travel and conferences. These funds will be used to cover the cost for attending the leadership conference at \$250 registration fee per attendee for 13 people. In addition to registration we will need seven hotel rooms at special rate of \$100 a night. There will be six double occupancy rooms for GAs and Protégés and one single for the coordinator. The total for the conference which is all inclusive will be \$4650. The remaining \$2,350 will be used for traveling to different high schools in the region to market the organization to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>



grade Black male students. This outreach is important if the institution wants to increase the enrollment of Black male students. Marketing material is important, and the budget allows for \$500 for a subscription to Canva so that we can create digital material so casing all we do. The next line item is for the food and beverages we will serve at each event. Catering will cost approximately \$5,000 per semester and an addition \$5,000 for the end of the year cook out for a total of \$15,000 year. Lastly, we need to furnish an office that will cost \$15,000. We will need four standing desk and office chairs, two iMacs, two Macbook Pros, two round tables and 10 chairs. Our office will be paperless because it is cost effective or environmentally sustainable.

### **Funding**

Once a budget is in proposed and in place, it is important to determine the funding sources. The best way to fund this would be through collaborative sponsorship. Some offices that would have a vested interest in sponsoring this program geared toward Black male student success would be a Multicultural Office, Student Success Office, an Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity, and the Provost Office. Having multiple collaborations allows for the cost to be share. I will write a sponsorship letter asking for financial donations (Appendix E). In exchange I will create a resource fair where the Black male student will learn about the resources offered in each office. They will also be able to learn about opportunities for work study and internships. Increased visibility for each office will also cut down on the outreach they need to do to engage these young men.

### **Leadership Modality**

In my experience Black male academic achievement issues seem to be of concern to colleges and universities. Through the BALM Initiative we will change the master narrative

about Black male students and provide them with support, resources, and training that promotes academic achievement, leadership development, and self-efficacy. In order to lead this program there must be a clear understanding of leadership styles and how they impact program advancement and stakeholder experiences. I will briefly mention effective leadership and its focus on achieving goals. I will then move into what I call a combo leadership style. A combo leadership style is one that utilizes multiple leadership styles. This combo leadership style is made up of transformational leadership, democratic leadership, and servant leadership.

Effective leadership is simple when you take out the idea that leadership is either good or bad. At the core, an effective leader helps those who follow them to achieve a common goal. Management in an organization may be effective in that they may get those who they lead to achieve goals within the company. While effective leadership gets things done it does not change lives. As an effective leader you may set a goal, delegate roles, and meet the requirements. If you only set your site on being effective, you might never get to make change.

Transformational leadership sees change as the ultimate goal. Transformational leadership seeks to move away from the status quo causing necessary change. Astin and Astin (2000) state:

Leadership is a process that is ultimately concerned with fostering change. In contrast to the notion of “management,” which suggests preservation or maintenance, “leadership” implies a process where there is movement—from wherever we are now to some future place or condition that is different (as cited in Harrison, 2011, p. 45).

A transformational leader is great at recognizing an issue and leading in a way that not only addresses the issues but empowers others to lead as to not centralize the leadership in one person.

Transactional models focus on the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers [while]...transformational leadership refers to the process whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. This type of leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential (Astin and Astin, 2000, as cited in Harrison, 2011, p. 46).

The goal of transformational leadership is to empower those who follow to take the initiative and become leaders themselves. This is important because diversity in leadership ensures that everyone is heard, considered, and taken care of. The idea of transformational leadership is that no one person is greater than the whole of the group. At the very least one can be effective in a leader position by getting people to meet the necessary goals but when you create a space where people can set the goals and feel empowered to lead, your leadership has become transformational. One may view these two leadership styles as "apples and oranges." When we look at these two styles, we see that effective leadership is the base and can even be considered the foundation for leadership. Whereas transformational leadership is more expansive. Not only do transformational leaders inspire those who follow towards goals, these leaders seek to empower them and grow as dynamic change agents.

