ENCOURAGING GREATNESS:

HOW BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR DEFINE HIGH-QUALITY MENTORING FOR CAREER AND COLLEGE READINESS

2020

MENTOR

JPMorgan Chase & Co.

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WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW: RESEARCH ON MENTORING BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

Mentorship, and the notion of who is a mentor, both hold a revered place for boys and young men of color (BYMOC). For BYMOC, the title of mentor is reserved for people who create deep, familial bonds with them, while celebrating their successes, challenging them when they come up short, and never wavering from doing all three.

Systemic racism and subsequent opportunity gaps drive notions of Black and Latinx males as broken or otherwise deficient (Banks, 1993, 1995). Mentoring programs and other interventions that operate based upon this deficit model contend that they will "fix" or otherwise cure those perceived deficiencies. These types of programs nullify their own effectiveness. They never build those vital bonds with mentees, and they constantly remind BYMOC of what is allegedly "wrong" with them. At the same time, mentoring that never addresses race and seeks to be color-blind also fails to meet their particular needs (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014).

Whether the focus of the mentoring is academics, athletics, career readiness, leadership development, or any other aspect or mixture of supports, being effective with BYMOC requires mentoring grounded in *care*. We often use the word "care" colloquially to indicate simply whether something has a modicum of importance to us. Geneva Gay, a founder of the study of multicultural education and creator of the concept called Culturally Responsive Teaching, instructs those working with children of color on how *care* must function in culturally responsive ways. Gay states, "Culturally responsive caring can be characterized as a holistic approach to understanding students personally and academically" (2010). Care that is culturally responsive must be foundational to the ethos of any mentoring organization working with BYMOC. It is this type of care that helps them overcome systemic barriers to their success, steeps mentors in the reality that BYMOC have unique needs they as mentors must meet, and reminds both mentees and mentors that BYMOC do not need "fixing."

> **"The concept of culturally responsive caring is significant in highlighting the sociological and human factors that contribute to the social and academic success of youth."**
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> From *"Reciprocal Love: Mentoring Black and Latino Males through an Ethos of Care"* in the Journal of Urban Education (Jackson et al., 2014)

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CARE AND GROUP MENTORING

Understanding culturally responsive care is a vital first step for mentoring programs serving BYMOC. Next, these mentoring programs must turn that concept into a set of actionable guidelines that provide the basis for how they build and maintain mentoring relationships. One of the primary guidelines is ensuring that mentoring involves both one-on-one *and* group experiences. Because of the unique systemic and systematic racial barriers BYMOC face, they hold a much more collective sense of community and empowerment than their White peers. Boys and young men who are Black and Latinx often consider each other, their communities, and their successes all linked together. Accordingly, studies consistently show that quality mentoring programs for Black and Latinx males ". . . [establish] a sense of brotherhood and collective responsibility, trust and open dialogue, and a broadened sense of capacity and personal aspirations — all of which contribute to [their] sense of the self and community" (Jackson et al., 2014). These communal and brotherly senses are not only an ongoing part of quality mentoring overall, they are prerequisites *before* mentors can begin helping them prepare for college and their careers in particular. Successful programs make mentoring a shared endeavor in which mentors and mentees support each other across multiple relationships, creating a community that proves itself supportive of BYMOC. Group mentoring activities build trust by providing a system in which they can together ensure that each other's socioemotional needs are met, and that the program truly has the best interests of their marginalized communities in mind. Once mentoring programs have created such a community, they can effectively support their mentees' academic needs.

"A scholar identity [is] one in which Black males perceive themselves as academicians, as studious, and as intelligent or talented in school settings."

From *Gifted Black Males: Understanding and Decreasing Barriers to Achievement and Identity* in the Roeper Review (Whiting, 2009)

CAREER AND COLLEGE READINESS

As a function of culturally responsive care, group mentoring activities facilitate a community of learning that encourages mentees to take on a *scholar identity.* Crafting an entire academic identity requires going beyond offering tutoring sessions. Mentoring programs must help mentees build intellectual confidence, academic self-esteem, and an overall belief that they are capable of overcoming the systemic barriers to their success in school. While they help them face those barriers, group academic mentoring activities for BYMOC help make the group

itself a learning environment in which they thrive. Their successes in these environments have the added benefit of demonstrating for all constituents how culturally responsive care in academic practices can disrupt systemic barriers in their schools as well. In effect, they provide a blueprint for improving how schools view and educate BYMOC.

