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## Get Rich or Die Tryin': Media and Black Male Academic Identity Development

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Get Rich or Die Tryin': Media and Black Male Academic Identity Development

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Educational Administration  
Higher Education

by

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B.S. Appalachian State University, 2005  
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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Milas Alexander (Sam) McClain Sr., the best grandfather a kid could ever ask for. Thank you for your strength, support, knowledge, and care throughout my life. You are my hero and you will be missed and loved by all you touched. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my godmother, Mrs. Wilene Potts. Thank you for everything and may you rest in paradise.

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## **Abstract**

Black males encounter many difficulties in their educational journeys. Often these disadvantages can be linked to socioeconomic and environmental factors, which have consistently plagued the Black community. However, a relatively unexplored area of interest in higher education is the influence media representation has on the academic identity of Black males. Routinely shown in media outlets as athletes, entertainers, and criminals, Black males rarely view positive representations of themselves across media, thus limiting their academic pursuits. From this study, the researcher hoped to develop a fuller understanding on the influence between multimedia and Black male identity and academic success in higher education. Through the use of photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews the researcher consulted with six full-time undergraduate Black males who attend historically Black institutions in the South. From the information acquired through each participant's lived experience, the researcher learned about each contributor's unique academic identity and means by which educators can increase and develop Black male persistence and achievement in higher education.

**Keywords:** *Black, male, identity, scholar, media*

## Chapter One

In America, education is a major predictor of several measures of well-being. Statistics reveal the more advanced one's education level is, the more income they will generate over their lifespan (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.) and the longer their life expectancy (Olshansky, Antonucci, Berkman, Binstock, Boersch-Supan, Cacioppo, & Jackson, 2012). In a study conducted in 2015, individuals who earned a bachelor's degree brought in on average \$17,700 more in annual after-tax income than individuals with just a high school diploma (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016). In addition, individuals with at least a bachelor's degree lived ten years longer than those who did not obtain a high school diploma (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011), participated more in their children's activities and made healthier lifestyle choices (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016).

While the American education system has positively impacted some groups, it has particularly benefited Whites and systematically failed Black males at all levels of schooling (Harper & Davis, 2012; Howard, 2013). In 2015, only 74.6 percent of Black students graduated from public high school compared to the national average of 83 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In that same year, 87.6 percent of all Whites students, 77.8 percent of all Hispanic students, and 90.2 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students graduated from public high schools. Over the years, researchers have commonly attributed poverty (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011), under preparedness in primary and secondary schooling (Hilton, Wood, & Lewis, 2012), Eurocentric curriculum (Davis, 2018; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson & Allen, 1999)

and school dropout (Plunk, Tate, Bierut, & Grucza, 2014) to the academic misfortune of Black males.

With regards to higher education, during the 2015-2016 academic year, Blacks earned only 10 percent of all bachelors' degrees awarded in the United States with Black men making up only 3.6 percent of all degree recipients and Black women making up 6.4 percent of all degree recipients (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). For the fall 2015 academic year, 2,311,100 Black students enrolled in postsecondary undergraduate education. Black women comprised of 1,424,100 undergraduate scholars and Black males comprised of 887,000 members (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d). At the end of the 2015-2016 academic year, 69,847 Black males earned bachelor's degrees and 124,561 Black women earned bachelor's degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). From the numbers presented, Black male educational achievement is lagging behind Black women at the undergraduate level. While many factors such as poverty and under preparedness in secondary schooling have negatively impacted Black male academic success in higher education, unknown factors in relation to identity development have also hindered Black student academic success. With this knowledge, Black identity development must be explored to understand external factors that impact their persistence in higher education in comparison to their statistical representation.

### **Identity Development of Black Males**

Identity development is a multilayered process that transpires differently across cultures (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Although identity development can occur in various domains, identity exploration within the realm of higher education has

become a popular trend in student development theory as a result of the diverse student body composition found on collegiate campuses (Patton et al.,2016). Within academics, identity is influenced by two qualities, time and environment (Evans et al., 2010). Time is in reference to the cultural climate of one’s surroundings and environment is in reference to one’s physical learning atmosphere. In order to understand the significance of social identity in education one must unpack the influence of privilege and oppression on the performance of scholars.

Social identity theories are models “grounded in the socio-historical context of the United States, in which some groups have privilege and some groups are opposed” (Patton et al., 2016, p.15). For Black males in higher education, identity association has become a complex system to navigate as a result of the assorted identities one can relate to whether it is gender, sexual, ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic in nature. While these identities can influence Black male development, one must comprehensively investigate the social, cultural, and psychological challenges that embattle Black males as they explore their identity inside higher education. According to Whiting (2009), “Less often do Black males see themselves as capable and talented beings in school settings” (p. 227). Owing to this belief, many Black males tend to gravitate towards athletics and entertainment for future profession (Ferguson, 2000). Historically, people of color have been depicted in menial ways across media platforms in regards to their behavior and intellect (Fitzgerald, 2017), nonetheless institutions such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) sought to uplift Black Americans both academically and socially. To balance these counterproductive messages of academic inferiority, Whiting (2009) states that, “educators must recognize the importance of how having a scholar

identity can improve the motivation, achievement, and aspirations of these students” (p.227). Through having a scholar identity, Black males would be capable of perceiving themselves as intelligent, thoughtful, and talented academics in school environments (Whiting, 2009). For many Black males, the perception of academic success has historically been viewed as a feat only achievable by White students (Harper & Davis, 2012) as a result of some of the adverse messaging distributed throughout media (Palmer & Maramba, 2011).

### **Problem Statement**

For generations, media has been used as means to market and disperse propaganda throughout America (Fitzgerald, 2017). With its power to influence, at times some forms of media have been utilized as a weapon to marginalize certain sectors of society. Historically, media has represented Black males as naïve, lazy, and dishonest (Hunt, 2005; Staples & Jones, 1985). Jenkins (2006) notes that, “One of the many factors influencing the current social status of Black people, and more particularly Black males, is psychological in nature: the persisting internalization of self-hatred, resulting in low self-concept” (p.136). This low self-concept has manifested itself not only internally but externally as well. In accordance with Hunt (2005), during the Civil Rights Era, television programming that involved Blacks were essentially assumptions created by liberal White middle-class television programmers. Most of these programs were comedies that were set in poverty-ridden environments. As a result of this, actors and producers in the 1980s such as Bill Cosby made it their mission to recode Blackness through imagery that was in opposition to past, poverty centric sitcoms. While we cannot dismiss all the positive contributions Bill Cosby made both monetarily for Black

institutions as well as with Black student matriculation and success in higher education, over the decades Cosby has had been embroiled in controversy that directly contradicts his media persona and the messages addressed in his television programs. With that being said, despite progressive changes by Cosby and others, media in the following decades began to showcase the gritty and harden side of Black male identity, with movies and music glorifying hyper sexuality, materialism, violence, and drug use (Chan, 1998). A select few of these films in this period also presented people of color in dire educational, socioeconomic, and judicial settings where their only hope for survival was at the hands of the clichéd White messianic figure.

While we do not know the importance multimedia has played on the academic achievement of Black males, the relationship between both positive and negative imagery and student success should be explored. Palmer, Davis, and Hilton, (2009) note that the number of Black males entering higher education increased in the late 1960s then increased again in the 1980s and 1990s. This increased admission was in part due to the signing of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* that removed racial barriers in the advancement of educational opportunities for people of color at non-minority serving institutions and the act of recoding Blackness in media in the 80s and 90s. While Black male college attendance increased during these time periods, Black males still faced barriers in regards to their academic success. Some of the barriers that impacted Black male success in education were racial barriers amongst peers, faculty, and staff as a result of prevalent social stereotypes. Other obstacles that influenced Black male success were the lack of adequate support services for people of color in higher education (Turner, 1994). In spite of these hindrances to Black males' academic success, one factor underexplored is the

influence oppositional imagery contained in media has on Black male academic output. Hawkins and Pingree (1982) asserts that the type of media content consumed by students plays a factor in their awareness of their social value, while Bandura (2002) acknowledges that heavy exposure to media that depicts distortions in social realities can make images appear authentic thus influencing behavior. While all forms of media are not propaganda, in recent years more diverse imaging and messaging has been able to be distributed globally thanks to mediums such as YouTube. In comparison to past decades where content was only distributed by a handful of networks, platforms such as a YouTube have been able to provide individuals with the means to present content with varying views.

### **Purpose for the Study**

Since we live in a digital age where media is readily available to nearly all Americans, Black males are repeatedly stimulated by imagery of socially constructed truths by dominant society (Carney, 2016; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012). These quasi truths are often stereotypical and misleading to the greater public. This research provided a counternarrative analysis of Black male identity and achievement in higher education in relation to media portrayal. Through theories in connection with Black male identity, Whiting's (2009) Scholar Identity Model was used to examine how media representation has influenced the academic identity of post-millennial Black males who attend HBCUs.

HBCUs were sought in this study because in theory HBCUs would have the compositional makeup of faculty and staff of color that can serve as positive role models to students to counteract the potentially adverse messaging depicted in media. In



addition, HBCUs would have viably a larger pool of Black male candidates to select from to satisfy this investigation's research protocol as a result of their history of graduating people of color. From the information collected from the participants, the researcher provided insight on ways to better assist educators in connecting with Black males in academia on a fundamental level so they can better achieve academic success.

### **Research Questions**

From a review of the literature, significant gaps were discovered in the coupling of racial and gender identity within higher education. In addition, the coupling of racial identity and gender identity in higher education in association with media depiction of Black males is believed by the investigator to negatively impact academic outcomes. As a result of this discovery, two research questions were generated from the literature to help guide the qualitative analysis:

1. How do Black males perceive their scholar identity?
2. In what ways do media influence scholar identity development amongst Black males?

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Black Males**

For the purpose of this study, a Black male is being categorized as a cisgender person of African descent. This individual can be of biracial or multiracial heritage, but they must self-identify exclusively as Black at their respective academic institution. Likewise, to be considered cisgender, the individual must identify as the gender they were designated at birth.

#### **Post- Millennial**

Post-millennial (often referred to as Generation Z) are individuals born in the late 1990s. With the intention of this study, a post-millennial was any student born on or after the year 1994. The reason why the year 1994 was selected because modern day, traditional aged college students would range in birth between 1994 and 2000.

### **Multimedia**

Multimedia is the combined use of digital, visual, or auditory material for the purpose of entertainment or enlightenment. These mediums can include animation, music, along with scripted and unscripted television or cinematic programming along with cellular devices and other electronic platforms (e.g. computers, tablets).

### **Scholar Identity**

A scholar identity is the internal perception Black males have about their academic abilities within a school setting. These abilities are generally correlated to being studious and intellectual. For most Black males, scholar identity is an image building process that must be nurtured by educators so that Black males can advance their motivation, academic success, and ambition (Whiting, 2009).

### **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)**

Historically Black college and universities are designated as institutions established in the United States prior to 1964 whose intended purpose was to service the Black community (Killough, Killough, Burnett, & Bailey, 2018; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). A large percentage of these facilities were created as a result of the Second *Morrill Act of 1890* that allocated cash instead of land for the development of these public infrastructures (Thelin, 2011). As of 2016, the National Center for Education

Statistics (n.d.) recognized that there were 102 public and private HBCUs located within the United States and its respective territories.

## **Chapter Two**

Narrowing achievement gaps within the Black male community is vital in accomplishing upward mobility. To comprehend the full scope of setbacks and achievements Black males encounter in the education pipeline, we must examine Black male identity from a cultural, social, and global standpoint to advance how media representations influence their academic development. Through the use of modern day and historical literature, the disposition of Black males within American education was evaluated in comparison to their interactions with family members, peers, faculty and staff. From this insight, the reader will grasp first-hand accounts of Black males in education and how developing their scholar identity can improve their chances of academic and social mobility.