The ACPA/NASPA Leadership Competencies influence my style mainly in leading from within a structure. Leading from within is when a person is innovative and

entrepreneurial in a department or organization by coming up with ideas, workshops, and procedures to cause necessary change. This is important because it gives my involvement with the department and the university meaning even if I do not have a prominent title. This is a sign of transformational leadership where I am not told what to do but I am free to come up with ideas and lead them.

One example I have is a program I started called Shop Talk Series which I will incorporate into the BALM Initiative (Appendix F). I had free reign with this program that was within the Student Resource center under the Black and Latino Male Empowerment Initiative (BLMEI). This experience taught me how important it is for a leader to empower the people following them. As a leader you must know your limitations and identify people who are strong where you may be weak. My mentor was great at this type of leadership because his philosophy is that the more, he empowered me and the other interns, the more we could achieve as a team.

The experience I had working under Dr. Kendrick Mickens with the BLMEI reinforced my lifelong experience leading and serving in my home church. I was raised in Care View Community Church (CVCC). My church and Senior Pastor espouse what I like to call a combo leadership style. A combo leadership style is one that is constructed by more than one style of leadership. CVCC is built with democratic, servant, and transformation. CVCC is a very democratic environment, we have a senior pastor, vision pastor, executive pastor, pastor of worship and arts, and a host of ministers who lead different ministry initiatives. We also have a Deacons team and Elders Council who handle church business, and we have various members who do not hold any of the titles but lead ministry initiatives. At my church nothing is centralized, and we make sure more than one person is making key

decisions. The biggest example of this is when we ratify the budget every year. The whole congregation gets to vote on that. At that point it has been put together by the finance team, approved by the Elders Council, and ratified by the congregation. In the aforementioned example we see administrator's leadership, and stakeholders joining forces to make a decision. Likewise, the BALM Initiative will utilize a democratic approach where everyone will have a everyone will have opportunities to leader and grow as leaders and determine the direction, we go in. A few rules that I will apply in the leadership of this intervention are that no position or title, including coordinator is permanent. This is key for those who presently hold the positions and those who may hold them in the future. It creates an environment where not only is it possible that one could be in a leadership position, but it is also probable. This is important because it keeps everyone engaged and in the mindset of continued growth. Another component of this combo leadership style is servant leadership. Servant leadership style centers one's care for those who follow you. This leadership style was modeled for me throughout my life and is an aspect of leadership I hold near and dear to my heart. Service is intentional you must see a need and work to meet it. In this instant I see the need to support Black male students and I developed the BALM Initiative. The key part in being a servant leader is seeing and hearing the people you serve so that you can meet new needs. This combo leadership style is the best to address my concern and my intervention because it creates the reality where the program will not die rather it will thrive and live well beyond my leadership.

The Transformational aspect of this intervention would be two-fold; the first would be in changing how Black male students are viewed and treated (externally) and changing how Black male students view and treat themselves. Change is necessary but getting people

to let go of old ways of thinking is difficult and disruptive, even if those ideologies do not serve them anymore. The leadership challenges that may arise as I attempt to explore my thematic concern may be resistance to doing things in a new way. I think many people are used to leaders setting goals, giving out jobs, and holding everyone accountable. There tends to be a comfort in having a leader operate in an authoritative manner. People may feel that things are out of order or chaotic if the leader seeks to be, according to my mentor “first amongst equals.” Although he is the senior pastor and guarantor of all things concerning the church in this season, he respects the opinion and ideas of everyone around him. This type of leadership resonates with me, but it can be daunting to people who are used to being told what to do and why they should do it. This challenge could hinder progress early on until people start to embrace the empowering culture. Another challenge could be trying to come to a consensus in a timely manner. Everyone is unique and has different perspectives so it can be hard to come to an agreement on simple things of concern. The important thing is to build a team of people who are strong but collaborative. The goal is to make sure that everyone agrees that the main goal is to serve the greater good. These challenges are in many ways unavoidable but with the combo leadership style I mentioned above they are solvable.

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

Assessment and evaluation are crucial to the success of any program, organization, and corporation. Assessment is key to understanding if the BALM program is effective. Evaluation will take a closer look at the intended outcomes and the actual outcomes. It is imperative to create goals that are measurable. We can design assessments and evaluations to measure the level of self-efficacy in our Black male students. Focus groups, interviews,

and surveys are methods we can use to understand the experiences of Black male students who participate in the BALM program. The program can look at traditional measures of success such as GPA and retention to understand if the students are successful.

