

The YBMen Project at Eastern Michigan University

The Fall 2016 Report



The Young
Black Men,
Masculinities,
and Mental
Health (YBMen)
Project



The YBMen Project at Eastern Michigan University: The Fall 2016 Report

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The YBMen Project reports synthesize recent findings from the implementation of the YBMen Project at a partnering study site. Reports do not constitute YBMen Project policy or commit the YBMen Project team or the University of Michigan to the activities described therein. This report originated with the YBMen Project team and was funded by a grant awarded to Dr. Daphne C. Watkins by the University of Michigan Depression Center titled *The Phil Jenkins Award for Innovation in Depression Research*.

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Overview: The YBMen Project

TRANSFORMING GENDER NORMS | ENRICHING MENTAL HEALTH | ENGAGING IN SOCIAL SUPPORT

The Young Black Men, Masculinities, and Mental Health (YBMen) Project is a Facebook-based health education and social support intervention that uses gender-and culturally-relevant prompts from popular culture and social media (e.g., song lyrics, images, YouTube videos) to educate Black men about the individual and collective importance of their mental health, their definitions of masculinity/manhood, and engaging in social support.

The YBMen Project was created for young Black men who are unlikely to discuss their mental health face-to-face; who have not been diagnosed with a mental health issue; and who desire social support in a safe and non-threatening environment.

Developed by Dr. Daphne C. Watkins, Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Michigan, the YBMen Project serves as a mechanism through which we can learn about the strategies that influence and shape young Black men's ideas and experiences with mental health, masculinity/manhood, and social support.

The YBMen Project at EMU

Implementing the YBMen Project at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) was made possible by several people who were committed to improving the mental health and well-being of young Black men at EMU. These efforts began when the YBMen Project team from the University of Michigan visited EMU during the 2015-2016 academic year to recruit Black male students for a survey. During that time, the YBMen Project team learned about the BrotherHOOD Initiative and their efforts aimed at recruiting and retaining Black male students at EMU. Inspired by the work being done at EMU through the BrotherHOOD Initiative, the YBMen Project team decided to tailor an iteration of the YBMen Facebook intervention specifically for the Black men at EMU to be implemented in the fall of 2016.

Dr. Watkins and her team visited EMU multiple times that year and worked with Dr. Raul Leon, Associate Professor at EMU and Program Director for the BrotherHOOD Initiative, to make their plans come to fruition. By participating in various activities that year, including the BrotherHOOD orientation and the barbershops, Dr. Watkins, Dr. Leon, and their team of UM and EMU staff and students identified 22 Black men at EMU to enroll in the YBMen Project during the 2016-2017 academic year.



Dr. Daphne C. Watkins
Director, YBMen Project
Associate Professor, UM



Dr. Raul Leon
Program Director, BrotherHOOD Initiative
Associate Professor, EMU

As the BrotherHOOD Program Director, Dr. Leon assisted the YBMen Project team in meeting with the BrotherHOOD participants, gauging their interest, and screening them for eligibility for the YBMen Project.

The YBMen Project team from UM had fruitful interactions with the faculty, staff, and students at EMU. By implementing the YBMen Project at EMU, our aim was to help improve the mental health and well-being of the Black male students on campus. We also wanted to teach Black male students about progressive masculinities and the importance of social support as they face various life transitions and trajectories.

Why We Used Two Groups

We recruited two different groups for the YBMen Project at Eastern Michigan University (EMU): the intervention group (or "Facebook group") and the comparison group (or "non-Facebook group").

We decided to place participants into two groups because we wanted to compare young Black men in the Facebook group to men in the non-Facebook group to see if their mental health, masculinity/manhood, and social support (measured by the surveys and interviews) changed: (a) from Time 1 to Time 2, and (b) for men who participated in the YBMen Facebook group (i.e., the intervention group) versus those who did not (i.e., the comparison group). To do this, we collected surveys from all 22 Black male participants before the YBMen Facebook intervention and immediately after the Facebook intervention. We also interviewed all 22 participants before the YBMen Facebook intervention and immediately after the Facebook intervention to learn more about their experiences and pressures and their thoughts about the YBMen Project.

