



Journal of African American
Males in Education
Spring 2020 - Vol. 11 Issue 1

Developing Scholar Identities: A Case Study of Black Males in an Early College High School

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Early college high schools are an accelerated option to complete high school and begin college. Targeted populations for the early college setting include students of color, low income students, and first-generation college students. Using Whiting's (2006) scholar identity model, this qualitative case study collected data to explore how the school setting impacts the development of scholar identities among Black male students. The findings presented here demonstrate scholarly identity construction as a highly introspective process. The article concludes with recommendations for early colleges to strengthen their offerings to Black males.

Keywords: Black males, early college high school, scholar identity

Early college high schools are a unique approach to secondary education allowing students to finish high school faster and gain entry to college classes earlier. Through early college programs, students have the opportunity to earn the equivalent of an associate's degree alongside their high school diploma (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). Early college high schools have been created on the campuses of colleges and universities and seek to serve populations of students who are underrepresented in higher education including first generation college students, students of color, students from low income backgrounds, and English language learners (Edmunds, Lewis, Hutchins, & Klopfenstein, 2018). Unique aspects of early colleges

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include only allowing students to enter the program starting their ninth-grade year, the small number of students they serve (no more than 100 per grade level), and the option students have to stay for a fifth year to earn additional college credit (tuition-free). Nationally, there are nearly 300 early college high schools with a large concentration found in North Carolina, Texas, and California (Jobs for the Future, n.d.). Data shows that early colleges report a graduation rate of 90% (Webb & Gerwin, 2014), and they have been identified as succeeding in their service to Black and Latino males (Seltzer, 2010).

As it relates to Black males specifically, educational discourse has insignificantly captured their positive education outcomes such as high levels of academic engagement and success, college performance, and advanced degree attainment (Harper, 2012; Harper & Davis, 2012). The overwhelming presence of deficit-oriented research on Black males reinforces what Adichie (2009) termed as the “danger of the single story.” Adichie (2009) stated: “the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” This direct quote is in line with Harper’s (2012) demand for a balanced conversation on the educational experiences and outcomes of Black males in education. In order for educators and researchers to understand how educational outcomes for Black males can continue to be improved, successful stories must be the frame of reference (Harper, 2012). While such counter-narratives are available in the scholarship, they have yet to make up the overwhelming majority.

In line with both Harper’s (2012) call to action and the goal of this journal, which is to overturn the dominant presence of deficit-oriented research on African American males in education, the purpose of this research was to highlight Black males that are successful in secondary and post-secondary settings. More specifically, this research highlights an early college high school context. Taking data from a larger study (Adams, 2016), the findings presented here focused on answering the following question: *how do Black males construct their identities as scholars at a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) early college high school?* While the larger study focused on students’ overall experiences in a STEM early college high school, the emphasis here utilized Whiting’s (2006) scholar identity model to showcase how the unique educational space helped influence scholar identity development among Black males. Harper (2010) stated a large majority of research magnifies failure among students of color instead of their achievement. Such deficit-oriented narratives leave the stories of young men of color and their educational potential one-sided (Harper, 2015). Thus, this research heeds the call for more anti-deficit-oriented research. Furthermore, few studies to date have examined the experiences of Black students, and Black males specifically, within the early college high school setting.

Theoretical Framework

Davidson (1996) explained school has been identified as a specific space where students’ identities not only flourish but are influenced. Due to the important connection of context and school to identity development, the research presented here employs an identity model specific to Black males in schools: Whiting’s (2006) scholar identity model (SIM). The SIM was created to highlight how positive academic identity can be structured.

A scholar identity is defined as “one in which culturally diverse males view themselves as academicians, as studious, as competent and capable, and as intelligent or talented in school

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settings” (Whiting, 2006, p. 224). Whiting (2006) asserts Black males often find a strong sense of self-efficacy in non-academic settings, therefore they must begin to develop their identities in school settings as well. He argues:

Black males who have an underdeveloped sense of academic identity are less likely to persist in school, more likely to be identified as ‘at risk’, less likely to be high achievers, more likely to be in special education, and less likely to be identified as gifted” (Whiting, 2006, p. 223).