Assessment and evaluation can provide a system of accountability. Data can demonstrate that the program is doing what it intends to do. Furthermore, by employing assessment and evaluation measures and then pivoting based on the results, we can show that we are willing to make changes so as to be the most effective. Funders will want to see data that shows success. The BALM Initiative welcomes assessment as a way to improve our practice and increase our impact as well as track all the progress we are making in the increase of the retention and graduation rate of Black male students.

BALM will assess the academic performance of students in the program through semester grade reviews. Our goal for the first year is to have an Initiative grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.8, with *no* students on academic probation. Bi-weekly meetings will be conducted by Graduate Assistants with Protégés to provide reflection and direction for continued progress. In these meeting the Protégés will present current grades, bring up any questions or concerns they may have. Graduate Assistants will encourage Protégés when they are doing well, provide appropriate resources and opportunities when necessary, and help them stay on track with their goals. There will be an end of the year debriefing, which will be a review process conducted to fully assess the impact that the program had on individual participants (Appendix G). The goal is to gather important data pertaining to academic support, professional and co-curricular opportunities (internships and leadership development), and to offer final evaluations of Sages and the BALM Initiative as a whole.

The students are the primary stakeholders, so their feedback is important to the direction of the initiative.

Lastly, we will have a focus group that will include Protégés and Sages (Appendix F). The purpose of the focus group is to gain insight from the Proteges about their experience in the BALM Initiative. The Protégés, GA's, and Sages will be able to give feedback on how they believe the BALM Initiative operating. The information will be collected and used to improve the experience within the BALM Initiative for all parties involved.

### **Limitations and Looking Ahead**

If I had more time, I would develop a conference specifically for the program. It would be called The BALM Summit. There is great significance in using the word summit. The term can be defined as a high place or the peak of a mountain. The significance of a high place is that it gives you greater perspective because you get to step away from your circumstances and examine them. With the stress and the pressure faced by Black male students in society and on college campuses (a microcosm of society) it is important to help vision a goal that is bigger than what they might be experiencing at the moment. It is a difficult vision to create given the current narrative and stereotypes and experience of Black men in our culture. The conference would take place over the course of four days and three nights and would be fully covered by the BALM Initiative via donations. This extended time would give students time to have a transformative experience.

The intervention I propose in Chapter 4 is just the beginning of where I see this program going. As mentioned in the leadership section of this chapter, I would want the intervention to start as early as elementary school. I remember being in first and second grade and having feelings of incompetence. In hindsight, I understand that those feelings did not



come out of nowhere. I was made to feel that way by teachers within a system that was hostile towards me and the other boys who looked like me. The difference was my parents were very active and did not allow the school district to put me in special education classes as the system tried to "over diagnose" me, under educate me, and ultimately pass me along until I graduated high school. I firmly believe that it is easier to build strong Black boys than it is to repair Black men. This belief can be true for any identity, but this thesis focused on Black boys and men.

Another expansion would be to have this program cover Black and Indigenous Men of Color. This expansion would include Latino and Indigenous men who face some of the same issues surrounding enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. My vision is to have a center, a physical space that would connect with a multicultural center on campus. The center could expand to include Black and Indigenous Women of Color and both groups could share the space in an equitable manner. Additionally, if I were to expand the program, I would want to develop a program component where the Protégés can be Sages to high school students. We would train the Protégés in mentorship and leadership as well as the importance of self-efficacy. They would be to their Protégé what their Sage is to them. I call this vision Perpetual Mentorship and, I believe this concept matches my educational philosophy and plan for empowering Black boys, Black male students, and in many ways, Black male Sages too!

### **Final Thoughts**

The BALM Initiative is important to me because of that defining moment I had in my senior year with my guidance counselor. She told me that I was not "college material" and that remark took a shock to my confidence and self-efficacy which had already been negatively

impacted in first and second grade. I internalized this message which set me down a path of academic failure. I did not believe I could reach academic success therefore I put little effort into my education.