Eleven participants were placed into the YBMen Facebook group, and the remaining 11 were placed into the non-Facebook group.



Facebook Group

The number of young Black men from EMU who enrolled in the project and were placed in the YBMen Facebook group. These men completed the:

- Pre-intervention survey (Time 1)
- Pre-intervention interview (Time 1)
- Post-intervention survey (Time 2)
- Post-intervention interview (Time 2)



Non-Facebook Group

The number of young Black men from EMU who enrolled in the project and were NOT placed in the YBMen Facebook group. These men completed the:

- Pre-intervention survey (Time 1)
- Pre-intervention interview (Time 1)
- Post-intervention survey (Time 2)
- Post-intervention interview (Time 2)

The YBMen Participants at EMU

The BrotherHOOD (Helping Others Obtain Degrees) Initiative is an EMU initiative designed to engage, empower, retain and graduate more males of color. Through collaborative partnerships with offices throughout the university, the BrotherHOOD employs a success-driven approach to help males of color develop as students and as men. All the participants in the YBMen Project at EMU during Fall 2016 were freshman participants in the BrotherHOOD.



Twenty-two members of the BrotherHOOD Initiative at EMU participated in the YBMen Project during Fall 2016. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 24. Below are characteristics of the twenty-two participants from EMU.



50%

**were employed, in addition
to attending college.**



20%

**were married or had
significant others.**

Weekly Facebook Topics and Goals for EMU during Fall 2016

Weeks & Topics	Goals
01 Introduction/Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To establish ground rules, get participants acclimated to the Facebook group setting, and to generate a “flow” in the discussion.
02 Black Masculinity/Manhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To familiarize participants with the terms “masculinity”, “Black masculinities”, and multiple definitions of manhood.• To learn about their definitions of manhood and how they developed these definitions.
03 Mental Health/Emotional Health/Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To familiarize participants with the term “mental health” and the mental health continuum.• To describe the difference between severe mental disorders and non-severe mental challenges.• To discuss help-seeking.
04 (General) Well-Being and Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help participants make connections between the importance of Black masculinities, mental health, and social support.
05 Program Wrap-up/Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To reflect on the topic from previous weeks.• To discuss any lingering topics.• To devise a plan for next steps.

What We Learned About the Young Black Men at EMU

Non-Facebook Group

We found no differences between Time 1 and Time 2 for the non-Facebook Group participants on any of the social support, mental health or masculinity variables.

Facebook Group

We found that some of the key outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms) increased between Time 1 and Time 2.*

Identify Mental Health Symptoms

We found participants in the FB group were able to identify more mental health symptoms during Time 2 than they could during Time 1.

Social Support

We found participants in the FB group reported more people they would reach out to for help (if they experienced a mental health challenge) during Time 2 compared to the number of people they reported during Time 1.

** Though these were not positive outcomes, our interviews with the EMU participants suggests that depressive symptoms increased between Time 1 and Time 2 due to the racial tensions that occurred on EMU's campus during the 2016-2017 academic year.*

Before and After the YBMen Facebook Intervention

Below are the before the YBMen Facebook Intervention (Time 1) and after the Facebook Intervention (Time 2) findings from the eleven young Black men who participated in the YBMen Facebook group. These findings highlight the major outcomes of our study: depressive symptoms, masculinity/manhood, and social support*.



4.36

Average score for
Depressive Symptoms
(PHQ-9)

51.45

Average score for overall
Masculinity/Manhood (CMNI)

25.36

Average score for overall
Social Support (ISEL)



6.00***

Average score for
Depressive Symptoms
(PHQ-9)

46.36

Average score for overall
Masculinity/Manhood (CMNI)

25.00

Average score for overall
Social Support (ISEL)

* Depressive symptoms were calculated using the PHQ-9 (Range:0-27); masculinity/manhood was calculated using the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI)(Range:0-93); and social support was calculated using the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL)(Range:0-36).