The framework for the SIM is made up of nine constructs: self-efficacy, future orientation, willingness to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, self-awareness, the need for achievement being greater than the need for affiliation, academic self-confidence, racial identity and pride, and masculinity. Largely rooted in theories of motivation and psychology, Whiting (2009b) explains the components of the model are “generic or neutral relative to race and gender; however, the model becomes race specific and gender specific when the last two characteristics (racial identity and masculinity) are included” (p. 228). The components of the model are buttressed by outside pillars of support including school, family, mentors, and community. Each of the nine pillars are briefly described in Table 1. The descriptions provided here are a summative overview from Whiting’s (2006) work. For greater detail on the constructs, see Whiting (2009a, 2009b, 2014).

Table 1. Theoretical Framework

Construct	Applicability to Black Males
Self-Efficacy	It is the foundational construct because strong levels of self-efficacy can impact Black males’ abilities to persist through educational challenges.
Future Aspirations	Black males who are future oriented think about and plan for their futures, understand delayed gratification and the necessity of long-term goal-setting.
Willingness to Make Sacrifices	Black males possessing a scholar identity, acknowledge there are some things they may have to forgo in efforts to achieve their goals such as not participating in or limiting extracurricular activities
Internal Locus of Control	Whiting (2006) argues scholars are unlikely to fault others for their outcomes because they maintain high levels of responsibility for their behaviors.

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Self-Awareness	Students with a scholar identity are able to honestly self-assess what their strengths and weaknesses are.
Need for Achievement > Need for Affiliation	This component of the SIM focuses on prioritizing education and educational outcomes over social relationships.
Academic Self-Confidence	Scholars maintain confidence in their academic capabilities, they are not despondent toward educational challenges, and they have strong work ethics.
Racial Identity and Pride	Scholars have strong racial esteem and are proud of to identify as Black.
Masculinity	Scholars do not negatively associate intelligence and manhood and are unlikely to fear academic success as undermining their manhood.

Literature Review: Academic Self-Concept

Given the focus of this research, it is necessary to address the literature which analyzes the relationship between academic identity and academic achievement. A student's belief about their academic abilities influences their achievement (Jenkins & Demaray, 2015). Academic self-concept and academic identity are often used interchangeably because both are defined as how one views themselves in relationship to their academic capabilities (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Lloyd, 2013). Numerous social science research studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between academic achievement and academic self-concept (Guay, Larose, & Bolvin, 2004; Huang, 2011; Marsh, & O'Mara, 2008; Marsh & Martin, 2011). This correlation is evident in the longitudinal study completed by Guay et al (2004). Focusing on elementary aged students, Guay et al. (2004) quantitatively demonstrated a strong relationship between educational attainment and academic self-concept while controlling for other factors including family structure, academic achievement, and socioeconomic background. Similarly, using a sample of middle school students, Lyon (2003) analyzed questionnaire data to measure non-cognitive factors (such as locus of control, motivation, classroom behavior, and self-concept) and found academic self-concept to be a predictor of academic achievement.

In addition to a general understanding of academic self-concept, research explains it can also be subject-specific. In a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies produced from 1978 to 2001, Valentine, DuBois and Cooper (2004) examined self-concept and achievement. Findings were consistent with regards to the positive correlation between academic self-concept and academic achievement though the overall effect size was small. However, Valentine et al. (2004) found the effect sizes to be higher when the self-concept was related to the specific subject areas (e.g., STEM self-concept affects STEM subjects). Focusing on math and verbal skills among first

generation college students, DeFreitas and Rinn (2013) found a relationship between academic self-concept and achievement. Students with lower academic self-concept in those subjects were found to also have lower grade point averages. Evident from studies mentioned here, research has demonstrated how positive academic self-concept can impact various academic factors including persistence, motivation, effort, engagement, and goal-setting (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997) sought to connect the role of racial identity to the relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement. While they found no relationship between racial identity and self-concept, they confirmed a positive correlation between self-concept and grade point average. Yet, unlike the results from Witherspoon et. al. (1997), Hatcher, Stiff-Williams, and Hanes (2015) found a significant relationship between high school grade point average and ethnic identity development. The results from these studies show the role of ethnic identity on academic self-concept remain mixed.