### **Literature Review**

In comprehending the positioning of Black males within the American education system, three themes were explored. First, the researcher examined the historical precepts of Black schooling in American education. Secondly, the researcher examined the idea of masculinity and its importance within the Black community. Finally, the researcher examined media's influence on the psyche of Black males and others within the American education system.

### **Schooling and Black Males**

For Black males, barriers that impact their academic performance are not only systematic but can be environmental and cultural. Noguera (2003) confirms that it is less known how “environmental and cultural forces influence the way in which Black males come to perceive schooling and how these perceptions influence their behavior and

performance in school” (p.433). For educators who are not adept at teaching such a unique demographic, behaviors and attitudes such as using slang and or lack of emotion may be viewed as unwelcoming and destructive.

While research shows that Black males want to learn (Jenkins, 2006; Wood, 2012), many are ushered into special education classrooms (Allen, 2017; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002) while others are suspended and expelled at rates far above their statistical representation (Allen, 2017; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Very rarely are students of color encouraged to broaden their horizons through advanced level coursework (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Howard, Flennaugh, and Terry (2012) state that:

Understanding schooling strictly from a capitalist standpoint, social reproduction theorists have argued that the function and purpose of schools has been to deliberately produce a semi-skilled labor force, to reinforce existing class arrangements, and to maintain the structural arrangements of a capitalist society, while still promoting the appearance of meritocracy, fairness, and equity (p.89). This system of apartheid can debatably be found in every facet of American life ranging from schooling to housing to employment to medical care, thus impacting the lived experience of the marginally oppressed.

Noguera (2003) states that, in primary school, students first learn about race through informal educational plans and less structured activities such as recess. During this age, acts such as name-calling or racial insults arise that unintentionally establish racial barriers amongst students. Similarly, stereotypical and prejudiced categorizations based on interactions with family members, friends, and media influence interactions

individuals have with one another (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). After the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, schools across America desegregated often causing individuals of color to be ushered away from neighborhood schools thus causing a cultural disconnect between students and educators. White instructors who possibly lacked social interaction with people of color were now mandated to teach a new student demographic. Instead of adjusting to Black youth's learning styles and culture, some institutions intentionally and unintentionally attempted to assimilate people of color to Whiteness through platforms like Eurocentric curriculum (Davis, 2018; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999), standardized testing (Gusa, 2010; Knoester & Au, 2015), dress codes (Pavalakis & Roegman, 2018), and non-culturally inclusive discourse in the classroom (Hurtado et al., 1999). For some Black males who could not acclimate to these environments as a result of a lack of nurturing from teachers, unfavorable conduct arose in classrooms as well as inclination towards athletics for future profession (Ferguson, 2000). For some people of color who did experience academic success they encountered the stigma of "acting White" by their same race peers because they were viewed as performing acts that were in opposition to Black normative culture (Davis, Stadulis, & Neal-Barnett, 2018; Fordam & Ogbu, 1986). Even as people of color navigated to post-secondary education, barriers still persisted as a result of some institutions lacking the support services and infrastructure needed to care for them holistically.

In higher education, Black males and other students of color still combat barriers that impede their success. For a select number of them who are high achieving, they feel judged based on prevalent social stereotypes concerning their academic capabilities from

peers, faculty, and staff alike (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Marsh & Noguera, 2017). In fall 2015 there were 887,000 undergraduate Black males enrolled in college in the United States and 110,700 postbaccalaureate Black males enrolled in college in the United States (NCES, n.d). Out of these 887,000 undergraduate students, Black males earned 69,873 bachelor's degrees in the 2015-2016 academic year (NCES, n.d). Likewise, Black males earned 27,026 master's degrees in the 2015-2016 academic year and 4,558 doctorate degrees in the 2015-2016 academic year (NCES, n.d). While these numbers do not shed light on the issues impacting Black male success, these numbers are nonetheless proportionately lower than any other demographic group due in part to Black males having the highest stop-out-rate among all demographics, coming in at 41.1 percent. (Shapira et al., 2017). Stop-out is defined as dropping out of an institution, yet re-enrolling in higher education at a later point in time (Vendituoli, 2013). While Black males readmit back into higher education, they still may not graduate as a result of factors such as work or familial obligations. When Black males enroll at non-minority serving institutions, other factors such as campus climate and structural diversity, may additionally play a role in their persistence.

### **Campus climate and academic success**

Campus climate is a consistent factor in student persistence and achievement in higher education (Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirm, & Yonai, 2014; Vijayayalakshmi & Sequeira, 2018). For students of color in post-secondary education, campus climate can be assessed through several factors such as one's race, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation as well as one's institutional type (i.e. HBCU, PWD). For this study

racial climate was explored to understand its influence on the academic achievement of Black males in higher education.

Campus racial climate is designated as existing beliefs within an academic setting about race, ethnicity, and diversity (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). Hurtado et al. (1999) shaped the framework of campus racial climate around four general tenets (historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, compositional diversity, psychological climate, behavioral climate) with the fifth tenet (structural diversity) subsequently being added to the framework by Milem, Dey, and White (2004). To fully grasp the precepts behind campus racial climate, a brief overview is provided.

The foundational piece to campus racial climate is an institution's legacy of inclusion or exclusion. Largely, people of color have had an extensive history of exclusion from PWIs (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005) giving rise to HBCUs being created to meet their educational needs. PWIs are observed as higher education establishments that have a White student body of 50% or greater. Harvard University founded in 1636, is the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States (Harvard, n.d.; Thelin, 2011); however, due to its legacy of exclusivity did not produce its first Black graduate, Richard Theodore Greener until 1870 (Gibson, 2016). It was not until 1799 that John Chavis became the first Black student to attend an American institution, Washington and Lee University (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.); nevertheless, it took until the year 1823 at Middlebury College for the first Black student on record to graduate, Alexander Lucius Twilight (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.). From Twilight's admission until his graduation, the path to achievement for people of color in higher education continues to waver.



Compositional diversity, the second barometer in analyzing campus racial climate, is the statistical and proportional representation of all racial and ethnic groups on campus (e.g. students, faculty, staff, and administrators) (Milem et al., 2005). In a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), in fall 2015 White instructors made up over 77% of all full-time faculty at degree granting institutions whereas in 2015 people of color made up over 45% of all students in post-secondary education (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). From the numbers it can be concluded that on most college campuses there is an unequal distribution of faculty that mirror student populations. Owing to this knowledge, Guiffrida (2005) and Stout et al. (2018) assert that lack of diversity amongst faculty in college could likely impede minority student achievement. It was reported that students of color believed that faculty of color were more inclined to advocate for them in times of need as well as serve in mentorship positions. In contrast, students of color felt that White faculty were less likely to understand their circumstances or take an active approach in their scholarship.

Psychological climate, the third barometer in assessing campus racial climate is the belief and awareness of racial and ethnic inclusiveness on campus along with institutional behaviors towards diversity and racial conflict (Hurtado et al, 1999; Milem et al, 2005). Studies have shown that on college campuses, the way people interpret institutional missions and racial climates vary depending on the individual, their race, and their social class on campus (e.g. student, staff, faculty etc.) (Hurtado et al, 1999). Although all institutions across America openly admit minority students, many people of color still feel unwelcomed and “out of place” in their academic communities as a result

of marginality and extreme hyper-surveillance (Edwards, 2019; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Smith et al. (2007) contest that:

Oftentimes casual strolls by Black males in historically White spaces were greeted with White fear and contempt. To reduce their fear of the Black male presence in these historically White spaces, Whites sought to eliminate the perceived threat and to reestablish environmental control via activation of increased Black misandric surveillance and restrictions. As a result, campus and local police were consistently deployed to suppress and control the Black male body (p.563).

Accordingly, these interactions influenced the way Black males surveyed their institution, its climate, and their self-consciousness. While Blacks have obtained political and social freedom in America, W.E.B DuBois (1903) noted how they inhabited a “double consciousness” where they were viewed as being either Black or American however not both at the same time. In becoming fully cognizant of the damage psychological climate plays on the achievement and development of marginalized communities, individuals must become empathetic to the needs of others on campus and seek ways to disarm any forms of intolerance.

Behavioral climate, the fourth barometer of campus racial climate focuses on the collaboration between individuals across racial and ethnic lines and the quality of these relationships. Some evidence suggests that people from varying backgrounds who interact regularly, display tremendous growth in educational outcomes (Milem et. al, 2005); however, for Black students who opt to serve as cultural informers on campus, at times they may be perceived as antagonistic as a result of their need to emphasize the

importance of race within educational spaces. Owing to this role, these individuals are more likely to be ostracized by peers (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007); nonetheless higher education must be sympathetic to their needs of racial identity and inclusiveness.

Lastly, structural diversity the last barometer in campus racial climate focuses on how an institution executes administrative duties such as allocating funds, creating curriculum, admitting students, hiring employees, implementing policy and procedures, as well as administering tenure (Milem et al., 2005). Largely, structural diversity is a necessary element in maintaining students of color because without top-down initiatives there could be greater rates of attrition amongst students of color. Structural diversity informs all aspects of campus racial climate and if all these tenets are purposefully sought out, academic success may arise for Black males and other individuals of color in spaces that are predominantly non-minority serving.

**HBCUs and Black male success.** Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are institutions that date back to the Civil War, whose mission was to educate and train freed slaves. Prior to the Civil War, any attempt to educate Blacks was met with opposition from slaveholders in the South (Childs, 2017; Swygert, 2004) as well as resistance amongst Whites in the free North (Freeman, 2005). In 1837, Cheyney University became the first American institution created specifically for Blacks (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.). After its inception in 1837, 200 HBCUs gradually arose across the South (Anderson, 1988) however, only 102 presently remain in operation in the United States (NCES, n.d.).

Despite making up less than three percent of all higher education institutions in the United States (Gasman, 2013), HBCUs educate over 292,000 students (NCES, 2017).

In accordance with the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), in the 2015-16 academic year, nearly 48,900 of all bachelor's and master's degrees awarded were conferred at HBCUs representing fourteen percent of all bachelor's degrees and six percent of all master's degrees being awarded to Black students. Regardless of their small number, HBCUs continue to garner minority student success as a result of their unique social experiences, programs, faculty and staff, geographic locations, and curriculum.

Historically, HBCUs coordinated under open admissions policies (Joonas, 2016; Kim, 2002) because they did not forecast students of color being afforded high quality schooling prior to their admission (Brown & Richard, 2007). Owing to this, HBCUs operated under the ambition to educate students of color as much as possible prior to their departure (Brown & Richard, 2007). For Black males who opted to attend HBCUs, these environments fostered academic and social growth as well as stability. Palmer and Maramba (2012) state:

Indeed, despite the lack of parity in resources between HBCUs and PWIs, research has overwhelmingly shown that Black students at HBCUs are educated in a family-like environment that promotes racial uplift, empowerment, cultural nourishment, and academic success (p.96-97).

This familial aspect cultivates a sense of mattering with Sulé (2016) acknowledging the act of mattering as a “psychological desire to feel loved and accepted” (p.182).

To create conditions of mattering for Black males at HBCUs, Palmer and Maramba (2012) detailed the existence of two key elements, (1) authentic caring and (2) engagement. Authentic caring looked at the value students placed on faculty being

empathetic and willing to work with them when they experienced adversity in the classroom, while engagement mattering surveyed the academic enrichment of students inside and outside of the classroom. Authentic caring synthesized down to faculty and administrators going beyond their defined roles by listening to students, learning about their interests, and connecting with them on a personal level. For Black males in education it is often hard for them to seek assistance or connect with authoritative figures because they do not want to show vulnerability (Majors & Billson, 1992). Because of this, they put up a facade to show that they are in full control of their environment even when they are not (Majors & Billson, 1992). In welcoming spaces such as HBCUs, Black students can develop such relationships with faculty and staff of color with Guiffrida (2005) noting that students of color tend to value these relationships with faculty and staff of color on campus because they are more likely to fulfill their desire for student centered learning. Within these interactions, mentorships form and faculty and staff of color are able to share their lived experience with mentees to reassure them that they are capable of succeeding in higher education.