Group mentoring activities also have direct, positive effects on preparing BYMOC for college. In mentoring Black and Latinx males, "group processes seemed to have contributed to students feeling that they have the potential to succeed and to have higher educational aspirations" (Sánchez, Hurd, Neblett, & Vaclavik, 2018). College-readiness for all students extends far beyond simply being capable of completing college-level coursework. While all college students must have the regular necessities like time-management skills, quality study habits, and the ability to work responsibly in groups, marginalized students of color often face racial prejudice, crises of confidence, and a greater feeling of disaffection than their White peers (Dickerson & Agosto, 2015). Preparing them for college requires a culturally responsive approach to mentoring for academic and nonacademic success that prioritizes both one-on-one and group activities.

A STUDY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MENTEES

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership began this work in a resource guide titled *Finding the Greatness Within*, which detailed the attributes and purposes of quality career and college-readiness mentoring for BYMOC. Building upon that work, MENTOR commissioned A Line in the Sand, LLC, to conduct a subsequent study. This new study involved conducting focus groups, interviews, and surveys of mentees in multiple programs, resulting in this issue brief. Its purpose is to provide advice to all mentors and mentoring programs, directly from BYMOC in mentoring programs, on what works in supporting their preparation for college and career. In the Findings section we organized what we learned from mentees in the study into four emergent themes that address the ways their programs effectively helped them build a sense of community, craft a scholarly identity, and challenge systemic barriers to their success.

HOW THE STUDY WORKED

The focus groups were conducted in New York and Los Angeles. The participants were current and former mentees ("Fellows") in The Fellowship Initiative (TFI) mentoring program sponsored by JPMorgan Chase. The TFI Fellows included both high school students currently in the program and college students who were alumni of the program. Unlike a traditional interview, the researcher gave the participants prompts and questions that fostered a conversation among all of them, guided by the main topics listed below. The one-on-one interviews were done either in person or over the phone, while the surveys were distributed online.

In all, the project involved more than 40 mentees in New York, California, Illinois, and Texas, and included TFI, 100 Black Men of America, Inc., and at least one other mentoring program respondents chose not to identify by name. Almost 20 percent of the participants were alumni of their respective programs, while the rest were currently enrolled high school students. The data from all sources were organized into four main categories, which included:

1) General programmatic understandings: what the mentees knew about their program before they signed up

2) The importance of race in mentoring: how being a young man of color factored into their relationships with all others in the program

3) College and career preparation: how effective they felt the academic and nonacademic aspects of their mentoring program prepared them for life after high school

4) Perceptions of effective mentoring: a general notion of what worked and what did not work well during their time as a mentee

Created and operated by JPMorgan Chase (JPMC), TFI provides mentorship for college and career readiness to young men of color in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Dallas. The mentors in the program are JPMC employees who have an interest in serving BYMOC in marginalized communities.

FINDINGS: WHAT WE LEARNED FROM WHAT WE WERE TOLD

Analyzing the data, we found four main themes that emerged. These themes overlapped with each other and with the categories into which the data had been organized. The results follow, and are presented as advice to all mentors and mentoring programs, portrayed through the voices of BYMOC. Theme 1: An Unexpected New Family

THEME 1: AN UNEXPECTED NEW FAMILY

"It became a family that I never expected."

Most of the mentees went into their mentoring programs without much prior knowledge about them. Often guided to them by teachers and parents/guardians, the mentees in the study were led to these programs by trusted adults. Reflecting a common experience, one mentee who was unfamiliar with his future mentoring program shared:

"My teacher came to me like, 'This is a program for you. I feel like it's something important for you to (try) . . . it's something to help you to expand as a person."

Because potential mentees often come in not quite knowing what to expect, it is vital for mentoring programs to begin by building positive relationships with schools and neighborhood communities to earn their initial trust. The importance of building trust is increased for BYMOC, who are often subjected to boring, inadequate, and even punitive relationships with organizations that treat them as if they are broken (Jenkins, 2006; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). The fellows in the LA focus group actually used the word, "program" to describe entities that treated them in this manner, drawing differences between these ineffective interventions and TFI. The key distinction they made, exactly as their counterparts in New York had done, was describing their experiences as being familial. One fellow reflected on this feeling of family, remarking, "We've been through it all! We've (even) done yoga together! So we have a crazy bond that is more like a family instead of a program." His peer agreed, responding, "Man, we've been outdoors together under a tarp. We've backpacked together. We see each other every Saturday for eight, nine hours!"