Lastly, examining literature that adds gender into the conversation was warranted since the research presented here focuses on Black males. Studies have demonstrated differences in achievement and academic self-concept for Black males and Black females. Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2012) found the relationship between academic self-concept and GPA for African American females to be stronger than the relationship for males. Similarly, Ford and Harris (1997) found Black students to have positive racial identity. Specific results however showed female, high achieving, and gifted students had stronger positive racial identities than males and “underachievers.” The underachievers in their study were identified as majority male students. Lastly, female students held higher grade point averages (3.2) than males (2.9; Ford & Harris, 1997). Collectively across the various populations in the aforementioned research studies, academic self-concept and academic achievement are proven to have some form of correlation.

Method

The purpose of this research was to examine how the early college environment aids in the construction of Black male student’s identity as a scholar. The research employed a qualitative case study design following the premise of Yin’s (2003) case study typology which includes needing to answer questions of “how.” Furthermore, Yin (2003) explains case study research must take place within the natural context of the phenomenon being investigated. In this case, the goal of exploring scholarly identity construction was the phenomenon under investigation, and the particular context was the early college high school.

Research Site and Participants

Williams STEM early college high school (pseudonym) is located on the campus of a large university in the southeast. Though located in one of the largest school districts in the nation, the small school serves less than 300 students. Students span across grades 9-12 and Williams also enrolls “super-seniors.” Super seniors are identified as students that choose to stay enrolled for their thirteenth year in order to continue earning free college level credits. The site was selected both out of convenience (geographic proximity) and purposefully. The researchers desired a site that had been open long enough to have fifth year students enrolled as well as a site with an articulated STEM thematic focus. Having fifth year students was important because it provided perspectives of students who demonstrated both persistence and success within the

early college context. Williams was in its fifth year of operation and had just graduated their first senior class at the time of the study.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. To participate, students from the research site had to be classified as upperclassmen (seniors or super-seniors) and identify as Black or African American and male. Table 2 provides the profile of the six participants including their name (pseudonym for confidentiality), grade, age, self-disclosed grade point average, and goals after high school graduation.

Table 2. Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Grade	Age	Self-Disclosed GPA	Postsecondary Aspiration
Shelton	13	18	2.5	Attend college: Double major in Communications (media) & Theatre
Anthony	13	18	3.5	Attend college: Major in English
Kelvin	13	18	4.0	Attend college: Major in Computer Science
Ellis	12	17	3.4	Attend college: Major in Neuroscience then enter medical school
Brendan	12	18	-	Attend college: Major in Business Management/Graphic Design minor
Pierre	12	17	-	Attend college: Major in Material Engineering

Data Collection and Analysis

Focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. A semi-structured interview approach was used for both. The constructs of the theoretical framework were considered in the creation of the interview protocols in efforts to design questions that would provide sufficient results for the research question. The focus group protocol included questions such as (a) in what ways do you think you have changed or grown since attending this school; (b) what factors influenced your decision to come to an early college high school; and (c) did you have to make any sacrifices to attend this school? At the conclusion of the focus groups, students were invited to participate in and schedule an individual interview. In the individual interviews, the questions from the focus group were revisited to give students a

chance to elaborate on a personal level. Additional questions included (a) how do you think your experiences, as Black and male, may be different from other students here at this school and (b) have you ever heard someone say, “being smart is acting White”? Tell me your thoughts and feelings about this. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Focus groups were video recorded to ensure proper attribution of thought during the transcription verification process. The data was analyzed using Braun and Clark’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis was used. Their process requires data immersion, initial coding and collapsing, and a final revision of larger themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). Whiting’s (2006) SIM served as a lens informing the analysis.

To establish trustworthiness in this study, member checks and peer reviews were used to ensure credibility for this study. For the member checking process, participants were asked to review their interview transcripts prior to data analysis to ensure accuracy. The peer review strategy involved soliciting the help to discuss themes and interpretations. Additionally, rich description was used to efforts were made to use of thick rich description to certify transferability.

Findings

From the data collection and subsequent analysis, three themes emerged. Themes are presented metaphorically as they best capture student responses. Participants spoke in terms of what they were “looking” through: a mirror at themselves, out of a window to their futures, and through a magnifying glass at the larger society. The description of the themes are verbatim student quotes which adequately captured the essence of the larger theme. Given that the constructs that make up the theoretical framework are mostly internalized factors and the purpose of this research was to learn more about the role of the school in their identity construction as scholars, the participants demonstrated a keen ability to be introspective about themselves and their experiences which are evident in the findings below.

A Look in the Mirror: “Williams has changed me.”