Under the second theme, engagement matters, Palmer and Maramba (2012) stated that student involvement in activities inside and outside of the classroom can attribute to Black male persistence at HBCUs. Within this theme lie two subthemes, “Out of Class Engagement” and “Beyond Lecturing”. “Out of Class Engagement” quantifies the significance of both student involvement and student-faculty interactions outside of the classroom; and “Beyond Lecturing” observes the significance of faculty’s use of the classroom atmosphere as a space for facilitating learning, retention, and student persistence. Quaye et al. (2015) acknowledge that culturally inclusive curriculum in

classroom activities promotes engagement amongst students of color. Often times on the first day of class, students of color analyze the syllabus to see if instructors integrate content that communicates the experiences of people of color. Through deliberately incorporating these types of readings and assignments into curriculum, it promotes a positive and welcoming learning environment for students of color.

Lastly, engaging students outside of the classroom helps students to learn of the various resources available to them on campus. This outward engagement with others creates social capital, a network that can influence the course of one's life (Lin, 1999). Palmer and Gasman (2008) noted the mantra, "it takes a village to raise a child". This village consists of peers, faculty, staff, administrators and alumni all working collectively as an extension of the classroom. Respondents within Palmer and Gasman's (2008) study noted the importance of having visible mentors by stating:

...it's already enough stacked up against, the Black male, and I'm not saying there's some external force that's trying to keep the Black male down.

Personally, I think a lot of what keeps us down, is ourselves. But the inspiration you can get when you see another [Black] man doing what you want to do, there's nothing like it. That's why I think a lot of students or a lot of [Black] males want to be athletes, because that's all they can see, or they want to be musicians, 'cause that's all they see. But if you saw a whole bunch of Black doctors running around all day, and saving lives, that's what you want to do, because it's feasible (p.60).

With greater access to an alumni and mentor base of color, HBCUs can better assist Black males in obtaining and achieving once-unfathomable feats of academic and social success all while countering media tropes.

## **Black Identity Development and Masculinity**

Identity development is a popular topic in higher education as a result of the many racial and ethnic demographics that encompass college campuses. Patton et al. (2016) noted that for decades, campuses were monolithic spaces mostly populated by upper and upper-middle class White males, but in the 1960s and 70s, higher education saw a shift in its student population. With the incorporation of more women, veterans, and people of color onto campuses, student affairs practitioners soon noticed a shortage in literature surrounding these populations. As a result of this, in the 1980s and 90s academics examined student support and development followed by social identity development.

For Black identity, William Cross (1971) introduced Nigrescence theory, a five-stage model that processed how Blacks accepted and acknowledged their individuality. The first stage also referred to as the Pre-Encounter stage, talked about how Black individuals took a color-blind approach in recognizing their race and the race of others. In the second phase, the Encounter stage, Blacks experienced an event that made them aware of their racial identity and caused them to feel various emotions (e.g. anger, shame, or confusion). In the third stage, Immersion-Emersion, Blacks become fully engrossed in their racial identity by way of learning about their rich history. In the Internalization stage, Blacks reconnected with society after developing a stronger sense of self through the questioning of White normative ideology. In the final stage, Internalization-Commitment, Blacks either chose to discontinue their immersion or continue their pledge to Black culture. While identity association is important for Black males development in higher education, so is the construction of their masculine identity. Similar to racial

identity development, masculine identity development transpires differently across racial lines and influences their academic achievement (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016).

**Black masculinity.** There are several sociocultural and psychosocial influences that shape how males construct their masculinity. Foundational theories suggest that one of the central factors that aides in the development and validation of masculine identities, amongst males, comes from their interaction with peers of the same sex (Harper, 2004). For most males within education, athletics has dominated their masculine identity construction as a result of its shared promotion amongst peers (Passero, n.d.). Non-athletic activities such as academics were routinely regarded as feminine in nature, therefore requiring peer approval in order to be deemed socially acceptable (Harper, 2004; Whiting, 2009). Although this overarching account reigns true for masculine identity, the nuances of Black male identity must be unpacked to comprehend general differences.

For Black males, the construction of their identity in adolescence and young adulthood is often shaped by family members, same sex peers, academic settings, and media (Harper, 2004). In the early 90s, researchers Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson (1992) introduced the phrase “cool posing” as an expression used to rationalize strategies Black males used in forming consciousness of their everyday lives. Cool posing is expressed through gestures (e.g. handshakes), dialogue (e.g. slang), and fashion; and is closely connected to pride, social confidence, and masculinity (Lane, 2005; Majors & Billson, 1992). Due in part to the lack of societal opportunities afforded to Black males because of racism, cool posing was often presented in resistance to oppressive settings (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011).



Closely linked to urban, hip-hop culture including that of hypermasculinity, Majors and Billson (1992) noted how cool posing was perceived as being rebellious, aggressive, and sexually promiscuous. For Black males who did subscribe to cool pose, it was believed they regularly dismissed academic achievements such as receiving good grades in school in exchange for social rewards offered by their peers such as attention. Patterson (2006) even likened the exhibition of cool pose to a drug that enticed men of color, while Jackson and Moore (2008) noted that the benefits associated with cool posing encouraged behavior that devalued academic success. Although cool posing and its cultural behaviors have been viewed as destructive and threatening in educational settings (Majors & Billson, 1992), some scholars noted that hip-hop culture was a constructive outlet for Black males who engaged in educational environments that routinely silenced and marginalized them (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins (2006) notes:

Within the cultural structure of hip hop exists many of the factors that seem to be absent in the educational arena for Black males: freedom of thought, inclusion, competitiveness, encouragement, and immediate reward, all taking place in nontraditional yet intellectually stimulating environment (p.147).

More important than all the items noted above, hip-hop was a de facto teacher that supplied students with lessons around topics that were generally overlooked in American classrooms such as Black history and politics. Although negative connotations such as drug use and poverty are connected to the realities of growing up in urban communities, many students stated that messages communicated in socially conscious hip-hop music gave life lessons on why getting a college degree was important (Wessel & Wallert, 2011).

Similar to cool posing, capital identity projection surveys the psychosocial properties of capitalism on Black male consumer consumption (Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). While consumer consumption can be attributed to visual imaging through product placement in media, Wood and Essien-Wood (2012) acknowledged that counter-culture messaging within media has been shown to encourage irrational purchasing. As noted previously, clothing and other material assets dictate coolness amongst the Black community. While negative visual representations in media such as gangsters and hustlers engrossed with cars, women, and expensive items like clothes and jewelry, are the personification of negative visual imagery associated with cool posing, these visual cues have a tremendous impact on marketing to Black males. As a result of these visual images, it was recognized in a study that the pursuit of material possessions by Black male college students resulted in them spending class time and study hall searching the Internet for consumer goods that signified their success (i.e. cars, clothes, games) instead of focusing on academics (Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). The feeling of instant gratification through material possessions at times eclipsed the delayed gratification connected with academic success (i.e. degree completion). From this information, it can be debated that the act of obtaining consumer goods that signified social stature could reasonably lead to academic attrition for Black males as they become more engrossed with social and cultural symbols of success.

To fully grasp the influence popular media has played on the identity development of Black males from a historical and educational perspective, a chronological analysis was employed. From this analysis the researcher attempted to unpack how media has been an important medium utilized to communicate the ideas of

Black masculinity and Black identity. From this transmission, behaviors and attitudes conveyed in frameworks such as cool posing and capital identity projection have been used to shape and influence Black male identity development across American educational systems.

### **Black Males, Popular Media, and the American Psyche**

Audio and visual imagery has been used as a means to market and disperse propaganda to the American public for decades. Once exclusively seen as a medium to publicize consumer goods, messaging on television and radio was fashioned to align with the American philosophical views of freedom and democracy (Hunt, 2005). This freedom allowed citizens the flexibility to purchase any product they desired but as industries witnessed revenue gains, they soon recognized media's power to influence consumer choice and opinion.

Media consumption within American households can be staggering. From a Nielson Report (2018), it was revealed that Black Americans over the age of 18 consumed nearly thirteen and a half hours of media daily (e.g. television, radio, social media, cell phone, etc.). In total, Black adults spent two and a half hours more consuming media than the average American adult (The Nielson Company, 2018). In the text *Pop Culture Freaks: Identity, Mass Media, and Society* (Kidd, 2014), it was shown that the median Black household watched eleven hours and four minutes of television, with the median viewing time for all races in America being eight hours and fifteen minutes. If one removed Black viewership from the calculation, the average household television viewing time would fall to seven hours and fifty-two minutes. While Black Americans are the dominant television consumer group in America per hourly

viewership, Whites are the second leading consumer group (The Nielson Company, 2011; Kidd, 2014). In accordance with Fitzgerald (2017), Whites are the most racially segregated demographic based on living environment. Wood and Essien-Wood (2012) argues that media's constant portrayal of Black males as criminals results in White America's increased consumption of network news and security systems. Fitzgerald (2017) states:

Cultural images of racial/ethnic minorities are oppressive, but they are so because they are products of a racist American culture rather than because they are part of some broad conspiracy to keep racial minorities oppressed. Filmmakers, most of whom are white, more than likely share a Eurocentric view of the world, and this is reflected in their films. However, film images do more than reflect societal patterns; they help to perpetuate those patterns, as being repeatedly exposed to certain images results in a sense that these images represent reality (p.368).

Fitzgerald (2017) makes the argument that images are the reflections of filmmaker's perspective of the world and Antonio Gramsci introduced the idea of cultural hegemony after developing upon Karl Marx's thesis of dominant ideology (Jackson Lears, 1985; Fitzgerald, 2017). Hegemony is the route in which dominant groups preserve their power over inferior groups whereas cultural hegemony is the retaining of power through the communication of ideas across platforms such as mass media (Fitzgerald, 2017).

Although Gramsci looked at class hegemony, his premise could be applied to racial domination in society as well. Subsequently, as the historical representation of Black males in media increased, so did the indifference towards them; with hooks (2001) conditioning that:

Most black thinkers acknowledge that internalized self-hatred is more pronounced now than it was when the economic circumstances of black people were far worse, when there was no social integration. Too late, progressive black people and our allies in struggle learned that legalized racial integration would not change white supremacist perspectives. Since anti-racist individuals did not control mass media, the media became the primary tool that would be used and is still used to convince black viewers and everyone else of black inferiority. (p.78)

Owing to this subjective and microaggressive propaganda, internalized and externalized hatred has debatably advanced within and outside the Black community thus influencing aspects such as economic and academic growth.

**Brief history of Blacks and American media.** With the advent of mass communication came manipulation. One of the earliest forms of multimedia manipulation within the United States occurred in 1915 with the release of D.W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation*. *The Birth of a Nation* was America's first cinematic blockbuster (NPR, 2015; Fitzgerald, 2017) that used fear as a means to alienate and denigrate Blacks while uplifting White supremacy in the age of Reconstruction (Fitzgerald, 2017). Griffith's film depicted Blacks as violent, racist, and hypersexual beings who were enthralled with White women. These negative images, "seemed to work against the movement of racial integration in America" (Hunt, 2005, p.12), with organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) attempting to block the film's release. Despite the NAACP's efforts, the movie was met with critical acclaim with President Woodrow Wilson alleging to have said, "It's like writing history with lightning. And my only regret is that it is all terribly

true” (Benbow, 2010, p.509; Fitzgerald, 2017, p.379). Running concurrently with this era was the “White slavery scare” which was centered around “urbanization, immigration, and women’s increased mobility” (Keire, 2001, p.6). This panic heightened America’s sensitivity to the safety and welfare of White women.