*** We note that our interviews with the EMU participants suggested participants were challenged with the racial tensions on campus during the 2016-2017 academic year. Our team wondered if depressive symptoms increased between Time 1 and Time 2 as a result of some of these tensions and others that occurred across the country during during that same time.

Participants' Voices

Mental Health

"...when I battle my demons, I tend to keep to myself 'cause I don't want to bother; or, put my hurt onto someone else."

"...it's the stress of just being a Black men in general. You know, we're targeted everywhere."

"I guess, there's like a stigma like you shouldn't be allowed to release your emotions as a Black man. You can't cry and stuff like that."

Masculinity/Manhood

"Being masculine to the Black men in my life is everything."

"I feel like, what it means to be a man is, never giving up, never showing fear, never showing failure, you know?"

"...you're Black and you're a man and everybody has a stereotype about you from the day that you are born... that we're aggressive ... people look at us like we're selling drugs and we go out and we shoot people ... And we have a lot of potential behind us but they just look at our skin color rather than what we have to offer."

Social Support

"...some Black men don't have a support system and some do. And [the] majority of different races have a support system, and it seems like — they stick together more [than Black men do]."

"...[after losing a loved one, I talked to]... my success coach. He's one of my teachers, and he's part of BrotherHOOD, and I talked to him about it."

"Even if we know, say for example, if we're here on campus and we're always being instructed about this and that but we're stubborn and we feel like we're going to be misunderstood so we won't seek out help."

The YBMen Facebook Intervention

"I feel like it was a good program, and it got like good like conversations started... because of what they post."

"...Besides this community, I haven't been in a community of Black dudes that really supported each other mentally... and really cared about each other's minds."

"I liked [the YBMen Facebook group]. I like... the conversational pieces you guys brought in. I like the fact that you guys discuss Kid Cudi and his mental health issues... you guys use[d] different TV shows, like Power... I like that because it kinda helps us start a conversation about things..."

Report Summary

The Fall 2016 iteration of the YBMen Project was a collaborative effort between students, faculty, and staff from the University of Michigan (UM) and Eastern Michigan University (EMU).

We recruited 22 young Black men from EMU's BrotherHOOD Initiative for the 5-week long YBMen Project, which included completing surveys and one-on-one interviews, and participating in a private YBMen Facebook intervention. The YBMen Facebook intervention was aimed at addressing the unique stressors, pressures, and needs of young Black men on campus. Half (n=11) of the young Black men who enrolled in the project during Fall 2016 were assigned to the intervention (i.e., Facebook) group and received the full YBMen Facebook intervention. The other half served as a comparison group (i.e., non-Facebook group) and did not receive the YBMen Facebook intervention.

As a part of the intervention, young Black men in the intervention group interacted with one another in the private YBMen Facebook group to learn (a) how to deal with stress and pressures in their lives; (b) the difference between traditional and modern-day definitions of manhood; and (c) how to seek help and engage in social support as they navigate the mental health challenges associated with young adulthood. The YBMen Facebook intervention included culturally-sensitive, gender-specific, and age-appropriate content that participants consumed on a daily basis. YBMen Facebook group participants were asked to log in to the private group at least 3 to 5 times per week over the five week intervention.

Participants spent anywhere from three minutes to fifteen minutes in the YBMen Facebook group daily. They were asked to engage in private YBMen Facebook group discussions with the moderator and other participants on topics related to masculinity/manhood, stress and coping, and topics related to the mental health and help-seeking behaviors of young Black men. The materials used in the YBMen Facebook group were adapted from news and popular culture, such as local and national headlines, memes, YouTube videos, song lyrics, TV shows, and podcast clips that were relevant during 2016. Men in the group also commented on posts and provided support for one another.