The essence of the first theme is self-reflection. Students spent time reflecting on how the school impacted who they are. Particularly, emphasis was on discussing how they had grown or changed as a result of attending the school. Their responses focused on social growth, individual maturation, and growth in confidence as a student. Shelton stated, “I’ve just grown so much as a person over the past five years that I’ve completely transformed from freshman year to now.” His words highlight the name of this theme as his explanation revealed his personal development and boost in overall confidence flowed over into other areas. He said,

[Williams] has completely changed my life both personally and ... because if [Williams] hadn't changed my life personally, it absolutely wouldn't have happened academically, or career wise and for me to even have the idea that I can have a future ... it wouldn't have even happened if I hadn't been able to have the opportunity to build confidence while I was in [Williams].

In line with, and using language from the framework of the study, students were asked to define what they thought it meant to be a scholar. During student conversations, they were also asked to discuss the relevance of academic success. Participants defined a scholar as a goal setter, a

person who works hard in school, a person that thinks deeply and asks lots of questions. Pierre connected his identification specifically to his academic performance:

A scholar would be in my opinion, somebody that takes school and all that seriously. A scholar would be somebody that excels in school or tries to excel at least. One of my teachers, he likes the people that actually put effort in doing things. I think that's great because I don't consider myself a really smart guy, but because I try it makes me feel like I'm smart. When I get those good grades, I feel better about myself. In a way, I can describe myself as a scholar.

Lastly, students evaluated their academic success within the school. Anthony said he was “definitely” academically successful at Williams stating: “not even just counting grades. It's counting all the people I've met. The connections I've made.” The student narratives shared above, highlight how the students see themselves in relation to the early college context. They articulated belief that the school allowed them to both excel and mature. In the second theme, students look externally at factors they believed influenced their desired futures.

A Look out the Window: “Coming here made me realize this is exactly what I want to do.”

For this theme, the window metaphor is used to describe how students spoke about their future plans. Brendan explained the role of the school in his future goals. He said: “coming here made me realize this is exactly what I want to do.” This belief surfaced as a commonality across student participants. All participants were able to describe the *what*, the *why*, and the *how* in regards to what they wanted post high school. By and large, student conversations about their future plans included the level of exploration the school facilitated and encouraged and how the ability to explore allowed them to make decisions about their future. Shelton explained coursework and conversations with university faculty caused him to change his expected major three times: “I ‘changed majors’ three times from architectural engineering to psychology to what I'm interested in now; a double major in Communications with a focus in Media and Theater.” The coursework was a key influence for Anthony. He said:

First, I wanted to go into film because we started doing projects involving making videos sophomore year. Then we had a lot more in junior year. I really enjoyed doing that and it kind of just stuck with me after a while... I also realized that I enjoy writing papers on the occasions where I don't sit there and wait until the day before. I realized I was good at it because my English teachers from before they've said, they've always enjoyed reading my papers. I thought that was maybe something I could turn into a career. I thought about it, and I really enjoy doing it. I especially like creative writing because we had a couple of projects like that last semester with our English IV teacher. That's what really made me want to consider going to college for that.

For Ellis, though he explained he always knew he wanted to be a doctor, he clarified how the school impacted his approach to entering the medical field:

The only thing that's really changed is my undergraduate major and coming here did affect that because in classes I saw what it was like and I talked to ... I got the opportunity to talk to [college] students that were taking the major that I wanted to do and it made me decide that it wasn't something I really wanted to do because it's known as a ... It's one of the harder majors. You can burn out and a lot of the people planning on going to medical

school and are going to do biomedical engineering just end up not going to med school because they're burnt out.

Presented here, theme two, shows how students began to “look out the window” that Williams provided for them as they envision their desired futures. In the final theme, participants discussed societal perceptions they believed they had to battle.

A Look in the Magnifying Glass: “What it means in society.”

With the theoretical framework in mind, as well as the population early colleges were created to serve, race and masculinity were intentionally addressed during the data collection process. Students discussed the two concepts in terms of how they perceive them and how they have observed the perceptions of others in the larger society. More specifically, the interview questions were designed to initiate a conversation on (a) what it means to be Black, (b) acting White, (c) common stereotypes attributed to Black males, and (d) their inability to concretely define masculinity. Students were able to speak at length from both personal experience and experiences at their early college.