In the coming decades, Blacks were rarely shown on the small screen. If shown on television in the 1950s, Black actors played three primary thematic roles. The first role was the “musical darky”, who was “simple-minded and only good for playing music” (Fitzgerald, 2017). The second role was the “Uncle Tom”, a character who was eager to gain the approval of Whites out of necessity for physical survival (McCarthy & Yancey, 1971); the third role was the “coon”, a character who was deemed pathetic and useless because of their incompetence and the latter role being the violent, promiscuous, Black buck (Fitzgerald, 2017).

In the United States during the 1960s and 70s, citizens became enthralled with the counterculture of the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War (Suri, 2009). During this time, there were regular broadcasts of internal and external turmoil taking part within the United States. President Lyndon B. Johnson even launched a presidential commission to examine the influence television programming had on the public’s perception of minorities (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Salamon, 2019). From his presidential commission it was revealed that minority depiction on television was often inconsistent, stereotypical, and impacting the way White Americans viewed minorities (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Salamon, 2019). During this time period, television programming was “largely representations of what White liberal middle-class television program makers

assumed (or projected) were ‘authentic’ accounts of poor black urban ghetto experiences” (Gray, 2005, p.160).

In the 1980s and early 90s, Black representation in film and television improved with people of color becoming more involved in front of and behind the camera with production, writing, and directing (Hunt, 2005). Television programs such as *The Cosby Show*, *A Different World*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, and *Family Matters* showcased positive, successful, and educated Black nuclear families. Entertainers such as Bill Cosby made it their mission to “recode” Blackness through the construction of imaging that was in opposition to Black, poverty centric situational comedies of the past (Hunt, 2005). Although Bill Cosby was attempting to change the narrative of Black Americans in the eyes of its White viewers, it was a difficult task because of the mass criticism directed at national programs such as affirmative action and welfare, all of which seemed to benefit more non-Whites (Fiske, 2005; Jhally & Lewis, 2015).

Additionally, cinema during and post the 1990s showcased the gritty and hardened side of Black masculinity (e.g. *Boyz N The Hood*, *New Jack City*, *Menace II Society*). These movies glorified hypersexuality, materialism, violence, and drug use as coping mechanisms for external stressors (Chan, 1998). Although these films showcased how a fast-paced lifestyle led to death or prison, it had a favorable impact on some Black males by showing what power, bravado, and luxuries “fast” money could bring. During this same time period, several films were created that also told fictional or true accounts of White individuals aiding marginalized groups in dire circumstances. While these films are noble, these films emphasized the White messianic figure that often comes to save people of color (Hughey, 2010). Movies such as *Freedom Writers* and *Dangerous Minds*

presented disparaged minorities from low socioeconomic backgrounds as victims of an education and legal system that was racially and violently oppressive (Hughey, 2010). These films revealed that in order for people of color to succeed they must be submissive and assume a role of dependence. Ironically in most of these films, the people of color were placed in these circumstances because of the social elite. While origins behind these messages and their intersectionality with Black male identity and academics can be argued, additional research must be employed to address ways psychosocial factors have impacted some post-millennial Black males and not others.

**Multimedia's positive influence in education.** While there seems to be an overabundance of reasons why multimedia may be detrimental to Black male success in higher education, we must not overlook the benefits of multimedia to the culture. As previously stated, hip-hop culture has transcended racial barriers, served as a coping mechanism, provided students a sense of purpose, promoted cultural awareness, and outlined the lived experience of the socially oppressed (Wessel & Wallaert, 2011; Sulé, 2016). For some Black males, hip-hop and hip-hop culture was not entertainment but it was a spiritual manifestation that dictated participant's day-to-day emotions and feelings (Sulé, 2016). Similarly, it was a soundboard for students to be valued and accepted through the encouragement of telling one's lived truth (Sulé, 2016). More importantly than the previous items noted above, hip-hop music was a teacher that provided students with lessons surrounding topics that were generally overlooked in Eurocentric curriculums such as Black history and politics (Wessel & Wallert, 2011). In Wessel and Wallert's (2011) article, a student noted how hip-hop music at times served as a



mechanism that piqued their interests about culture and history, thus, spurring their curiosity.

According to Wessel and Wallert (2011), hip-hop music persuaded students to achieve their academic goals. Although negative connotations such as drug use and poverty can be connected to the realities of growing up in urban communities, many students stated that messages communicated in socially conscious hip-hop songs gave life lessons on why getting a college degree was important. These messages persuaded Black students to not develop a capitalistic or materialistic mindset and reinforced that all possibilities in life were attainable if you had an educational base. More notably, hip-hop culture encouraged non-minorities to step outside their comfort zone and check their bias and privilege. According to Sulé (2016), hip-hop sparked cross-cultural dialogue that “allowed students to recognize their own social identity in relation to others” (p.192). By recognizing one’s own social identity, students were able to discern cultural parallels and differences, while challenging discriminatory practices in society.

For a select number of Black males, educational infrastructures represent conflicting environments. On one hand these spaces are intended to be venues where free thought and enlightenment take place. While this does occur at most institutions, some of these infrastructures still preserve discriminatory ideologies of the past. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perceived truths that are verbalized across media can distort and alter the possibilities of many Black males. From being viewed as out-of-place in academic settings, to being seen as a beneficiary to governmental policy such as affirmative action, media has played a factor in the academic identity of many Black males.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Black males need for identity association is vital for their success in education (Givens, Nasir, Ross, & McKinney de Royston, 2016). Often misunderstood and overlooked, Black males frequently lack the proper support systems needed to be successful in academia. With very few positive images surrounding them as a result of oppressive educational environments and media outlets, educators like Gilman Whiting (2009, 2014) attempt to introduce models that are aimed at building pride in one's culture and heritage.

### **Scholar Identity Model**

Gilman Whiting (2009) introduced Scholar Identity Model as a basis to “improve the educational status of Black males identified as gifted” (pp.224); nonetheless, his psycho-social model can be applied to support Black males who encounter academic apathy within the classroom. The Scholar Identity Model (Whiting, 2009) incorporates nine characteristics exhibited by individuals who obtain a scholar identity. In Whiting's (2009) model, self-efficacy is the foundational piece followed by future orientation, willingness to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, self-awareness, need for achievement, academic self-confidence, racial identity, and masculinity. Whiting's (2009) model draws heavily on other scholar's work such as Bandura's (1977) Seminal Theory on Self-Efficacy and McClelland's (1966) Need to Achieve Theory; however, what is unique about Whiting's (2009) model is that he couples masculinity and racial identity into the analysis of understanding and decreasing barriers in Black male academic achievement.

**Self-Efficacy.** From studies it is noted that Black males find their identity and worth within a narrow scope of fields such as sports, music, and television (Ferguson, 2000). Whiting's (2009) model desires to support the practice of image building amongst Black males in conjunction with developing a scholarly identity that can improve academic ambition, achievement, and motivation. Self-efficacy, the cornerstone of Scholar Identity Model, is of note because students who obtain this trait have the belief that they are competent enough to complete tasks set forth in front of them in spite of stereotypes.

**Willingness to make sacrifices.** A student's willingness to make sacrifices is needed in accomplishing short-term and long-term goals; therefore, instant gratification is not a collective desire amongst this community. Consistent with Whiting (2009), Black males who exhibit a scholar identity are more prone to "sacrifice some of their social life (e.g., extracurricular activities, excessive time at play, watching TV, dating, having an extensive social life, and so on) in order to reach self-defined and valued goals" (p.229).

**Internal locus of control.** Black males who exemplify an internal locus of control are optimistic that they can achieve academically therefore they are more prone to participate in class, as well as study, and ask for assistance when needed (Whiting, 2009). While some Black students do demonstrate a desire to succeed, they are at times characterized as "acting White" by their peers (Davis, Stadulis, & Neal-Barnett, 2018; Durkee & Williams, 2015; Ogbu, 2003) and excluded from social circles (Durkee & Williams, 2015). Nevertheless, the overarching value of education for those who exemplify an internal locus of control can be associated with upward mobility.

**Future oriented and self-awareness.** For Black males who inhabit an optimistic outlook on life, Whiting (2009) states they set realistic goals and analyze how their current behavior will impact their future aspirations. Additionally, they have a sense of self-awareness that allows them to understand their strengths and limitations and means to compensate for aforementioned shortcomings.

**Need for achievement.** For high achievers the need to succeed is often stronger than the need for membership in social circles and for Black males who truly possess a scholar identity they “understand that high academic achievement will take them further in life than being social or popular” (Whiting, 2009, p.229), therefore in this tenet substantial friendships are more significant than the number of friendships a scholar has.

**Academic self-confidence.** Black males with academic self-confidence welcome educational challenges and are poised within their surroundings because they do not “feel the need to camouflage, negate, deny, or minimize their academic abilities and skills” (Whiting, 2009, p.229). For individuals who exude this sensibility they are authentically themselves without compromise.

**Racial identity and masculinity.** Lastly, for Black males with a scholar identity, Whiting (2009) notes that they “seek greater self-understanding as racial beings but are also aware of the importance of adapting to their environment and being multicultural” (p.230). Through having pride in one’s race these students refuse to falter to low expectations created by society and the prejudices built on race and gender.

The coupling of racial identity with masculinity is important because masculinity is “an oft-misunderstood, sensitive, and controversial topic” (Whiting, 2009, p. 230). Whiting (2009) notes, “If allowed, youth will, through multimedia sources, family,

community, and school, develop a destructive meaning of masculinity. Without the guidance of caring and responsible adults, young Blacks males will be forever challenged to reach their potential” (p.230). In order for this self-destructive behavior to not materialize, educators must become cognizant of Black male identity development and counter-cultural tropes that hinder development.

### **How Scholar Identity Model Informs the Study**

Scholar identity model (Whiting, 2006) best serves this research as a result of the multiple lenses for which one can examine the influence of media on Black male scholar identity development. As stand-alone models, Bandura’s (1977) Theory of Self-efficacy and McClelland’s (1966) Need to Achieve Theory, do not advance the scope of the investigation. Unlike those theories, Whiting’s (2006) model incorporates the participants lived experience in conjunction with the intersectionality of their race and gender. This is essential to this study because Black male identity construction differs from other racial groups.

Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory speculates that one of the ways individuals build confidence in their abilities is through vicarious experiences, which are experiences an individual has through observing successful individuals close to them or individuals that resemble them. For Black males, visual representations in media stereotypically characterize them as criminals, athletes, and entertainers but rarely as academics (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007) therefore Black males rarely receive positive academic identity reinforcement on grand scales.

In accordance with Royle and Hall (2012), McClelland’s (1966) Need to Achieve Theory positions that people are motivated by three factors: achievement, power and

affiliation. In regards to achievement, individuals look for distinguishable patterns behind their success and detest unintended achievement. For those who pursue power, they want to be influential and prominent within social circles; and those who seek affiliation want close relationships with others. What sets Whiting's (2006) Scholar Identity Model apart from McClelland's (1966) theory is that "African American males with a strong need for achievement understand that high academic achievement will take them farther in life than being social or popular" (Whiting, 2006, p.229); therefore, Black males are typically unconcerned with social affiliation.

While individually Bandura's (1977) and McClelland's (1966) theories offer lenses that could contribute to the examination of this research, when they are combined with the other characteristics found inside Scholar Identity Model (Whiting, 2006) they paint a complete picture of factors that play a role in Black male academic identity development.

### **Chapter Three**

Research is the process of “inquiring into, or investigating something in a systematic manner” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.3). Normally, research is conducted under two fields of study referred to as quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Quantitative inquiry places emphasis on overarching assumptions from numerical data and qualitative research places importance on data saturation (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2013). In this study, qualitative inquiry was employed to advance the assessment of multimedia’s influence over Black male academic identity and achievement in higher education. Additionally, this chapter explored the investigator’s use of critical constructivism to define his epistemological view, along with various communication practices used to gather participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and research credibility.