The goals of the YBMen Facebook group are to decrease depressive symptoms, decrease adherence to traditional definitions of masculinity/manhood, and increase help-seeking behaviors among participants. Our preliminary findings from the YBMen Project at EMU showed that **depressive symptom** scores increased, **masculinity/manhood** scores decreased, and **social support** scores remained about the same for the young Black men at EMU who participated in the YBMen Facebook group (*see page 6 of this report for details*). Though the increase in depressive symptom scores were not ideal, the post-test interview (Time 2) data highlighted the difficult time some of our participants experienced as a result of the racially-charged events that occurred at EMU* and UM** during the Fall 2016 semester.

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* EMU = https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2016/09/kkk_racial_graffiti_spray_pain.html

** UM = https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/11/13/university-of-michigan-student-wearing-a-hijab-threatened-to-be-lit-on-fire-police-say/?hpid=hp&utm_term=.e15acf554aaf

After reviewing these findings alongside the one-on-one interviews with the young Black male participants, we believe the higher depressive symptom scores post-intervention (Time 2) should raise awareness about the importance of addressing mental health with Black men at EMU amidst the racial and political tensions associated with Black men and other men of color that have been featured in local, regional, and national news.

Overall, we found that participants in the YBMen Facebook intervention group and the comparison group (non-Facebook group) reported being excited and hopeful about starting college at EMU. Despite this, several participants reported challenges with the living and working conditions of their friends and family members back home and the potential distractions that these conditions might cause them as they embark on a new chapter of their lives. This information was often shared while the men described their definitions of depression; whether Black men experienced *depression* differently than men of other racial/ethnic groups; whether Black men experienced *masculinity/manhood* differently than men of other racial/ethnic groups; and the kinds of *social support* the young Black men at EMU relied on during their transitions to adulthood.

Questions asked during the Time 1 interviews were identical to the questions asked during the Time 2 interviews, with one exception; participants in the YBMen Facebook group were asked additional questions about the YBMen Facebook intervention during Time 2. The Time 1 interviews allowed participants to express their views on depression, masculinity/manhood, and social support. Time 2 interviews reported similar information as to what was found during Time 1, only Time 2 interviews also demonstrated participants' enthusiasm for the YBMen Facebook intervention at EMU. Overall, YBMen Facebook group participants liked the flexibility of the project and the use of popular culture references, but questioned whether Facebook was the best platform for such a program (as opposed to Twitter, Instagram, etc.). They also suggested that we hold regular face-to-face meetings with YBMen Facebook group participants periodically throughout the 5-week project period, and not just depend on Facebook for engaging with the YBMen intervention content.

Participants in the YBMen Project (both the intervention group and comparison group) also reported feeling very supported by EMU's BrotherHOOD program and the program staff. During the interviews, participants reported feeling very comfortable speaking to their mentors and teachers in the BrotherHOOD, when opportunities presented themselves.

Looking ahead, our plans are to continue collaborating on initiatives to improve the mental health, progressive masculinities/manhood, and help-seeking (i.e., social support) behaviors of young Black men at EMU. Since 2016, Dr. Watkins and Dr. Leon have continued to communicate about funding opportunities to support another iteration of the YBMen Project at EMU through the BrotherHOOD Initiative. Dr. Watkins and Dr. Leon are also pursuing national funding opportunities to improve and maintain the mental health of other boys and young men of color in Washtenaw County. ***

Recommendations for Practice

What happens next? Below we outline ten (10) recommendations for campus partners, service providers, and researchers at EMU to consider as they interpret the findings from this report and proceed with their efforts to improve mental health, increase adherence to progressive definitions of manhood, and increase social support among the young Black men at EMU.



RECOMMENDATION #1: EXPOUND ON THE SERVICES BLACK MEN CURRENTLY USE.

Future efforts should focus on bringing Black men into the decision-making process for campus mental health, masculinity/manhood, and social support programs; soliciting their specific preferences and concerns; and providing healthcare navigation services as needed to coordinate care and overcome material and economic barriers to treatment adherence.