Being Black. A response from Kelvin provided an explanation of why his identification as African-American was important:

I feel like race is an important part of your culture and who you are and where you came from, not necessarily as an individual, but as a people. I feel like when I'm overcoming a lot of these obstacles, I just feel really proud that I can do this. I've had this opportunity to do this, and a lot of Black people, regardless of their time period, didn't have such opportunities.

Collectively, the participants said their school was providing them with opportunities to have a space to talk openly about issues of race and gender. Shelton explained in his English and Civics classes they would discuss connections between educational funding and race and wages and gender. By comparison, however, the super seniors and seniors varied in the way they processed the importance of race. Super seniors were very vocal about the role of race in society. Kelvin's thoughts highlight a common belief among them that race impacts everyone. He shared:

A lot of people are racially minded, whether it's conscious or subconscious. Everyone has race in mind, and they have preconceptions about different things about race. Some people may assume things about a black person and something else about a white person. The media plays a lot into that too. Regardless, almost everyone has subconscious or conscious race assumptions.

In contrast, the concept of race among seniors was described as a nonfactor. Ellis described race as “artificial.” He expounded by describing students in their school as being more distinguishable by nationality. Ellis explained:

I think it's, not de-constructive, but it's, what's the word...It hinders us from a lot of progression having to categorize people because I see nationality and ethnicity as far more honest ways of doing that. You could say that there are actually some serious

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cultural differences as a result of you being from this particular culture or particular country versus you just having Caucasian friends that they are all lumped together as Caucasian but some are German. I have some Finnish friends, I have some Italian friends. I have some friends that are from different areas of the world, but they are just lumped together. They have their own differences and I growing up being an African kid in a public school I was lumped together with African-American students but like, in all honesty, the most bullying that I ever got from any particular group was from African-American students for being African.

Acting White. As an immigrant, as Ellis recounted his experiences upon moving to the United States, he shared:

One thing that singled me out from most Black students was I spoke differently from most of them because in middle school. I kind of spoke a weird proper English that I was taught because that's what my mom taught me. That's the way my mom learned, that's how they teach English in Kenya and how they teach English in a lot of European countries or for people taking it as a second language you're expected to have a particular proper type of English. Then other Black students would speak a different way, and I'd be called out. I was once told I speak like a White person. I said I don't really see what that means, but okay.

The notion of how one speaks or acts being relative to the White race was a shared experience among the group. Kelvin explained:

That's pretty much the story of my life. People always say I act White. In recent years, I've really started to take offense to that, because then I ask them "What does it mean to act White?" Just because I'm smart, I may talk in a polite or grammatically correct manner, I don't believe that's how all White people talk, or I don't think it should be tied to a race. When people say that, I get a little upset. I can see a lot of people assume ... White people talk correctly, and they assume they're smart. On the converse side, people may assume Black people aren't smart or that they talk a certain way. People say I always act White because I act the way that they think White people act or they notice White people act.

In response to being accused of "acting White," student participants were adamant about refuting any belief that their demeanor or being smart was based on racial identification. Anthony responded:

I don't really talk to people who share that mindset. It's like I don't know. I don't like that thought process. It's just so negative because you're essentially saying that for me to be akin to my race, I have to be stupid. I feel like saying something like that. You're just insulting every other black person that's out there like why do we have to be dumb? Why can't we strive for something?

The conversation began to naturally transition as students began to reflect on stereotypes they believed had been and would be attributed to them as Black males in society.

Stereotypes about Black males. In the discussion about stereotypes and the origination of them, the research participants all agreed that stereotypes are rooted in some truth. Participants identified stereotypes commonly attributed to Black males as assumptions they could play basketball, that they are from lower socioeconomic groups, and that they are criminals. Kelvin provided a unique perspective to the conversation reflecting on his position as class valedictorian:

If you think about it, not a lot of Black students, in general, get the educational opportunities that I'm getting. If you think about it, really, a lot of people don't of any race, but I feel really proud to be a Black male at such a high standing in the school. A lot of people, when I tell them I'm valedictorian, they seem kind of surprised. I'm not sure if it's because of my age or maybe because I'm Black, but a lot of people are also really proud of me, because if you look at statistics, not too many Black males are at such a high standing in academics. Being at that standing and at this school, it gives me a lot of pride and a lot of honor. Whenever people find out that I'm smart or that I'm capable, I can kind of sense that they're a little surprised. I think that might be a subconscious racist thing. Not all people are surprised when I tell them that, but maybe it's just the notion of valedictorian, I mean, I don't know that many valedictorians. So like hearing it, in general, might just be surprising. I will definitely say there is a little bit of a shock factor when people see a Black male as valedictorian. That just may be because of the history. Black people were slaves and were suppressed and even though it's lessening, it still comes as a surprise to see them moving up.