The primary way mentoring programs in the study effectively built this sense of family was by consistently engaging in group activities. From yoga to college fairs to camping excursions, these activities included all aspects of learning with a particular emphasis on the nonacademic ones. Mentees described these opportunities to interact with their mentors and program administrators as instrumental in helping to build that sense of family. The participants in both focus groups spoke about how the people

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of color in the administrations at their respective programs became "father" and "mother" figures to them. Their feedback reinforces the notion that any mentoring program for BYMOC must have people of color prominently involved, both in administration and in direct mentorship. Some program chapters in this study had limited resources for recruiting people of color as mentors. For programs whose local demographics are a hinderance, having people of color in administration allows them to have greater contact with more mentees — especially when these administrators are running and participating in group activities. It is vital, however, to understand that this greater impact also comes at a greater emotional and physical cost. While all programs must provide pointed and constant support for the people of color in their administrations, programs with low numbers of them have to be uniquely diligent in their support in order to prevent burnout.

THEME 2: PROVIDING UNWAVERING SUPPORT TO HELP MEET A VARIETY OF CHALLENGES

"They gave us so much support. They were pretty much with us every step of the way, from when we first applied to after we graduated. Even now, I'll still get contacted by the [program] administrators and my mentor."

We also learned how valuable it was for mentees to have mentors who were persistent and consistent in their support. Across programs, mentees described how incredibly impactful it was to have mentors and administrators who remained in contact with them. One interviewee, a self-described "good kid and good student, who wasn't really thinking about college," noted how he avoided contact with his mentor at first, but acquiesced from her persistence. He stated, "My mentor and I didn't have a lot in common, and we didn't connect at first. I was born in Mexico and she's a White woman from [the U.S.]; there's a big age difference, and she grew up with two parents who are lawyers. But she kept texting and reaching out and, ultimately, we got really close and she's still there for me, now."

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Eventually they developed a close and lasting relationship. They found important commonalities in overcoming challenges they had each faced, as both came from homes that expected them to pursue high-profile careers. Both of them also faced discrimination based upon aspects of their cultural identities — her as a woman and him as a Latinx male. The latter aspect is an important one, as it provides an example of how a mentor's persistence can help transcend ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and generational differences. To be clear, persistence alone is not a panacea for intercultural communication, but it is a key way for mentors to engage in care that is culturally responsive. Persistence by adults in mentoring programs counters the tendencies of adults with whom they interact in their formal learning environments. These adults, mostly in the mentees' schools, are often more likely to give up on trying to reach children who initially push them away. Schools foster the mistrust in them shown by BYMOC when those students see themselves disproportionately reprimanded, earning the lowest grades, remanded to remedial courses, and going to college in the lowest numbers. Mentoring programs, simply by being positively persistent, are positioned as learning environments in which boys and men of color are valued and respected, reciprocally earning the respect and trust of their mentees.

Schools and other formal learning environments often give up on or are antagonistic toward BYMOC. Persistent mentors create a new, positive paradigm for how adults interact with them.

THEME 3: FOSTERING SELF-WORTH AND SCHOLAR IDENTITIES

"They make me feel like such a valuable person. And they want to learn from me. And I feel like the program is building me up, and building my character, and building my relationships with other people, and just making me a better person in general."

Mentees expect the mentors and administrators in any program to be steadfast in their support and communication, and to help mentees meet academic and nonacademic challenges. For the latter, mentees in this study described their programs as maintaining an equal balance between the amount of activities they did that helped them academically (i.e., tutoring, standardized test preparation, and college fairs) and those that were nonacademic (i.e., group and individual excursions, open

discussions, and mentors attending mentees' athletic contests). This balance helps mentees build and strengthen their sense of self-worth and self-confidence, which has positive effects on their performance in and outside of the classroom.

According to mentees, the key to engendering this sense of self-worth was how programs embedded it into their ethos. For example, fellows in the TFI focus groups on both coasts repeatedly used the phrase "best self" to describe who the program challenged them to become. Their concept of "best self" was a well-rounded one that included academic, career, and social successes, circumscribed by a sense of community. A mentee from New York noted that, "Everybody wanted to see each other succeed and go to college and get that four-year degree. That's one of the main things that made me stay [in the program]." For the mentees, being their best self included the communal desire to see their peers have success and actively engaging in helping them achieve it.