The mission of the BALM Initiative is to build self-efficacy through representative mentorship thereby increasing the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of Black male students. The vision is a world where everyone, including Black men, know that Black men are viable members of society in general and in higher education specifically. The BALM Initiative not only hopes to deconstruct the negative master narrative about Black male students but to heal and free Black men of the bondage created by it. We can look at statistics to identify an issue, but we must stop using it to create narratives. It is detrimental to the mental, emotion, and physical well-being of the people behind the numbers.

The stress produced by trying to combat negative stereotypes is too much to carry and often plays a significant role in the outcomes of Black male students. Not only do they worry about adjusting to the rigors of college and being away from home, but they are concerned with how they are viewed and treated. If universities are going to prioritize diversity and inclusion, they need to be intentional about recognizing and respecting what people from cultures outside of the dominant culture have to offer to society in general and higher education specifically. Meaning the space created must be free from the strings of assimilation. Assimilation is an unnecessary burden for Black men, and it perpetuates the message that they and the culture they belong to are inferior, which is not true. Black men need to be free to be themselves without fighting a narrative or trying to be presentable.

Imagine education as the ocean. There are surface currents which flow in one direction and then there are undercurrents that flow in a different direction. Black male

students have been swept up by an undercurrent caused by the master narrative which comes from a deficit approach to educating and reporting about Black men. The dangerous part about an undercurrent is by time anyone has looked up, the swimmer (in this case the student) has drifted off in a different direction and it will take a search and rescue team to bring them back. The BALM Initiative will not only rescue our brothers, but we will connect them with brothers who were able to beat the undercurrent and swim towards graduation and a successful career.

One goal is to decrease the amount of Black male students who succumb to the undercurrent of the master narrative about them by connecting them with Black men who overcame it. Another goal is to put people in our country and in the world on notice that we are unapologetic Black men who belong in academic spaces just as much as anyone else. We will no longer fight a narrative we did not create, and we will not seek to prove why our lives matter. We are done with the mental bondage that has put limits on what we can do, say, and be. We are Black men, and we can do, say, and be whatever we prepare ourselves for.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Coordinator of the BALM (Brothers of Achievement Leadership and Mastery) Initiative**

#### **Job Description**

- 1) Supervise 1 full-time administrative assistant and 2 graduate assistants working with 10 undergraduate students.
- 2) Communicate with University faculty, department chairs to monitor success of students.
- 3) Oversee the weeknight study hall component of the BALM Initiative.
- 4) Coordinate the tutoring program in partnership with the tutoring center or student success center.
- 5) Collaborate with key partners (financial aid, library services, tutoring/student success center, student conduct, residence life, disability services, career center, and other offices within the Division of Student Affairs.
- 6) View weekly reports provided by graduate assistants tracking academic and personal progress as well as identifying and mitigating any academic issues that may arise.
- 7) Work with the office of institutional research to collect and analyze student success data.
- 8) Assist the office of the registrar to create academic fall schedules for 1<sup>st</sup> year Black male students.
- 9) Work as a secondary academic advisor for assistance with academic schedules for all Black male student athletes.
- 10) Serve on university wide committees representing the BALM Initiative.

- 11) Collaborate with the Higher Education Graduate program to provide opportunities for graduate students to complete internships and Graduate Assistantships with the BALM Initiative.

## **Appendix B**

### **Bi-Weekly GA and Protégé Check-in Sample Questions**

#### **1. General Check in**

This is for relationship building. We not only care about the academic well-being of the Protégés but we believe that caring for the personal well-being is a gateway to academic success.

- a. What is new with you? (Personally and Socially)
- b. How are you feeling? (Emotional, Mental, and Physical Health)
- c. What's on your mind?

#### **2. Academic Check-in**

GAs will sit with students and go over each class to see how Protégés are tracking academically. This is an opportunity for them to see if the Protégés needs access to services or if they just need encouragement. The goal here is to keep track of academic progress, facilitate Protégés as they mitigate any issues they may be having (advocacy and self-advocacy), and increase their self-efficacy pertaining their academic ability.

