

Chapter 1

Countering Soloist Impostor Syndrome Among African American Male First-Year Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Preventative Solutions for Future Post-Graduate Career Preparation and Professional Success

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ABSTRACT

Impostor syndrome details the occurrence of individuals who have a tendency to doubt their achievements and the skills that accompany them, despite the feedback that they are receiving from others. People who exhibit the behavior of the soloist function of impostor syndrome believe that they must solve any setbacks in their life on their own, without any outside help. This chapter focuses on soloist impostor syndrome (SIS) in first-year African American male students in the Historically Black Colleges and Universities or HBCU environment. The chapter's goal is to help the student overcome SIS by fostering workable curriculum, advising, mentoring and counseling, and career preparatory-based solutions for their success. Additionally, the chapter also stresses the student's ability to access spirituality by using their relationship with the higher power of their understanding to assist in adapting to the new environment.

As faculty in the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) system for 16 years, the author of the chapter has noticed a hypothetical trend of many first-generation African American male students who engage in what is known as the soloist behavior of the Impostor Syndrome (Clance, 1985; Young,

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2011). There have been students who, upon experiencing a personal traumatic experience such as the death of a loved one, financial difficulties that may have their academic career in jeopardy, or personal mental challenges, and instead of notifying the faculty member in private early on in the semester, may many times, wait until Midterm Exam time halfway through the term, or worse yet, near the end of the term to notify the instructor. The Impostor Syndrome “describes a psychological experience of intellectual and professional fraudulence” (Clance and Imes, 1978; Matthews and Clance, 1985). This fraudulence can manifest itself in five different behavioral patterns; the perfectionist, the natural genius, the soloist, the expert, and the superhero (Raypole, 2021). This essay’s focus is based on the goal of eliminating in first-year African American male students, the soloist behavioral function, in order to prepare them for future post-graduate professional workplace success. When Soloist Impostor Syndrome (SIS) is present in African American co-cultural circles, it can discourage African American males from seeking help when needed for fear of being seen among other male peer group members as being weak or “soft” for not keeping the issues to themselves and somehow figuring out and solving the problems on their own. This essay also seeks to identify the point in which many African American male students who are struggling on the HBCU higher education level, experience cultural pressure from their family or peer group’s belief that men aren’t supposed to show weakness of any kind especially when dealing with a racist society, means that they must be “soloists,” who can only rely on themselves to climb out of their academic rut, while believing that reaching out for help is a sign of weakness, instead of a proactive act of strength. The goal is to empower first-year African American male students to eliminate SIS by giving them instructional tools that will empower them to overcome it, therefore paving the way for their unhindered professional workplace-oriented development. Kunjufu (1997) suggests that many African American males learn this mindset through interaction with their childhood peer groups; planted social seeds that surface in their elementary school years, and continues to be cultivated through middle and high school as well. Majors and Billson (1993) argue that many of these deep-rooted beliefs are still present when the African American male reaches adulthood. The reality of being a first-generation university student, the process of figuring out how to be a successful man in the midst of many not having their biological father in the home growing up, and being exposed to limited positive male role models, and emerging from an elementary and secondary educational environment that did not adequately prepare them for the university setting are believed to be contributing factors of feelings of SIS that the researcher seeks to successfully provide solutions to counter it. Additionally, the essay will especially emphasize the role of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities-HBCUs in providing counter strategies to this problem through effective early detection, faculty-to-student mentorship, and weekly communication with the student as a way of checking overall wellness academically and otherwise. HBCUs have shown proven success in helping African American male students successfully overcome issues that hinder student success (Shorette & Palmer, 2015; Palmer, Davis & Maramba, 2010). Additionally, this essay also seeks to emphasize the strategy of the reliance on positive coping strategies that Black males taken on during their undergraduate years to equip themselves to overcome SIS through spirituality, in the form of ascribing to a power higher than oneself for strength to deal with the academic setting as well as everyday life, as well as taking on other positive coping techniques such as undergoing strategies to reduce stress (Norman, 2008; Riggins, McNeal & Herndon, 2008). The essay’s ultimate purpose is to provide a structure in which HBCU faculty can help African American men dealing with to identify and break the behavior patterns associated with SIS and replace those patterns with positive habits designed for African American male student success. To understand how to eliminate SIS among African American first-year HBCU students and prepare them for academic and profes-

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