Mentees identified a sense of self-worth as the primary asset for developing a scholarly identity. The next most important asset was having mentors and administrators who were eager, lifelong learners. Their demonstrated desire to continue to learn, in both academic and nonacademic senses, influenced the mentees to do the same. Mentors and administrators who took the time to learn not only *about* their mentees, but *from* them as well, were much more effective in helping them claim that scholarly identity. In one anecdote, an alum recounted how his mentor had taken him on a learning trip to an art history museum, and then tasked him with planning his own learning excursion for her. Another mentee from the New York focus group described a similar experience stating, "When I was in ninth grade, before I was in TFI, I was like a C student. I didn't really have much motivation. And then things changed when I joined TFI. . . . Everything I wanted to do, they supported."

A lifelong learner is also a positive risk-taker. Duell and Steinberg (2018) describe positive risk-taking for adolescents as engaging in activities that push them out of their comfort zones, challenge negative teenage social norms, or both. Examples could include a popular athlete joining a science club, a student who is not out participating in an LGBTQ forum, or even a high school student simply expressing a love of learning at school. Mentors who modeled positive risk-taking encouraged mentees to follow their examples. One important way that was done, according to

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focus group participants, was through showing their own vulnerability. A participant shared that, "[Our program manager] noticed that he made mistakes as well, so he always asked us, 'What can I do better? How can I be a better program manager so you guys can be where you want to be in life?' And that was the most important thing about him; [it showed] he cared for us."

Scholars are willing learners, willing learners take positive intellectual risks, and taking positive risks involves being vulnerable. Effective mentors are both teachers to and students of their mentees, helping them instill a scholar identity by exemplifying it in all of their interactions.

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THEME 4: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS AS INEVITABLE OUTCOMES

"They instilled in me from the start that you're going to go to college. No matter how much you struggle in high school, college is what you're going to do. It's part of your future. It's inevitable. You're not going to miss out on that experience."

With its stated focus on career and college readiness, mentees described TFI as exceptionally effective in helping them take on a scholar identity. The program establishes earning a college degree and having a professional career as inexorable outcomes for its mentees, and then provides them with every necessary resource and support to ensure they attain both. As the above quote indicates, college and career preparation — like the notion of a "best self" — are a part of TFI ethos. Mentees in 100 Black Men similarly described their experiences with college and career preparation, with both being core and reiterated goals in their programs as well. Two of them in a Houston chapter added the importance of having men of color as influences, one stating, "Being able to be around so many successful Black men has shown me that I can go to college and have a successful career." His counterpart responded, "[And] the college tours and field trips we took have helped me further understand my career path and other options."

Comparing their experiences with college preparation in TFI to the ones their schools offered, TFI fellows described the latter as consisting mostly of informal college counseling sessions, held only by request or otherwise sporadically. They noted that these informal college counseling measures, while sometimes complementary to the ones employed by TFI, were largely overshadowed by them in quality and utility. Fellows in TFI talked about attending college fairs, taking free standardized test preparation classes, and getting individualized help with filling out financial aid forms and college admissions packets. They also indicated that the compelling conversations about college experiences they had with their mentors and

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administrators during nonacademic interactions were just as important as the actual tutoring they received. Fellows subsequently found the college-educated mentors and administrators in TFI more aspirational than the college-educated teachers. The combination of individualized high-quality college counseling, along with embodying an ethos of best self and a scholar identity, distinguished the mentors' influence. One NY fellow summed this comparative notion up, saying, "TFI made college more of a realistic goal because now you have people who *went* to college who are *in* careers already, who actually *want* you to go to college as well, and are likely more invested than teachers in your school are."

The quality of their preparation for college was corroborated by the TFI alums in the focus groups. They spoke about feeling equally ready for the challenges of their coursework, and for the nonacademic challenges of being a college student, such as finding affinity groups on campus, managing their social life, and being a person of color on a predominantly White college campus. Of the latter, an LA alum spoke to how his mentor advised him noting, "She said there are going to be disadvantages, purposeful disadvantages that people do to you. She definitely prepared me to always bring my best self forward. And to think positively of the person next to you, but just know that that person could look down upon you because of the color of your skin."