In addressing the influence multimedia has on the academic identity and achievement of Black males in higher education, this study attempted to answer two fundamental questions:

1. How do Black males perceive their scholar identity?
2. In what ways does media influence scholar identity development amongst Black males?

In addressing these two questions, the methodological approach for this study was designed.

#### **Research Design**

Everyone encounters the world differently, therefore social interactions help define how an individual accepts knowledge. According to Kincheloe (2005) a critical

constructivist is concerned with the exaggerated role power plays in the creation and validation of knowledge. Through this lens one seeks to understand how some sectors of society are bestowed privileges while others are denied them. While it is believed that multimedia has an adverse effect on students of color academic identity in higher education, it has been noted how hip-hop culture promotes freedom of thought and inclusion, thus providing common ground in classrooms where life skills can be learned (Jenkins, 2006). Goodman (2008) shapes that critical constructivism is a “knowledge building platform and an emancipation tool for the liberation of both students and teachers” (p.259). This platform challenges student comprehension through practical issues and engagement.

This investigation found it valuable to employ critical constructivism because the investigator wanted to understand the consciousness of Black male identity in higher education as it relates to media perception. According to Palmer and Maramba (2011), within media lies a hidden curriculum that discourages academic achievement and encourages conformity. This passive approach to controlling secondary groups has historically worked in alliance with dominant cultures schema thus causing secondary groups to consent to their own demise. In dominant society, the voice of the socially oppressed is often unheard (Sulé, 2016; Wessel & Wallert, 2011), nevertheless as noted above hip-hop and hip-hop inspired lectures seek to alter this sentiment. Unlike banking models where students are fed information without cognition or analysis, hip-hop courses use a “pedagogical approach that favors the student-centered model, where the student is seen as the learner and dispenser of acquired knowledge” (Walker, 2006, p.23). Often in educational settings, learning follows a hierarchal process where the distributor of



information is the only entity allowed to be heard and whose dominating ideas are advanced (Freire, 2000). As a result of this model, core principles of learning such as validity and integrity are lost while exploitative and racist rhetoric can be imposed. With this information, I was inspired to use critical constructivism in my study because I wanted to hear the voice and lived experience of the socially marginalized. Through this process I could understand their reality and lived truth.

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is the use of first-person accounts as a form of data to communicate stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of research “relies on the participants to offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experiences” (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007, p.23). Qualitative inquiry uses different approaches (e.g. phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, and narrative) to tell an account, with each method displaying its own unique way to structure questions, gather participants, as well as collect and analyze data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative research has a long history within the social sciences (Fick, 2009). Ormston et al. (2014) notes that in recent decades qualitative research became a well-accepted methodology as a result of the various theoretical challenges associated with quantitative research. Owing to this, qualitative research was “adopted (in a somewhat patchy way) across a range of disciplines and substantive fields, including those which had traditionally relied upon the use of controlled experiments to study human behaviour” (Ormston et al., 2014, p.15). From this adoption, qualitative research has now become viewed as a viable investigation tool.

**Narrative inquiry.** Narrative inquiry is the practice of storytelling where members “remember, argue, justify, persuade, engage, entertain, and even mislead an audience” (Riessman, 2008, p.8). Since the establishment of social science investigation, there have been many questions regarding the validity of practices surrounding narrative investigation (Polkinghorne, 2006). Narrative inquiry looks at an individual’s experience via interviews, journals, letters, autobiographies, and other mediums so that the researcher can understand the events of a lived story (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While narrative research has a general approach when guiding inquiry, the data collected has the potential to alter the scheme or outcome of the narrative (Varaki, 2007).

Riessman (2008) notes that narratives are used differently amongst parties. As mentioned above, for individuals, narratives are used to justify, persuade, and engage others; whereas for groups, narratives can be used politically to organize and build a sense of unity. Nonetheless, in stance with Clandinin and Caine (2008), narrative inquiry is a reflexive and reflective process that spans the researchers’ understanding of the phenomenon and that of the research participants. With that in mind, the researcher must be able to negotiate the purpose and intentions of their research as well as ways to aid participants during and after the research. From this understanding the researcher must be cognizant of ethical issues that may arise.

**Counter narrative.** While there are various techniques utilized to analyze first-person accounts across disciplines, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) introduced counternarrative methodology as a tool to share the lived experience of individuals of color, whose stories often go unnoticed in literature. Prior to counternarrative methodology becoming a common practice used to share the background of marginalized

communities, master narratives (or majoritarian stories) were employed. According to Harper and Davis (2012), “Master narratives are dominant accounts that are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups (e.g., Black guys don’t care about education)” (p.107). Harper (2015) states, “These narratives almost always portray people of color and the communities in which we live (and are schooled) in a hopelessly one-sided fashion” (p.145). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) asserts that these racist philosophies create, maintain, and justify racial privilege and the use of master narratives; however, through the use of counternarratives, researchers are able to critique and challenge dominant ideologies in order to further racial reform and fragment perceived societal norms.

In their research Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identified three general forms of counternarratives: (1) personal stories, (2) other people's stories, and (3) composite stories. Personal stories are autobiographical reflections that convey an individual's reality with racism or sexism. Other people's stories are third person accounts of other's experience with racism and sexism, and lastly composite stories are narratives that build on various forms of data that detail racial, sexual, and classed experiences of people of color. For this investigation, personal narratives were utilized to receive authentic accounts of participant’s perception of multimedia's influence on their scholar identity.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Participants and Site Location**

Participants for this study were selected based on criteria established by the researcher: (1) Black/African-American, (2) cisgender male, (3) traditional undergraduate student, and (4) attends a historically Black institution in the South. From this inquiry, a

small sample size of six participants were amassed in anticipation that saturation would be met early on in the study based on the quality and quantity of student feedback. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005) as investigators continuously interview subjects from applicable categories; new dialogue should produce less pertinent information thereby creating a saturation point. In addition, Malterud et al. (2015) contests that “the larger the information power the sample holds, the lower *N* is needed” (p.2). Owing to this, the study in question is narrow in scope rather than dense because we are analyzing traditional aged Black males who currently attend HBCUs versus Black males who currently attend or had attended an institution of higher learning. Secondly, the investigation is grounded in established theory and applicable theory; therefore, allowing a smaller sample size. Lastly, the investigation lends itself to a case that does not deviate from the variations in the literature therefore being applicable to a small sample size.

**Black males.** Cisgender Black males were selected because as a whole they are an underperforming demographic across most educational categories. Cisgender is defined as an individual who still identifies as the gender they were designated as at birth (Tate, Youssef, & Bettergarcia, 2014). For many Black males, it has been noted that they want to learn and achieve in college (Jenkins, 2006; Wood, 2012), however there are several outside factors that hinder this progress.

**Traditional college student.** Traditional aged college students between the ages of 18-24 were selected for this study because of their general accessibility on college campuses. While the scope of the research can be undertaken with non- traditional college students, their lived experience may differ significantly from that of the target

audience thereby influencing their persistence, achievement, and thoughts of attrition differently.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).** HBCUs were designated as site locations because they embrace 23 percent of all Black male undergraduates in the United States while only making up 3 percent of all American higher education institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These institutions are well regarded for accepting Black males as they are and equipping them with the skillsets necessary to succeed in a competitive educational environment, despite a large percentage of their students not being afforded the same college preparatory advantages as their White peers (Hilton & McClain, 2014). Similarly, these institutions were nominated because they would contain the compositional diversity needed between faculty and staff on campus to serve as advocates and role models for the Black male student body, in opposition to the negative tropes projected across media.

### **Recruitment Strategy**

The recruitment strategy for this investigation consisted of numerous approaches to garner student support. One such method was communicating with university officials via email to gain permission to access students through electronic campaigns and the placement of recruitment flyers on university communication boards. An additional strategy consisted of utilizing the researchers' social capital to connect with gatekeepers at institutions via electronic and personal communication to help collect participants. While utilizing gatekeepers did not ensure cooperation from scholars, gatekeepers can have the authority to influence the progression of the study (Wanat, 2008).

In helping to identify the influence multimedia has on the academic identity and achievement of Black males in higher education, this study also employed purposeful sampling for participant recruitment. Purposeful sampling identifies “individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas et al., 2013, p.3). Purposeful sampling can be broken-down to five categories: typical, unique, maximum variation, convenience, and snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study convenience sampling was used.

Convenience sampling selects participants who meet “certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability, or the willingness to participate” (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016, p.2). To help advance this study, participants were selected in proximity to the researchers’ location. The sites for this study were HBCUs located in the state of Louisiana. Louisiana is home to six historically Black institutions that have histories dating as far back as 150 years. Some of these institutions host professional schools in law and medicine and helped pave the way for people of color in Louisiana in fields such as agriculture, science, and engineering. While one would assume it would have been easy to gather participants for the study, the researcher did encounter some difficulties in collecting participants. The difficulties could be attributed to it being the end of the academic semester and students gearing up to take their finals examinations.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In requesting participation in this study, all eligible contributors were provided a letter of consent, approved by UNO’s Institutional Review Board and was signed prior to

the start of the investigation (see Appendix A). The letter of consent stated the purpose of the study in addition to providing a disclaimer that reiterated participation was voluntary and the contributor had the right to remove himself from the study at any time. Each guided interview was conducted in person or by videoconference. The conversations were audio recorded and saved on a password encrypted electronic device.

The dialogue between the primary investigator and the contributors were conducted through two interviews. The first interview was semi-structured (see Appendix C) while the second interview was conducted through the process known as photo-elicitation (see Appendix D). Semi-structured interviews are less planned dialogues that are guided by a list of questions or concerns that the researcher wishes to explore and whose questions are not in a preset order (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of the first interview was to get the contributor to tell a narrative, whereas the purpose of the second interview was to use images taken from various media platforms in conjunction with the contributions from the participant to help tell a story. The method known as photo-elicitation, “discards any pretense of objectivity and recognizes that the photography has the power to elicit interpretations from individuals” (Ketelle, 2010, p.533). From these images the researcher wanted to better illustrate and understand the influence images had on an individual’s interpretation, therefore contributing to the scope of the narrative research. While the participants are viewing the videos and photographs in question, their physical reactions were recorded by the researcher through the act of journaling. As Richard and Lahman (2014) notes, “adding photographs during an interview not only provides a way to elicit additional information, but this interviewing technique also offers a visual dimension to the unobservable thoughts, feelings,

experiences, and understandings” (p.4). From the participant’s verbal and physical responses to the images, they were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis by way of themes brought up through a collaborative effort between the researcher and the participants. From this approach both the researcher and the participant worked together to frame and communicate the message.

After conducting each interview, the audio files from the sessions were transcribed and returned to the participant for member checking. Once the transcriptions were quality controlled by the participants, each contributor was designated a pseudonym to help preserve their anonymity. Lastly, the transcriptions were stored on a password-protected computer and will be held there for a total of three years before being erased.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began with the dictation of participants accounts. Transcriptions were organized through thematic narrative analysis. Thematic narrative analysis allows investigators to analyze participant’s responses across a complete data set versus individual segments, such as that in grounded thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). While the investigator was gathering information that ultimately detailed the lived experience of participants, the restorying of the contributor’s accounts allowed for the linear ordering of events that detailed a chain of circumstances. In accordance with Brown (2013), “Restorying allows for both agency and pain, strength and vulnerability counternarratives” (p.24). Through this action of restorying and unpacking the cause and effect of minority disadvantages, it aided in countering the narratives of dominant society (Brown, 2013).