Participants were then asked to extend their thoughts about gender and race and to spend time addressing their thoughts on masculinity. As a construct in the SIM, questions about masculinity were asked in efforts to gather participant's perspectives about its role in their educational experiences and overall lives.

Masculinity. Students used words such as “fragile,” “controversial,” “absurd,” and “vague” in their efforts to construct a definition of masculinity. Students found difficulty in defining masculinity outside of its conceptualization through society. Shelton's description of the term was “fragile.” He explained:

The media has really perpetuated the idea that masculinity can only be exclusive to certain things like feelings like you don't feel, and what is style and whatnot. Certain conceptions of having an identity or what makes someone who they are is attached to your gender.

Shelton explained he found it difficult to provide a definition of masculinity apart from “the social definitions of what it means in society, how it's used and what it could be, it's potential.” He explained it was challenging for him to talk about masculinity apart from gendering it. Ellis made the connection of masculinity and language:

In languages, there's also the kind of weird thing where a table is masculine, but a bed, is feminine. Those kinds of thing where if it's masculine it's expected to be kind of harder or

more brutal in a way. Like sports is seen as the more masculine attitude. Whereas arts, crafts, cleaning, cooking are expected to be more feminine.

Participants concluded in agreement with Anthony's definition of masculinity as a "set of expectations." Overall, students' conversation around masculinity show they were unable to concretely define the construct.

Discussion

As presented here, the three themes show how the early college context has aided in the development of students, provided a space to explore pathways for their future, and has allowed them to begin to think about themselves as Black males in both the schooling context and larger society. From the first theme, students highlighted an increase in confidence, maturity, and social development. Additionally, students self-assessed academically. Not only were they able to articulate why having general academic success was important, they had positive self-concepts about their academic successes within the early college environment. Participants attributed project-based learning, the size of the school, and being placed in an environment with high expectations as elements of the school which attributed to their success.

The first theme, in relation to the theoretical framework, captures a strong sense of self-awareness on the part of the students. According to the framework, self-awareness is based on a scholar's ability to accurately identify areas of strength and weakness. Two examples that highlight the students' self-awareness are Anthony discussing changes he was making because his "work habits are not the best" and Pierre describing the process of seeking out a tutor for his college level math course because he "struggles with math." In addition to self-awareness, the participants in this study demonstrated high levels of internal locus of control. Their locus of control, or where they place blame and responsibility, was internal because they addressed the active role they play in their own educational outcomes. Whiting (2014) identifies four factors that influence high internal locus of control for Black males:

These males believe they can do well because they: (a) believe they can, (b) planned for the difficult (time consuming) work, (c) made the time to study and prepare for the examination, and (d) when not sure, they are willing to ask for help (p. 95).

As evident from student interviews, these students meet these criteria. For example, Kelvin was discussing his physics final:

That's the one that's really kicking my butt. It's actually like a really difficult kind of weed-out course at [the partner university], so I'm having a lot of trouble with that. We have finals coming up but I'm pretty confident about the final.

Connected to Whiting's (2014) definition of a strong internal locus of control, the participants in this study were able to explain their study habits and even quantify the amount of time they spent studying each week. Lastly, their ability to ask for help was evident as they explained their relationships with teachers and peers and how they work together. For example, Pierre shared, "when we have tests, we meet up on Sundays to study."

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From the theoretical framework, the second theme directly connects to the attributes of academic self-confidence, self-awareness, future orientation, and self-efficacy from the SIM. Participants exemplified confidence and comfort as they discussed what subjects they perform well in and enjoy and how that performance and enjoyment, in turn, influenced their future plans. Whether or not the students decided to stay for the fifth year of the program or were planning to pursue a STEM related field, the forethought that was required to make such decisions highlights their disposition of being future-oriented. Ellis completed his research on the decision to stay for the fifth year and he found out the private universities he was interested in would only accept a limited amount of transfer credits. With this knowledge, he was able to plan accordingly and decide a fifth year was not the best option for him. It is evident being future-oriented requires goal setting skills and motivation.