Another consideration for preparing BYMOC for college is the many ways race and geography function in their higher education experiences. In some cases, alums decided to attend institutions in rural or suburban areas far away from their homes. Because of population demographics, mentoring programs serving BYMOC are often located in large metropolitan U.S. cities. Many alums in this study talked about college being the first time in their lives during which they were far away from home for an extended period of time, living in a non-metropolitan area, and managing racial environments drastically different from their home cities. They described feeling varying degrees of culture shock due to these factors, but they also reported that they felt prepared for it by the stories and lessons their mentors and administrators had shared with them. From anecdotes of activism, to self-care, to joining campus organizations, to volunteering in their local communities, mentees learned a variety of ways to handle various aspects of college culture shock.

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The overall advice to mentoring programs intending to concentrate on college readiness is that preparing BYMOC for college requires a robust set of programmatic practices that ready them for the challenges of coursework, as well as the challenges of everyday life as a young man of color on a college campus.

As with college preparation, mentees found their mentors and administrators' careers aspirational as well. Many who had not thought in depth about the career they would pursue actually found answers through exposure to their mentors' careers. Speaking in response when asked if he would want to be a mentor himself, an LA fellow responded, "Yeah! I'll share my background with my mentee, and I'll show him how I came up, and the connections I have in my career. I'll set him up with some of my clients or coworkers. And then maybe, if he likes business, too, he can follow the same route I did."

Mentees also spoke positively about the ways they were taught professionalism by the program. They learned the expectations of formal business environments and how to navigate them. They also received support for career ideas outside of the traditional business world. Describing how invested his mentor was in his career goals, a fellow said, "When he would ask me, 'Have you decided what you want to do? What you want to do in the future?' I knew he wasn't just asking, because he really *felt* my intentions, and my goals — [as if] they were his too." This deep level of interest and investment was reflective of the fellows' program-wide experiences with career preparation.

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For boys and young men of color, being prepared for college and career requires a multifaceted and layered set of aspects. They include examining race, seeing themselves in precollege experiences, and an overall sense that college and career success are inevitable.

PARTING ADVICE: MENTEES HIGHLIGHT IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF QUALITY MENTORING

Whether in a focus group, survey, or interview, every mentee in the study was given the opportunity to reiterate and highlight aspects of mentoring we had discussed, and to add other aspects we had not covered. One point they chose was being persistent in communicating with fellows. An interviewee advised mentors who encountered initial resistance to, "Keep trying! Even if you don't have a lot to say, say something!" It takes time to build a trusting relationship. And considering their all too often negative experiences in educational environments, BYMOC are usually understandably more reticent to engage with new adults in a mentoring program. Recalling how some mentees referred to ineffective educational interventions as "programs," they may initially consider their mentoring relationship a "program" and harbor skepticism. It is also important to note here that current mentees advised future mentees to be equally persistent. Of their program's weekly Saturday morning group meetings, one mentee confided, "I just thought, 'There go my Saturdays! No more video games!' But [the program] was a lot more than I expected. I started looking forward to it!" TFI fellows in LA likewise encouraged mentees to engage with the program. Referencing memories of his own first few meeting experiences, one fellow advised future fellows, "Just jump into that conversation over there. Try to make friends with people you don't know. It may be hard in the first week or so when you start the program, but keep pushing yourself!"

In addition to persistent communication, mentees also lauded the challenging workload their programs required. They encouraged mentoring programs to continue implementing this rigorous content, while also urging future mentees to rise to that challenge.

As a true measure of whether mentees find a program beneficial, their desire to become mentors themselves and pay their experiences forward is invaluable. Summarizing the feelings of almost all mentees in the study, a TFI Fellow in LA declared, "Yeah. I'll probably be a mentor. And I'll do exactly what my mentor did. It worked."

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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: GUIDANCE FOR MENTORS AND MENTORING PROGRAMS

Taking the four themes that emerged, we offer the following synopsis and recommendations. This advice is not offered as a *comprehensive* guide to effectively mentoring BYMOC, as no such guide could ever exist. Every mentoring program is different; from geographic location to overall goals, to the pool of available mentors, to the ages of the mentees, to numerous other factors, each mentoring program must take a unique approach to how it serves its constituents. We can say, however, that effectively incorporating these aspects will help the overall efficacy of any mentoring program serving BYMOC.