Datasets from both collections of interviews were first composed and reviewed several times before being synthesized into six broad themes. With the addition of photo-elicitation into the restorying process, the participants were able to observe and recall with the assistance of visual and auditory aids, the shared life experiences of both fictional and non-fictional characters. In conjunction with these visual and audio images, each participant's authentic lived experience was utilized to help the researcher come up with the six initial themes that were constructed from words or phrases articulated by the participants. From these initial themes, they were subsequently broken down into three core themes that best reflected the collective narratives of the participants. These themes were interpreted through a counternarrative lens because each theme was birthed out of either personal stories, composite stories, or other people's stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

**Journaling.** Throughout the investigation process, journaling was employed as an auditing mechanism to ensure researcher bias is suppressed from the study. According to Ezzy (2002), "Keeping a journal and regularly writing memos encourages researchers to reflect routinely on their emerging understanding of the data" (p.72). This reflective procedure not only benefits the investigation practice but also the overall process. Through thoughtful reflection the journals could develop into fruitful corresponding research.

### **Trustworthiness**

To assess the credibility and transferability of this investigation, the researcher used four conditions of trustworthiness as outlined by Guba (1981): (a) truth value, (b) applicability, (c) consistency, and (d) neutrality.

## **Truth value**

Truth value establishes confidence and credibility in the research. For qualitative analysis, truth is based on the lived experience of the participants. To fully communicate the validity of the participant's responses in this analysis, peer debriefing and member checking was utilized. Peer debriefing is "the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.129). For this study, peer debriefing was used periodically throughout the course of this study with the aid of verbal and written feedback from peer debriefers. Lastly, member checking was employed to clarify that participant comments are translated accordingly. Creswell and Miller (2000) attest that member checking in addition to keeping a written research log is important in documenting the thoroughness of the research when faculty committees or students want to review methodological procedures. By utilizing member checking along with a written log the researcher was establishing a clear audit trail.

## **Applicability**

Applicability examines how content being researched can be applied to other situations. For qualitative analysis, each situation being explored is unique therefore it can be less flexible and applicable to other situations. Nevertheless, in this study it was believed that the findings can act as an overarching generalization. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) believes that some unique cases can in fact be transferable and applied to a broader population; nonetheless, this must be done with caution as so it does not discredit circumstantial factors. Therefore, transferability is contingent on a scholar's conviction of applicability to context, location, participants, as well as transparency of data analysis

(Connelly, 2016). For this study, this research should be transferable to other cisgender traditional aged Black males who attend historically Black institutions in the South. As noted prior, these institutions would likely have the compositional diversity of faculty and staff who can elicit conditions of mattering for Black males. In comparison, this research would most likely not be transferable to Black males who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) or other institutions as a result of factors associated to campus climate such as psychological climate, behavioral climate, structural diversity, compositional diversity, and an institution's history of including or excluding people of color.

### **Consistency**

Consistency considers how findings conducted from a study would be constant if replicated by another researcher using the same participants. As noted prior in truth-value, an auditing trail was utilized through the process of journaling. With the use of this process, data sets can be cross-referenced with interviews, journal publications, and other sources.

### **Neutrality**

The last method used to ensure research credibility was neutrality. Neutrality establishes the researchers' objectivity and observes the subjects and conditions of the inquiry. For this process to take place, peer debriefing and member checking were employed. As noted prior, peer debriefing was utilized periodically through verbal and written feedback from peer debriefers whereas member checking was used for extensive and detailed clarification from respondents. Both of these methods were utilized at the conclusion of data analysis because more content was known about media's influence on

Black male academic identity, hence a precise and comprehensive set of data was available for participant critique.

### **Researcher Identity**

For this study the researcher identifies as a Black male who possess a scholar identity. In developing his academic identity, the researcher was nurtured at an early age by family members, community leaders, and educators through initiatives and enrichment programs such as Upward Bound. Dating as far back as primary school, the researcher's mother instilled the value of education in him by regularly taking him to his local library to read books and providing him with academic workbooks to complete over summer breaks. These values and characteristics instilled in the researcher aided him throughout his academic journey.

While sports and video games played a major part in the researcher's childhood, the researcher was only allowed to play video games on the weekend, and he was not allowed to play organized team sports until middle school. Equally the researcher was diagnosed at birth with the bleeding disorder, hemophilia. This rare blood disorder prevented the researcher's blood from clotting normally in comparison to others. From this diagnosis, the researcher's doctors notified his parents that he would not be able to participate in contact sports out of fear of severe injury. Owing to this, the researcher's doctors imparted the importance of education in order for him to achieve upward mobility. The researcher's hemophilia diagnosis influenced his study because he inherently could not rely on athletics for future profession as most males. Even if the researcher was not nurtured by his instructors he still had to rely on education as a means to an end.

Lastly, media played an important role in the researcher's identity development because he was able to see positive Black characters on television who also emphasized the importance education. Of importance were the Black male characters that the researcher saw on television. These characters acted as role models to encourage him to pursue higher education since there were no males in his immediate family who had navigated the paths of higher education.

## **Chapter Four**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence multimedia has on the academic identity of Black males in higher education. This study called for two separate interviews with the participants to understand the realities of their lived experience. The first interview, a semi-structured question and evaluation, was employed to gain rapport with the participants and to help tell a narrative, whereas the second interview utilized photo-elicitation to help communicate accounts by way of photo and video imaging. From the literature review, two guiding research questions were developed to help direct this investigation:

- (1) How do Black males perceive their scholar identity?
- (2) In what ways do media influence scholar identity development amongst Black males?

Through thematic narrative analysis, three themes emerged from the six participants: (1) external forces, (2) exposure, and (3) empowerment. On account of this investigation, the chapter was broken-down into two sections, participant descriptions followed by thematic analysis so that the researcher could provide a comprehensive overview of the phenomena at hand.

### **Participants**

In the fall of 2019, six participants were successfully recruited for this research investigation. The investigation consisted of 1 continuing freshmen, 1 sophomore, and 4 juniors, all between the ages of 19 to 21. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to help protect their anonymity along with the privacy of their respective institution. At the time of the investigation, each participant was classified as a full-time student.

**Ramel.** Ramel is a continuing freshman who attends a private HBCU located in urban Louisiana. Ramel is presently a neuroscience major but is considering switching his discipline to business. Ramel was born and raised in the Houston, Texas metropolitan area and is the oldest of three children. Ramel was mostly raised by both his mother and grandmother, and views higher education as a way of society coming together to validate an individual is knowledgeable about a subject and they can commit to an action for at least four-years.

**Brandon.** Brandon is a sophomore, accounting major who attends a highly selective liberal arts HBCU in Louisiana. Brandon was born in Chicago, Illinois but raised primarily in Las Vegas, Nevada with his mother, grandmother, and uncle. Brandon is an only child who holds his relationships and friendships dearly. Upon completing his sophomore year of high school, Brandon relocated back to the suburbs of Chicago to live with his father and finish out his last two years of secondary schooling.

**Kendrick.** Kendrick is a junior, political science pre-law major at a highly selective liberal arts HBCU in Louisiana. Kendrick's hometown is Houston, Texas, but he was born in Lafayette, Louisiana. Kendrick was raised by both of his parents and is the youngest of three children. During his free time, Kendrick is an aspiring rapper who performs at local shows in Texas and Louisiana. Kendrick views rapping as a medium that aids him in expressing himself.

**Derrick.** Derrick is a junior, business-sales and marketing major from Scottsdale, Arizona who attends a private HBCU in Louisiana. Derrick is an only child who was raised in a two-parent household. Originally born in Cleveland, Ohio, Derrick moved to New Orleans at two weeks old. From the age of two weeks old until seven, Derrick lived

in New Orleans before moving to Arizona. While living in Arizona, Derrick attended predominantly White private schools, where he stated that he encountered constant racism throughout his high school years.

**Justin.** Justin is a junior sociology pre-law major who attends a public HBCU in Louisiana. Justin is from Zachary, Louisiana, and is the middle child of three siblings. Justin’s parents divorced when he was younger, and he spent time in both California and Louisiana living with each respective parent. Prior to attending his current institution, Justin attended a private HBCU in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Terrence.** Terrence is a junior criminal justice major who attends a public HBCU in Louisiana. Terrence hails from Litcher, Louisiana and is an avid member of student government and other student organizations. Terrence comes from an athletic family, where both his father and grandfather were star athletes. Upon completing his undergraduate degree, Terrence wants to pursue a degree in Higher Education Administration.

Table 4.1 *Participant’s Demographics*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Major</b>
Ramel	19	Continuing Freshman	Neuroscience
Brandon	19	Sophomore	Accounting
Kendrick	20	Junior	Political Science Pre-Law
Derrick	21	Junior	Business Sales and Marketing



Justin	20	Junior	Sociology Pre-Law
Terrence	20	Junior	Criminal Justice

### **Findings**

Throughout the investigation the participants noted various dilemmas in regards to being a Black male in America. Whether it was having warranted or unwarranted expectations placed on them by society or having the constant feeling of being watched by those in positions of power, the students stated that they faced a litany of challenges that the average American did not encounter on a daily basis. Often reminded of the old adage that they, as Black males, had to work twice as hard and be twice as smart to get half as far as their counterparts, this study provided the participants with a safe space to express a lot of the traumas placed on them as a result of media and societal interpretations. Derrick shared:

[America] it's built off of a system of oppression and people who are politically defined as White choose to politically define people of African descent, as Black and [they] use black as your dirt... you're lower than us. And that's one of the many ways oppression started...

Although there were several unfavorable factors that potentially stood in the way of the participants academic success, many of the participants welcomed and embraced those challenges so they could inspire the next generation of Black scholars to be successful in spite of adversity. Overall, the participants in this study helped identify both positive and negative influences that came to shape their academic identity by way of (1) external forces, (2) exposure, and (3) empowerment.

## **External Forces**

External forces were routinely regarded as negative influences in Black male scholar identity development. The heightened stress of external factors caused the participants to question not only their stature within society but also challenged their personal relationships with both family and friends. Participants shared messages of shock and awe, as well as thoughts of similar lived experiences, while observing and listening to recordings for this investigation. With this in mind, this theme was divided into three sub-themes which include: (1) K-12 experience (2) family, and (3) racial identity disconnect.

**K-12 Experience: Crabs in the Barrell.** Several of the participants shared all too similar experiences about their matriculation process within the K-12 pipeline. While coming from different walks of life, quite a few of the participants expressed ridicule they received from their peers for acts such as talking proper. The use of proper English was viewed as “acting White” and was seen in defiance of their “culture”. This belief was common in a study conducted by Fordam and Ogbu (1986). As a youth, when confronted over his use of proper English and “talking White”, Brandon recalled thinking “there is no such thing as talking White”. Brandon believed in being able to communicate effectively to express one’s ideas to others. Similar to Brandon, Ramel experienced ridicule growing up for using proper English. Ramel recalled, “they would always make fun of me because I’ve always spoke more proper than everybody. And they would always like kind of tell me about how I was definitely going to do something [with my life]”. According to Marshall (2018), it was believed that improper English or slang within educational settings was devalued by some educators. For African-Americans

who opted to use proper English within these settings it was believed that they were *race-shelving* or *identity-shelving*. *Race-shelving* was viewed as an individual temporarily putting aside “behaviors most associated with a particular race, in this case how language is used in speech and/or writing, and an adoption of behaviors associated with the dominant culture” (Marshall, 2018, p.53). Conversely, *identity-shelving* was viewed as identity “shaped by factors such as race and the use of power to require a temporary putting aside of racially ascribed elements of an identity believed to be objectionable or personally offensive” (Marshall, 2018, p.53). While these elements were ultimately viewed as giving up on one’s culture, pundits within the Oakland School Board believed that Ebonics, or African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as it was also known, should be viewed as a legitimate dialect by faculty and staff and be treated as any other language spoken by students (Zunguze, 2017); nonetheless, this ideology was not shared nationwide. While slang has its own merits, participants such as Brandon emphasized that, “no matter how intelligent you are, if you can't convey what you... if you can't speak in a way that your listener can understand what you're trying to say, then you're not going to appear to be intelligent.” With this belief in mind, Brandon advocated for what he calls “brushing up on the dictionary” so that one could have a better understanding of words and the English language.