RECOMMENDATION #2: GIVE VULNERABLE SUB-GROUPS OF BLACK MEN SPECIALIZED ATTENTION.

More specialized programs and campus services should be offered that are intentional about how they target Black men (e.g., services offered through religious groups, sports teams, educational groups, and fraternities).



RECOMMENDATION #3: ACCOUNT FOR GENDER ROLE ADHERENCE.

Develop campus programs and tailor services in the context of gender (e.g., masculine) role adherence, which considers how closely Black men adopt certain gender roles and masculine norms as a result of their family history and their interpretation of gender presentations, actions, and traits.



RECOMMENDATION #4: ACCOUNT FOR INTERSECTIONALITY.

Campus service providers and researchers should collaborate more effectively to track mental health literacy and mental health risks among Black men so that more effective interventions can be developed. The goal should be to provide access to healthcare services and treatment for Black men before undiagnosed conditions progress and Black men end up interacting with systems that have been historically oppressive for Black men (e.g., criminal justice system).

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RECOMMENDATION #5: IMPROVE EDUCATION/TRAINING FOR CAMPUS STAFF.

It is important for campus staff to be well-trained to deliver mental health services (i.e., counseling, social work, and psychology) so they can work directly with Black men. Whether staffed by men or women, gender-sensitive and age-appropriate training is also imperative for successful mental health programs geared toward Black men.



RECOMMENDATION #6: INVOLVE MORE BLACK MEN IN CAMPUS PROGRAMS.

It is important for younger Black men to see charismatic men of color leading health and educational programs and services on campus. Similarly, programs developed and delivered by Black men and other men of color are important to the success of the programs. This kind of peer-mentoring and peer-facilitation encourages Black men to work toward getting better and offers them the opportunity to help someone else.



RECOMMENDATION #7: USE HEALTH ADVOCATES THAT WORK.

Campus service providers should consider using men of color who have experienced mental health challenges and who can serve as advocates for screening and services. This proves to be a powerful tool for disseminating information to Black men, along with adding an important element of cultural familiarity.



RECOMMENDATION #8: GO WHERE BLACK MEN LIVE, LEARN, AND WORK.

mental health, masculinity/manhood, and social support programs and services geographically positioned within the communities/ neighborhoods where Black men live, learn, and work are effective. This makes delivering services to Black men easier and more convenient for them.



RECOMMENDATION #9: LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY.

Mental health promotion efforts should include online social support as a means of coping with traumatic experiences and as a preliminary step toward helping Black men improve and maintain their mental health. Black men may be more inclined to seek help for their mental health challenges if they first explore them through a medium with which they feel comfortable, such as the Internet.



RECOMMENDATION #10: CONSIDER A LIFE COURSE APPROACH FOR WORK WITH BLACK MEN.

Campus service providers and researchers should use a life course approach to gain a better understanding of the multilevel factors that influence mental health, masculinity/manhood, and social support for Black men as they age. This approach will assist with developing programs that not only improve Black men's current situations, but also their mental health, masculinity/manhood, and social support transitions and trajectories.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WASHTENAW COUNTY COMMUNITY SUPPORT & TREATMENT SERVICES ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

555 Towner Street
Ypsilanti MI 48197-0915
Phone: (734) 544-3050 OR(800) 440-7548 (24 Hours)
Website:[http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments
/community_mental_health/](http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/community_mental_health/)



EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY PSYCHOLOGY CLINIC

611 West Cross Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Phone: (734) 487-4987
Website:<http://www.emich.edu/psychology/psychologyclinic>



EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CLINIC

135 Porter Building
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Phone: (734) 487-4410
Website: www.emich.edu/coe/clinics

THE CORNER HEALTH CENTER

47 N. Huron Street
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
Phone: 734.484.3600 Website:<http://www.cornerhealth.org>



MEET THE TEAM



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MEET SOME OF OUR PARTNERS



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