MENTORING REQUIRES BUILDING A FAMILY

Most of us are familiar with the African proverb about villages raising children. The next steps we rarely discuss are the creation and maintenance of that village. Successful mentoring programs have a model that binds mentees, mentors, and administrators into a web of mutual support. There are multiple ways to accomplish this. According to mentees in this study, effective ones include:

1) **Group activities that involve all mentees, mentors, and administrators.**
These may occur during a Saturday Academy, a summer field trip, an on-campus gathering for mentees at a particular school, or other gatherings, both formal and informal. The peer-to-peer interactions between mentees that occur during these activities can actually be the most powerful ones for building that sense of family.

2) **A program philosophy that purposefully and openly centers on a familial outcome.**
A mentoring program should have stated notions of building a community among its constituents. Mantras, affirmations, and exercises that reaffirm the program's commitment to building family can also be effective.

BYMOC are often in formal educational environments that are alienating, and they consistently experience a subsequent disconnection between themselves and that learning community. Because most mentoring programs have a prominent academic component at their core, setting the program as an oasis in which learning is supported through a communal effort is key.

MENTORING REQUIRES PERSISTENT INTERCULTURAL AND INTRACULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Every mentoring program has different ways by which it attracts mentees. For many in this study, it was a trusted teacher or adviser who recommended the program to them. The effects of being in schools and other programs that inadequately serve BYMOC also include an initial distrust and dismissal of programs intended for them. To paraphrase and remix a popular expression, "You may build it, but don't expect them to come!" Mentoring programs should set a precedent of persistent communication to its mentees and follow through with that level of communication throughout and even beyond their mentoring experiences. Some ways to do this are:

1) **Targeted advertising of the program to specific school and community constituents.**
There are people who are gatekeepers to formal interactions with BYMOC — folks who have earned their trust by establishing sincere interest in their success. Quality mentoring programs build a rapport with them by being transparent and deferential as they introduce and incorporate themselves into the lives of BYMOC.

2) **Consistent and persistent communication between the program administrators, mentors, and mentees.**
As we learned in this study, the mentees appreciated and ultimately responded to mentors who were persistent in their communication. Those who were undeterred by their mentee's initial reticence were able to make deep connections for doing so, while mentors who pulled back on their communication struggled to make similar connections and ended up taking much longer to do so if they finally occurred.

3) **Addressing the importance intercultural connections and differences between mentors and mentees.**
The mentees highlighted the importance of both having mentors and administrators who shared cultural identities with them, and how those with whom they did not share much in common culturally spoke and interacted candidly regarding those differences.

The third highlight is an important aspect regarding intra and intercultural communication for mentors of BYMOC. Balancing the *acknowledgment* of cultural differences and similarities between mentees and mentors without making it the *focal point* of interactions is key, and programs go about doing so in varied ways. For 100 Black Men, they are purposeful in everything from their name, to their fundamental mission in describing who they are mentoring and why. As a multicultural organization, by contrast, TFI has strengths in its intracultural relationships between its mentees and administrators and its often intercultural relationships between its mentors and mentees. No matter how an organization goes about building relationships with BYMOC, that they are building relationships with young men of color is a fact that must be purposefully acknowledged and addressed.

Building culturally relevant and responsive communication within any organization is a task that requires expert facilitators. Recruiting mentors and administrators of color is a vital aspect of that task, but running a program that serves BYMOC also requires much more than that. Just as "building it" does not mean "they will come," the presence of people of color in a program does not ensure cultural competence. For example, cultural competency training is done both online and in person for mentors and mentees in 100 Black Men, even though all are Black and male. We have included a resource from "A Line in the Sand" and some links in the Appendix that can help mentoring programs as a place to start their training, but we emphasize that every organization 1) must have initial and ongoing training in cultural competence for all constituents, 2) needs to have that training primarily facilitated by experts, and 3) should be constantly engaging in self-assessment and reflection to ensure it remains up to date in its competency.