For Ramel and others, throughout their schooling, many of their Black peers tried to push or embrace cultural stereotypes, such as being from the hood or being into criminal activities. Brandon suggested that in media, “the African American male is most of the time depicted as some kind of gangster, and that... I can definitely say that has some influence on how males grow up and you know they see it on TV.” Ramel

summarized that although media often depicted Black males in a negative light, he noticed how in some movies, the so-called antagonist or “gangsta” often encouraged others to continue their schooling and avoid the lifestyle they opted to choose. From this acquired knowledge Ramel thought it was important to do well in school and pursue his education. Within various media platforms, this culture of Blackness and masculinity in media often created conflicting connections that required consumer accountability. From these images, it whittled Black male coolness down to violence, indifference, and materialism (Bradley, 2012), thus causing some individuals to adopt destructive behaviors.

Participants such as Kendrick experienced different transgressions in his K-12 experience that caused him to question his interactions with his peers. On several occasions Kendrick expressed feeling slighted from members of his own race in regards to his intelligence. Kendrick detailed when transitioning from middle school to high school, he attended a new school district within his city. At his new school, Kendrick did not know any of his new classmates. Admittedly, Kendrick conveyed that he could have a childish demeanor about him. Kendrick loved to joke around but when it came time to complete his schoolwork, he would take it seriously. Fittingly, Kendrick gave two accounts of when he felt insulted by his peers in high school. One account was when Kendrick was taking the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam. During the test, a classmate did not know the answers to a particular portion of the examination and decided to cheat off another classmate in the classroom. Kendrick explained:

They didn't even ask me for an answer. That might seem crazy but I'm like 'Are you sure you're not going to ask me? I know the answer too.' That was the first time I got mad at somebody not trying to cheat off me. I didn't say it during the test, but he skipped over to a Hispanic kid and asked him for answers versus me. I ended up getting commended on that exam. Now, I'm not sure if the other person did or not, but for a Black person to skip me and ask another person, that is one of the best recollections I can recall.

While this recount may come off as comical, there may be underlining reasons on why his classmate decided to cheat off another student. Lastly, Kendrick gave another account of how he felt offended intellectually in high school. During Kendrick's high school graduation rehearsal, the students in the top ten percent of the class were allowed to lead the graduation proceedings followed by the rest of the student body. At the graduation rehearsal Kendrick's friends noticed that Kendrick was at the front of the line in the gymnasium. Kendrick noted that his friends shockingly asked him, "Kendrick, you smart?" In that moment Kendrick described feeling heartbroken because he felt his race never believed in his academic ability. While disappointed, Kendrick said that he proudly shouted "Yes. Yes, I am" to answer his friend's question.

Lastly, Derrick's K-12 experience differs from all the other contributors in the investigation because he attended private and preparatory schools throughout his childhood. Derrick completed his first few years of elementary education in New Orleans before moving to Arizona. Once moving to Arizona, Derrick noticed the lack of Black people living in Scottsdale, Arizona, as well as attending his private school. In his high school, Derrick recalled experiencing bouts of racism from his peers as a result of

him being one of a handful of Black students who attended the school. Derrick recalled being called racial slurs on multiple occasions by multiple students. Derrick remembered how his institution emphasized having a zero-tolerance policy, but Derrick questioned how significant the policy was if affluent parents had the capital to sway decision makers at the private institution. Derrick indicated that, “certain polices, you know that we need to have them in America...you know private companies [keep] funneling money, it’s why stuff really doesn’t change. It’s like that [at my high school] but more on a microscale.” After multiple occurrences of being called a racial slur by one particular student, Derrick stated that the student was expelled; nonetheless, none of his classmates in his school liked him. Even teammates on Derrick’s football team stopped associating with him. Derrick recalled, “I use to eat with some people on the football team... one kid, after the team did not like me, he was like ‘Why did you tell on him? You snitched.’” Owing to this, Derrick began to eat lunch by himself or in his teacher’s classroom. Coupled with this, Derrick began to develop animosity with not only his school environment but his mother as well. This angst generated between Derrick and his mother created a disconnect because he felt his mother wanted him to be submissive; this aspect of submissiveness will be unpacked in the subsequent sub-theme.

In conjunction with their personal experiences, the participants voiced their understanding and opinions on media portrayals about Black males in K-12 schools. In one such media portrayal, the participants expressed the realities of Black livelihood while watching a snippet from the television show *A Different World*. In the *A Different World* segment, a Black college professor is working with two Black male youth who are in a mentorship program and facing disciplinary action. The two youth are roughly

middle school age and are in two opposing gangs. There is conflict between the two students because of gang affiliations and they begin to argue, so the professor tries to calm them down. The professor asks the first student, if he gave him a gun right now what would he do. The student turns around in his desk, makes a gun motion with his hands and states that he would shoot the other student. The professor then asks the other student the same question and the second student stated that he would do the same thing to his peer. After their response, the professor questions the two students if they had anything to live for since they don't value each other's life or their own. The professor then proceeds to ask one of the students what he wanted to be when he grows up, but the student did not have an answer. The professor asked the young man to at least think about the possibilities and the young man answered that he wanted to be a movie star when he got older. The second student in the room started laughing at the first student because of his response and the professor had to intervene before the two young men fought. The professor then proceeds to ask the second student what he wanted to be when he got older and the second student stated that he wanted to be like Clayton. Confused with his response, the professor asked the student who Clayton was and he stated that Clayton is the neighborhood garbage man. After stating this, the first student started laughing at the second student because he wanted to be a garbage man versus being a movie star. The professor quickly stated that there was nothing wrong with wanting to clean up your community by being a garbage man. The professor tells the young men that he has a story to tell them about two fleas, one from the 220 neighborhood and the other one from the Coolidge neighborhood. The two fleas are trapped in a jar with a tight lid. Every time the fleas jump up, they hit their heads on the

lid and fall back down. On the next day, without the fleas knowing it, someone removes the lid from the jar. When the fleas attempt to jump up, they cower away and fall down, scared that they will hit their heads on the lid. The professor tells the students that the two fleas were free without even knowing it. The second student then asks the professor what was the point of the story. The professor stated that the two young men could be garbage men, the president, anything they wanted to be in the world, even gangbangers but the choice was up to them since there was no lid over their heads.

After watching the video segment each participant stated the scene had a profound message to it. Throughout their interviews, some participants shared how the “crabs in the barrel” mentality is a common trend amongst the Black community. The “crabs in the barrel” mentality can be summed up as individuals not wanting to see another individual be successful, therefore they shoot down that individuals dreams or aspirations. The “crabs in the barrel” mentality can be loosely coupled with some students’ awareness of inherent barriers such as glass ceilings that could impede their future economic success (Ogbu, 1992). Regardless of these things, after watching the video Derrick simply reasoned that, “We don't value our own lives and it stems from slavery.” Derrick believes that we should be reaching out to Black youth at an early age and ingrain within them the value of life and community because as he states “it’s easier to mold children than to fix broken men.” Next, Kendrick pointed out, when “nobody believes in you, in turn you don’t believe in yourself.” Nonetheless, while success and failure are relative, Brandon believes in the notion of helping his fellow student out because as he sees it, “your success is not my success and my success is not their success.” Success in Brandon’s perspective as well as the perspective of the other



participants boiled down to working hard and not giving up. Terrence noted how he lived by the mantra, “By your own, your only true failure is when you stop trying.” Owing to this belief as well as the belief in helping others, participants such as Justin equated success to:

Just being able to impact a lot of others if you have the ability to do so. And for me, I would say that I failed as...I guess as a Black man, [if] I didn't do all that I could to make sure that I was able to live a lifestyle that allowed, afforded me the ability to give back to others.

In all, the participants had a sense of community and willingness to help others succeed notably in higher education as a result of past transgressions within the education pipeline. Additionally, the participants believed the image presented in the video was impactful because of the Black educator within it. According to Derrick, he believed the students in the video listened to the educator because “the actual teacher was Black.” Derrick went on to further clarify, “You get a White teacher [and] it's like, you can't tell me... you know a thing about White teachers and teaching predominantly Black areas like you can't relate.” While it is important to have culturally competent educators it is equally important to have gender and racial representation that is influential to the emotional and cultural growth of students. This connectedness ushers' feelings of community and family.

**Family.** Relationships with family members are imperative when it comes to academic success for Black students (Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011). As noted with Derrick in the previous section, his constant encounters with racism caused a rift between

him and his mother. In the face of adversity or physical threats, Derrick's mother encouraged him to seek authority figures so they could fix said issues. Derrick stated:

My mom is like... my mom is like more of a... you know, early Dr. [Martin Luther] King. You know you don't put your hands... if someone puts their hands on you, you tell somebody. You tell the teacher because I guess she didn't want me getting into trouble. My dad was like if someone puts their hands on you, you know... that's it.

Derrick's routine encounters with racism impacted his relationship with his mother because he felt that he was in an oppressive learning environment, yet his mother was not providing him with the support that he desired. Derrick understood the consequences that could occur if he retaliated against his oppressors, such as getting kicked out of school or having charges pressed against him. Derrick reasoned that retaliating could potentially hurt his education and chances at college as well, but he felt his mother's way of handling the situation was submissive. Derrick reflected on his interactions with his mother by stating, "I told my mom it's like what you're saying sounds like a coon. I said this to my mother... to my mother. I had flat out yelling arguments, all this with my mother."

Owing to this, Derrick sided more with his father's mentality of standing your ground and handling people directly. From his encounters with his mother and his school environment, Derrick reflected on it by remarking, "I was like in a constant state of rage. I used that as motivation to go to a HBCU and get out of high school and succeed and be the man I want to become when I'm older."

Similarly, Terrence experienced division amongst his family members that impacted his academic success. Many of the males in Terrence's family were star

athletes growing up. Terrence illustrated how his father was a standout athlete in football, basketball, and baseball in high school. Terrence remarked, "... it was very hard for me in high school because everybody knew me as his son, so they expected me to do everything that he did, if not better than he did it. So I was always held to a higher standard and he expected for me to do so." Many people in the community were eager for Terrence to uphold his family's name when it came to high school athletics; however, Terrence did not follow in his father's footsteps because he was not interested in those sports. Terrence had a passion for academics and track and field. Terrence proclaimed, "I wanted to be better in school than in sports and I don't feel like they valued academics as much as I did. So it was very hard trying to get them to understand exactly why I did it." Going into his senior year, despite his love for track and field, Terrence stopped competing in athletics because he reasoned there was no point in competing in high school sports if he was not going to the Olympics. With this in mind, Terrence devoted all his time to academics. While the women in his family supported his decision to focus mainly on school throughout his high school career, the men in his family were not as accepting at first. Terrence remarked:

For me, I knew that I would come out successful in college. I knew that I wanted to pursue a masters and PhD, so I had to sit down and talk to him [his dad] about it, but at first, like the male figures in my life weren't really receptive of it but now, they definitely are understanding and they are definitely proud of me of everything I do in school.

While being a standout athlete is admirable, the research shows that Black males tend to settle towards athletics for prospective careers as early as the fourth grade due to negative

experiences with non-nurturing educators (Ferguson, 2000). While Terrence realized that his academic abilities could take him further in life more so than his athletic abilities, the men in his life still valued athletics over academics.

This contempt towards athletics can be argued from many directions. In America, athletics galvanizes communities and brings individuals from different walks of life together both on and off the field (Macri, 2012). The glorification of athletics in media, coupled with the fame, stardom, and monetary benefits associated with being a star athlete, are arguably praised more than academic success. Athletic success on a local level is praised within the community, shown on the local news, and observed in the newspaper on a daily basis, while on the other hand academic success is not praised nearly as much on the local level. As the competitive level of athletics increases, so does its notoriety within the public sector. This can easily be witnessed with the fandom surrounded around collegiate sports and professional sports. For Black males this form of notoriety or self-worth is visibly digested on a daily basis since Black households are the leading consumers of media in America (Kidd, 2014: The Nielson Company, 2018). With this in mind, it makes sense that the male figures in Terrence's life had issues accepting Terrence's dreams of academic achievement. While this is only the story of one participant, imagine the countless Terrence's of the world that did not have the courage to stand up to family members and take their academic destiny into their own hands out of fear of ridicule or rejection.