The final theme addresses the role of racial identity and pride and masculinity from the theoretical framework. In the case of the Williams STEM students, their opportunity to be in a diverse and unique learning environment which supported the discussion of race and gender in the classroom helped students learn more about themselves in relationship to their surroundings. Racial identity alignment for a majority of the students matched what Smalls, White, Chavous and Sellers' (2007) identify as a promotive factor. This perspective involves students' understanding that the African American community has not always had access to educational opportunity and mobility and that being academically successful is highly valued in their community (Small et al., 2007). The promotive perspective is strongly represented in Kelvin's response as to why his racial identification is important to him:

I feel like when I'm overcoming a lot of these obstacles, I just feel really proud that I can do this. I've had this opportunity to do this, and a lot of Black people, regardless of their time period, didn't have such opportunities. So, I'm just real thankful that I'm having this opportunity as a Black male over a White male who may have had this opportunity for a long time.

In accordance with the SIM, students in this study were adamantly against any association of them being smart to be an unlikely attribute of their race and they were just as adamant about not being subjected to stereotypes. At no point in the conversations did participants equate being successful in school as being a quality that men did not possess. Instead, many of them defined manliness as being able to take care of their families, provide for themselves, and help others. Ellis explained masculinity as the creation of a "box" that men were required to sit in but he, like the others, did not feel limited to that "box." Though the students exhibited positive perceptions of masculinity, they also highlighted the difficulty in defining and describing it concretely. Taken together, these findings illuminate students' high levels of self-efficacy, self-awareness, future orientation, internal locus of control, and academic self-confidence as well as their positive perceptions of racial identity and masculinity. From this work, insights are provided deepening our understanding of the role that a positive schooling environment can play in the construction of a scholarly identity. The intent of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge on the experiences of Black males in early colleges as well as how the schooling structure influences scholar identity construction. Altogether, this research contributes to the overturning of deficit-oriented narratives about Black males and education.

Implications and Recommendations

Parents, teachers, administrators, and community stakeholders alike must be intentional about positive identity construction in school if the goal is to ensure Black males are adequately served in education. The use of Whiting's (2006) SIM is a great place to start. Purposeful club formation on early college campuses as well as curricular frameworks to address constructs from the model could allow students opportunities to engage in understanding constructs like self-efficacy. From the findings, one key opportunity is building the capacity of mentors in Black males' lives. Mentorship was not an intentional point of focus for this early college but cannot be overlooked as a pillar of the SIM according to Whiting (2009a, 2009b). Creating and supporting formal mentoring programs in early college settings could allow Black male's the opportunity to continue to grow as they develop as academicians and as men. Mentoring programs could provide a space to help students unpack masculinity because all the students in the study explained that masculinity is a construct based on expectation and because of that, found it difficult to articulate its meaning. Many of the students' responses reflected perspectives perpetuated by the media. In addition to unpacking masculinity, students need a space to further strengthen their racial identity and pride. While many of the students explained that their identification as Black or African American was a significant part of their identity, some others believed that race was less of an issue because of the diversity of both their school and the partner university. An added element to some variation in these beliefs about the relevance of race could be related to the status of two participants as African immigrants. Exploring cultural and ethnic differences could prove valuable to students understanding of diversity. The early college high school offers a unique opportunity to streamline those mentoring networks from the high school to the university. Suggestions include partnerships with African American student organizations on the campuses such as Black Greek letter organizations, 100 Black Men of America, and the campus cultural center groups. Given this school's emphasis on STEM, partnerships and mentoring through organizations such as the National Society of Black Engineers could help support student's understanding and interest in the field.

Concluding Thoughts

The participants in this study exuded scholarly identities. Whether or not they would self-identify as a "scholar" does not detract from their actual possession of the attributes laid out in the SIM. Early colleges are a unique space with the capacity to support students arguably in ways traditional high schools may not be able to due to its small size and access to college classes for all students. With this advantage, they could in turn, develop "whole child" approaches to focus on the various aspects of identity development for their students. More research is needed to understand action-oriented practices that influence positive identity construction in Black males in efforts to provide guidance for educators wanting to do this work. Lastly, more stories and inquiries such as this are necessary to overhaul the skewed narratives on Black males in education.

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