MENTORING REQUIRES AN UNWAVERING BELIEF IN YOUR MENTEES

Paramount to cultural competency and communication in mentoring BYMOC is the fundamental notion that they are capable, worthy, and valuable. Whether it is New York, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, or any other city where Black and Brown boys reside, they are consistently relegated to the adverse side of social conditions. Mentoring programs are one part of the remedy to the systemic factors causing these social conditions, playing a crucial role in helping BYMOC develop a healthy sense of self and a scholarly identity. To ensure they do so, mentees in the study have advised programs to:

1) **Identify challenges as systemic, rather than internal, to BYMOC**
   Part of mentoring that builds self-esteem is managing the balance between stoking mentees' internal motivation, while acknowledging and countering the outside factors that constantly chip away at their self-esteem and self-concept. Boys and young men of color get an inordinate amount of messaging about their shortcomings. A quality mentoring program never reinforces those sentiments, recognizing the underlying systemic problems instead.

2) **Dogmatically adhere to the idea that Black and Brown boys are capable**
   The mentees responded in an overwhelmingly positive manner to the ways their mentoring programs grounded their work in the fervent belief that they are worthy of and capable of experiencing success. This rang true particularly with regard to their success in the classroom, and extended into their lives outside of school as well.

3) **Recognize mentees' expertise**
   Being acknowledged and respected as authorities on a variety of subjects, both academic and nonacademic, was important to the mentees. The mentors and administrators in the programs reinforced their stated programmatic philosophy that every mentee could be successful by highlighting their talents and knowledge. This also positioned the adults in the programs as learners as well, modeling how they wanted their mentees to see themselves.

The ideal mentoring program is constructed as a functional and loving family. As with any family, everyone has multiple roles, with elders providing guidance while everyone shares their knowledge and expertise. Consistent communication is also part of a healthy family, and it requires an acknowledgment of differences and similarities between family members. Loving families practice getting better at communication, even seeking out the help of experts in order to do so. And though they have differences, at their core, functional and loving families are oriented toward supporting each other at all turns. Every family member is so invested in each other's accomplishments that they become the measure for their own success.

APPENDIX A

The following recommended cultural competency development actions have been adapted from Michigan State University Extension's **Ready to Go: Mentor Training Toolkit.**

- ❏ Reflect on your own culture (e.g., your ancestors' experiences, how your family functions, your personal biases).
- ❏ Learn about other cultures (e.g., others' traditions, languages, how other families function).
- ❏ Experience different cultures (e.g., exploring others' life experiences, various ethnic foods, cultural attractions/events, diversity conferences).
- ❏ Be aware of the labels and stereotypes that we use and consider how they influence us (positively and negatively).
- ❏ Reflect on our values, the sources of those values (e.g., family, religion, media, peer groups) and how we put our values into action.
- ❏ Focus on understanding others who have different values and cultural backgrounds versus "fixing" them to believe what you believe or to practice your values — understanding each other is key to a healthy relationship.
- ❏ Work through challenges, recognizing that building mentoring relationships takes time and effort.
- ❏ Appreciate that others are the experts of their own experiences and that we will never know everything about another individual's life — avoid insisting that you can relate 100 percent to their experiences.

The following questions to help facilitate discussions on race and discrimination are highlighted in the U.S. Department of Justice **Community Dialogue Guide.**

- ❏ Have you ever felt different because of your race? If so, what was the experience like for you?
- ❏ What experiences have shaped your feelings and attitudes about race and ethnicity?
- ❏ What experience have you had in the past year that made you feel differently about race relations? What are the conditions that made that experience possible? If you have not had an experience, what makes such experiences rare? What do we make of our answers?
- ❏ What are the underlying conditions that influence the quantity and quality of our contact with people from other races?
- ❏ Can you think of a recent experience when you benefited or suffered from people having a stereotype about you? Can you think of a time when you wondered whether your behavior toward others was affected by a racial stereotype, or by other racial issues?
- ❏ What are the underlying conditions or barriers that hinder better race relations?
- ❏ What are we, either independently or with others, willing to do so that we have more interactions that contribute to better race relations? To make it easier for people to relate to those in other groups?

The following are additional mentoring practices shared by MENTOR that can help mentees overcome the barriers that they face and strengthen communications among mentors, mentees, and mentoring program administrators.