- a. What assignments have you turned in?
- b. What new assignment grades do you have?
- c. What assignments are due in the next two weeks?
- d. Do you need tutoring for any of your classes?

## Appendix C

### The BALM Initiative Protégé Application

#### The BALM Initiative Sage Application

Please fill out this form. After you are complete send us an email, at [thebalminitiative@tucker.edu](mailto:thebalminitiative@tucker.edu), with your resume and any questions, comments, or concerns you may have regarding the program.

\* Required

1. Name \*

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2. Email and Phone number \*

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3. Undergrad Major and Graduate Major (If Applicable) \*

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4. During undergrad what leadership roles did you hold? and What activities (including athletics) were you engaged in? \*

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5. Place of Employment, Position, and Years in the field (Format: Company-Position-5) \*

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6. Why do you want to be a Sage mentor? \*

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7. If you could give your undergraduate self some encouragement what would it be? \*

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## The BALM Initiative Protégé Application

5/9/2021

The BALM Initiative Protégé Application

### The BALM Initiative Protégé Application

Please fill out this form. After you are complete send us an email, at [thebalminitiative@tucker.edu](mailto:thebalminitiative@tucker.edu), with your resume and any questions, comments, or concerns you may have regarding the program.

\* Required

1. Name \*

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2. Student Email and Phone number \*

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3. Major and GPA (Minimum GPA of 2.5 for current students joining the BALM Initiative) \*

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4. Why do you want to be a Protégé? What are you looking to gain from you experience in the BALM Initiative? \*

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5/9/2021

The BALM Initiative Protégé Application

5. What leadership roles do you hold on campus? and What activities (including athletics) are you engaged in? \*

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6. Do you have a work study job? If so, where? If not, are you interested in exploring your eligibility for a work study job? \*

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<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1IEyP-FWISQMDMsG-3c5gipQVOc?v-bFV4BAkh3NewsU/edit>

2/2

## Appendix D

### Budget

Expense Item	Justification	Year Total	
Administrative Assistant	Keep Coordinator's schedule (year, semester, month, and week). Approving Marketing Material created by GAs and Protégés, and booking rooms and spaces on campus, guest speakers and entertainment for the events each year.	40,000	
Graduate Assistant (2) Tuition, Stipend, Book voucher	Point of contact for Proteges each and their case load (7 undergraduate students total). The will conduct biweekly academic meetings with mentees and peer mentors. Checking on their progress. The will also play a huge roll in the programming (Shop Talk.).	82,000	
Computers/Laptops, Office Furniture/supplies and décor	Four Desk Four Chairs Two iMacs Two MacBook Pros Tables and chairs for undergraduate students Décor	15,000	Note: This will be a paperless office cutting down on our strain on the environment and keep budget low. It is important to understand that many of the items in this section will not be a yearly purchase.
Traveling	Conferences for social, professional, and educational enrichment. Speaking at schools giving them an overview of our program.	7,000	Note: For the first semester of full operation it will cost \$4,650 to pay for the registration fee and hotel room of the coordinator, GA's, and 10 Protégés who will attend a leadership conference like the Robert D. Lynch Student Leadership Development Institute. The remaining money will go towards regional recruitment traveling.
Marketing	Raise awareness about the program and all supplemental components (podcast, bi-weekly hangout, study halls). Let perspective Black male students and their family know about our program and providing them with information for inquiries especially during the college choice period.	500	
Food for events	We want to feed this men mentally and physically. Food will be for the Orientation brunch, Shop Talk and the end of the year cook out.	10,000	
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>154,500</b>	

**Appendix E**  
**Sponsorship Letter**

05/10/2020

Dr. Samantha King  
Director of the Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)  
**University of Change**  
777 Transformation Drive  
Glenolden, PA, 19036

Dear Dr. King,

The Brothers of Achievement, Leadership, and Mastery (BALM) Initiative invite you to become a sponsor for our initiative to benefit Black male students at the University of Change.

The primary source of funding for The BALM Initiative will come from departments on campus who are focus on social change, such as yourself. We will receive no governmental funds.