- ❏ Set the tone for open communications, using neutral language versus parental or authoritative language.
- ❏ Don't force discussions — be available for your mentee when they chose to open up and discuss.
- ❏ Take into account the geographic proximity between you and your mentee when considering meeting spots to address transportation barriers/challenges.
- ❏ Practice giving effective feedback that is timely, specific, and action-oriented.
- ❏ Work with your mentee to leverage personal resiliency builders.
- ❏ Provide your mentee with opportunities to reflect, discuss, and challenge systems of inequality.
- ❏ Discuss race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., and address how these issues adversely affect mentees.
- ❏ Focus on your mentee's strengths versus their deficits — challenge mentees to fully leverage their strengths.
- ❏ Teach problem-solving skills versus providing solutions to your mentee.
- ❏ Engage mentors in training that can unveil implicit biases, the attitudes or stereotypes that affect their understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.
- ❏ Empower mentees by assisting them to self-advocate.
- ❏ Assist mentees in building their social capital so they feel connected to their communities and are exposed to a wealth of supportive relationships and resources.

APPENDIX B

TAKING A CULTURAL INVENTORY:

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL IDENTITY AND POWER DYNAMICS

Time: Approximately 50 minutes

Materials: Index cards

Participants: Any number

This is an initial/icebreaker-style activity that involves participants creating a cultural identity inventory. The purpose of the activity is to get people to consider their own cultural identifiers, how those identifiers combine to create their cultural identity, the fact that cultural identity is always shifting, and how cultural identities affect communication.

It is important to let everyone know that they only have to share what they are comfortable sharing. This activity combines a large self-reflective component with an interactive one, and participants will have varying levels of ease sharing such personal information. Revisiting the activity with people who are familiar with each other is definitely worthwhile.

Part 1: Identifying Categories

The activity begins with the leader describing and defining the initial cultural identifiers used for the activity. This list is a great place to begin, but is not intended to be comprehensive: age, ability, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religious/philosophical beliefs. It is important that everyone understands that the purpose of this list is not to simply check boxes, but to create a starting point for how we discuss cultural identity. It can be useful to have people add categories, but be sure they are cultural identifiers. For example, political orientation or military status may be important aspects of a person's identity, but they are a function of personal choices they have made, and not identifiers themselves. Language, however, can be an important addition to this list, as it is a function of ethnicity.

Part 2: Identifying Subgroups and Power Dynamics

The next step is to identify the subgroups within categories. Each one should be left to interpretation. For example, one person may describe their age as 37, while another person might describe themselves as a millennial. Either one is fine. The point is to identify subgroups within each category and then identify which ones are empowered or disempowered. For example, within gender, we acknowledge that chauvinism and misogyny cause people who identify as women to be disempowered, and those who identify as men to be empowered. None of this is intended to be clear-cut, however, and the messiness and differences in interpretations should engender healthy and important debate. This can be done in pairs or in small groups, reminding participants that they do not have to share their own identities with each other.

Part 3: Our Strongest Personal Identifiers

For this portion of the exercise, each person identifies and circles (on the index card) the three subgroups with which they identify the strongest. A person may describe their race as "Asian" and their ethnicity as "Filipina," but indicate that the latter is so much more important that they do not really identify strongly as the former, even though they are related. Turning back to their groups/pairs, participants share which ones they are comfortable sharing and why they chose them.

Part 4: Our Strongest Perceived Identifiers

Next, participants quietly place an asterisk (or other indicator) next to the categories they feel other people perceive when interacting with them. The purpose is to begin understanding how differences or similarities between how we identify internally and how we are perceived externally affect our interactions with others. As in the prior step, participants share what they have chosen during this step — again, according to their level of comfort — with their partner/group. It is important to note that the categories a person chooses one day — or even within a day — may change later on, and this phenomenon is directly affected by how they perceive the cultural identities of the people around them.

Part 5: Implications for Mentors

The final step is a full-group discussion on how cultural identifiers affect communication between mentors and mentees, considering differences and similarities they may share. It is important to avoid trying to find a "common ground of oppression" that dishonestly posits everyone as "some type of victim." Participants should begin to understand how they are in some privileged cultural groups, some disempowered cultural groups, personally identify with some more than others, and that how they identify affects intercultural communication — especially with their mentees who are BYMOC. They will find that the figurative cultural distance between them is transient, but with some aspects that remain fairly constant.

Follow-up

This activity is one that can and should be revisited. Have participants keep their index cards for a later date and do the activity to see how it/they change over time. Mix groups so that mentors and mentees are talking with each other or are purposefully separated. Whatever the combination, keep in mind that this is a beginning point for exploring the complexities of cultural identities and intercultural communication, and how they affect relationships between program constituents.

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