We plan to fully launch this initiative in Fall 2022, and we are currently in the planning stage. We will have a few events in the summer leading up to the Fall launch. These events will be informational events for students and their families so that they can learn out what our initiative will offer.

The primary component of this initiative is mentorship. There will also be Leadership and enrichment conference attendance, social gathering geared towards the bonding of Black male students on our campus. The funds provided will go towards paying for conference attendance of students involved as well as the staff, food for bi-weekly meetings, an orientation brunch, and the end of the year cookout.

Your sponsorship will help assure the success of The BALM Initiative. Enclosed please find more information on this exciting event and its sponsorship levels. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. I look forward to speaking with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Levi A. Tucker II, Coordinator of The BALM Initiative  
[267-071-1726]

Enclosures: Sponsorship Information




## Appendix F

### Shop Talk Flyer and Topic Sample

**THE BALM INITIATIVE  
PRESENTS**

**BLACK HISTORY MONTH**



"We're brainwashed. ... Colorism is not a good thing,  
especially when you're black."  
-Kendrick Lamar

**SHOP TALK SERIES**

**AM I BLACK ENOUGH?**

**FEBURARY 25TH  
11:00AM-12:00PM**

GUEST SPEAKER **ALBERT GREEN**


**FREE FOOD**


Sponsored by  
The Diversity Committee and the BALM Initiative

### Diversity & Leadership: Pathways to Success Symposium

**Keynote Speaker**

Juan González is an American progressive broadcast journalist and investigative reporter. He was also a columnist for the New York Daily News from 1987 to 2016. He frequently co-hosts the radio and television program Democracy Now! with Amy Goodman.





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**TUCKER UNIVERSITY**

**ANDREA STUDENT CENTER**

**Friday APRIL 15  
10AM-12PM**

**Guest Speaker**


Mike Burrell aka the "Success Shepard" is an up and coming Motivational/Professional speaker who enjoys helping people to reach their goals and find their value, and communicate their message to the world.




**Free Lunch 12pm-1pm**  
**Career and Life Lessons from Alumni Panel**

Made with PosterMyWall.com

**THE BALM INITIATIVE**



**Guest**



**REGINALD HOWARD**  
Author

## MENTAL WELLNESS BLACK MEN MIND YOUR MIND

"Mental health...is not a destination, but a process.  
It's about how you drive, not where you're going."  
- Noam Shpancer, PhD

ANDREA STUDENT CENTER  
ROOM 2510  
MARCH 31  
11:05AM-12:00PM  
FREE PIZZA & WINGS

Made with PosterMyWall.com

## **Appendix G**

### **Assessment Interviews/Focus Groups**

#### **Protégé Interview Questions**

This interview can be conducted at the last GA check-in meeting.

1. What is your name, year in school, major, and one organization you lead/serve in?
2. What goals did you set for this year? Did you achieve them? How did your mentor and the BALM Initiative Team Assist you in achieve your goals?
3. Considering your complete experience with the program, why would you recommend it to a friend?
4. Do you have any suggestions/comments to help us make the program better?
5. What did you learn about yourself as a result of serving as a Protégé?
6. How can we support you through the summer?

#### **Impromptu Questions**

#### **Sage Interview/Survey Questions**

GA's will conduct these interviews.

1. What is your name, profession, and title, and the name of the college or university you attended?
2. What was your experience working with your assigned Protege?
3. In what ways has your Protégé progressed this semester?
4. What were some of the highlights of your experience as a Sage? Challenges?
5. How would you evaluate your effectiveness as a Sage?
6. Considering your complete experience with the program, how likely would you be to recommend to a fellow alumni, friend, or colleague to serve as Sage?

7. How are we doing supporting you? What are we doing well? Where do we need improvement?

### **Focus Group Questions**

1. In what ways did you see the BALM Initiative making a difference? Should it continue?
2. Look back on the year and evaluate your involvement and experience. (Protégé and Sage). How did your involvement impact your experience?
3. What were the highlights of your experiences this year? Discuss one way you believe you made a difference.
4. What did the BALM Initiative staff do well?
5. What are some things that you feel we need to improve upon moving forward?

## Appendix H

## Logo