**Racial Identity Disconnect.** The feeling of being a part of a community is vital for student success. While several of the participants achieved academically in high school, they felt a disconnect with their Black peers as a result of them being placed in

advanced classes. Justin remarked by stating, “they [administrators and teachers] kind of treated me and a couple of the other African American males that were in like in dual enrollment, honors AP classes, they treated us with like Black tokens.” Justin believed that administrators and teachers paid more attention to them and were pulling him away from interacting with the other Black students at his school. Likewise, Terrence, who was also enrolled in dual enrollment and honor courses throughout high school, felt a disconnect between him and his fellow African-American peers. Terrence proclaimed that he felt that he had to choose sides because he was “in the middle of the very, very high-class kids and the low class [kids].” While Terrence felt that his Black counterparts were not always doing the most positive things, as an African-American he felt that he, “had to just stick with my people.” Even today, while attending a HBCU, at times Terrence feels as if he does not fit in with his own race but he is proud of who he is. While feeling trapped between two worlds, Terrence did acknowledge “I know how to confidently speak in a room full of people who don't look like me at all” thanks to his advanced classes.

The notion of racial identity disconnect is important to unpack for African-Americans, since the ideology of owning and being knowledgeable of one’s identity was a mainstay in participant conversations. While viewing cartoon images from the 1940s, the participants noted how the imagery was rooted in racism. Black characters had exaggerated physical features such as big noses and big lips. The characters also moved at slower, melancholy paces, talked with a delayed drawl, sang and dance, and were easily outwitted by animals. In one video, the Black characters lived in an area called “Lazy Town” and did not exert any energy until a fair skin individual came onto the

premises. These same individuals did not know how to properly do meaningless tasks unless they were shown how to do so. These negative representations can play heavily on one's perception of themselves. When reviewing the videos, Terrence stated that if Blacks were still portrayed this way, he would feel "pretty embarrassed, knowing that it is nothing like how most of us act." From these images, the participants contemplated on how destructive images such as these could have or would have influenced their upbringing if they did not have positive reinforcements that countered such narratives. Derrick stated that without these reinforcements, "I would could come out as...I believe this, I probably would be a Black republican. Nah, I'll probably be an Uncle Tom, a coon, all those things watching this." From the participants observations and beliefs in concluding sections it will be unpacked how positive representations in media have or could potentially influence Black male scholar identity.

### **Exposure: You Can't Be, What You Can't See**

Exposure can be vital to academic and professional success. Exposure can come from many different angles whether it is cultural exposure, economic exposure, or emotional and cultural intelligence. The simple act of uncovering truths or learning new things can widen one's perspective on worldviews as well as help individuals navigate in oppressive settings not intended for them. As one of the participants, Brandon confirmed, "Your environment does influence... partly influence your intelligence." From this belief, the participants expressed their opinions about exposure after watching a short snippet of an episode from *Good Times*. In the *Good Times* clip, a young Black male was discussing with his parents how standardized testing was inherently racist. The parents did not seem to understand why their child made such a statement because they

knew he was very intelligent. The child then goes on to comment that standardized tests do not measure how smart you are but rather how White you are. After having further discussion with his parents, he gave examples on how such tests are inherently racist and why people of color tend to score poorly on them because of language and cultural differences. The example the child gave to his parent was, “Complete the following phrase: Cup and (blank).” He stated that they had to choose between four options, wall, saucer, table or window. The young man then commented on how his friend selected table because in his house they do not have any saucers to place under the cups. While this video clip presented a teachable moment within a sitcom, it resonated with the participants because it coincided with their beliefs that standardized testing is not suited for people of color and it is not an accurate measurement of one’s aptitude. For decades this argument has been made with Knoester and Au (2015) stating:

Standardized tests, in conjunction with the ideology of meritocracy, thus have operated as a tool of white supremacy because they make racist outcomes of the tests appear as a byproduct of the way the world works objectively and naturally – they ‘scientifically’ justify the existing racial order, and they do so within a false promise of measuring everyone equally, accurately, and fairly (p.7).

Owing to this Derrick specified, “If you think someone's intelligence is... you can compile someone's intelligence from a test, a standardized test, that’s foolish.” The participants agreed that standardized testing could not measure someone’s intelligence or the potential for one’s success. Ramel affirmed:

...it's like you'll have stories of like, let's say like a millionaire or billionaire. They could fail every standardized test. They could have been the worst child in the

class, but it doesn't show their true intelligence because they went on to make these great companies and make all this money and are able to fund the education programs and stuff back at their school. It's kind of like people gave up on them but then they get older and they are the richest person in the room and they use to be the dumbest person in the room. So, it's like how can you really measure their intelligence? Obviously, they must be smarter than you somewhere...

Nonetheless, some of the participants argued that if you are to administer standardized tests, you would need other racial demographics in the room helping to generate test questions so that they could have a universal appeal. Ramel gave the example that:

... like let's say for example like with tech companies when they code, a lot of code in the world is racially biased because they only have certain groups in there. There's not... there's not like a Black person there helping them say, "Okay you didn't think about this part of the code." Like, because when coding, you have to think about different possibilities and they don't think about that because you don't have everybody from the different cultures in there making that code. So it's the same thing for the test, you don't have everybody in there, saying, "Okay, back whenever I was growing up we used this word, so I need to tell people that my people probably won't understand the word that you're using"...

Although all the participants did not argue against the use of standardized tests, Brandon stated that, "it's over emphasized", while some participants believed that tests should be considered in unison with other criteria when it came to aspects such as college admissions.



An additional belief shared amongst the participants was the belief that some individuals were simply not good test takers. While standardized testing in the video was articulated as being a measurement of how White an individual is, the participants also reflected on the complexity of the English language. This complexity was described twofold. Derrick postured by stating, “The English language is one of the worst things that happened, especially to Black people.” Derrick attested that one-word in the English language could mean a dozen things whereas, in other languages, one-word means just one thing. Ramel went on to also explain that in different regions of the United States, the English language has its own colloquialism and that American English is truly one of the least proper forms of the English language. Ramel detailed:

...like from Texas personally “y’all” to me it's like a set word. It's not like, um, improper for us to use it and we can use it in text, emails, everything because that's an actual word for us. But for a lot of people you have to use “you all” because they don't like you using the conjunction.

Within their argument, Derrick contested that as a result of the complexity of the English language one individual may feel as if they are motivating another individual, the second individual may feel as if the first party is demeaning them. Because of this, Derrick attests, “[this] is why we need to have these conversations to get to the root and get to the point so we can find a common ground.” In all, he believed the English language is flawed and full of misinterpretations and communication is key to social change.

Correspondingly, when it comes to exposure and Black male academic achievement, the participants noted the importance of having Black educators within the classroom. Brandon recalled seeing a poll on Twitter that asked users how many Black

educators they had growing up. Brandon went on to state that “unfortunately for most students, it's probably less than how many you can count on both hands.” Brandon went on to explain:

...I feel as though what educators get paid is not congruent with the value that they have. They're very important to just the growth and development of anyone African American or not. And, just you know the way that they're treated... definitely not okay, that's a different discussion. African American educators are very, very important because you know, just like you want to be diverse and you want to have cultural understanding from different... you just want to have a better cultural understanding. You're not going to have a better cultural understanding if you're only taught by you know, White teachers; teachers who are not ethnic. You have... it's just, we just... every single person walks differently, talks differently, thinks differently, and they teach differently. And so, by not having as many African American educators as you know, those of another race, they might be limiting, you know, someone being able to grow and develop just because you know they're all teaching the same...

Whether it is in K-12 or higher education, exposure to educators of color can be beneficial on several different layers. Referencing back to the *A Different World* clip and the Black educator within the storyline, participants such as Ramel noted the importance of Black educators due to Black students inherit connectedness to them. This idea is widely noted in the work of contributors such as Guiffrida (2005) as he details how students of color at PWIs actively seek out faculty of color as a result of the belief that faculty of color are student-centered. This student centeredness equated to faculty of

color doing such acts as extending themselves by helping students locate funds to pay for school, providing additional tutoring services on campus, as well as actively communicating with parents on behalf of students as it pertains to their academic and personal affairs. Terrence emphasized that Black educators were important simply because some educators may have come from similar backgrounds as the students they taught. Kendrick particularly acknowledged how important Black male educators are since:

Some people don't have male figures in their life. So, when you go to school and the only male figure that they see, authoritative is, you know, the educator. And as an educator it is important because when these kids look up to you, it's about what you represent, you know.

With the addition of Black male educators, students have a positive authoritative figure they can look up to in opposition to negative media images. Messages such as those presented in the *A Different World* segment could, in theory, have a tremendous impact on student's academic identity development because it may encourage individuals to be the change they want to see in their community by empowering them to seek productive career choices.

Lastly, when it comes to exposure, the students expressed how Black males are not monolithic, but rather they are well versed in many areas. This notion came to light in a Fox News snippet from *The Ingraham Angle*, a current affairs show hosted by Laura Ingraham. Within the segment, Laura Ingraham critiqued Black NBA players LeBron James and Kevin Durant about their commentary surrounding President Donald Trump and his leadership. Ingraham provided scathing remarks about both James and Durant

and stated that the two of them should have not provided their opinion about politics simply because they did not have college degrees and because they were athletes. Ingraham finished her commentary by stating they should “just shut up and dribble.” After watching this snippet, several of the participants reflected on how in America, being Black compounded with being an athlete equates to an individual not being intelligent. Ramel noted, “...they [LeBron James and Kevin Durant] weren't making illegitimate points.” Other participants assumed that if a wealthy, non-Black person who lacked a college degree, said the same comments as LeBron James or Kevin Durant, Laura Ingraham would not have said a word about that individuals’ remarks. The participants all believed Laura Ingraham’s comments were rooted in racism, while Brandon echoed that individuals such as Laura Ingraham, “can’t really tell someone, how they should think or feel. Everyone has a right to their opinion.” While both LeBron James and Kevin Durant were getting criticized for their comments, Derrick uttered:

Number one, this is the epitome of propaganda and making a group of people look unintelligent, but it's not working, you know. Some people may fall for the okie-doke, I don't. When you tell a story, tell the whole thing. Talk about his charitable contributions, Kevin Durant and LeBron James. Talk about LeBron James opening a school.

Poignantly, Brandon’s and Derrick’s sentiments resonate back to how media subconsciously attempts to influence the masses ideology about marginalized community’s scholarly identity by way of downplaying their sensibilities. As noted by the participants, not performing well on standardized tests or not having a college degree does not dictate how successful or intelligent an individual is. The participants affirmed

the numerous millionaires and/or billionaires who are college dropouts but are at the forefront of pushing society forward. Simply because one is an athlete, Black, and not a college graduate does not lessen their scholarly identity.

Furthermore, as it relates to exposure, music can have dueling effects on its listeners. Music can inspire its audience, it can make listeners aware of injustices in society, and it can invoke less than pleasing behavior. Kendrick, a novel rapper within the local Texas and Louisiana community stated that in regard to his artform:

... the things that I rap about, I don't normally discuss. It's not because of what I rap about isn't true, it is because what I rap about... it's my way of expressing myself and I don't fully express to everybody how I'm really feeling outside of that... The lyrics that I rap and the way people perceive because they kind of conflict with one another, you know. But it's not necessarily a bad thing.

While Kendrick does not rap about violence or drugs, he does talk about materialistic things such as having money and women. As Kendrick states, "you would expect someone high achieving [to have these things]." For Derrick, music serves a different purpose. Derrick conditions:

I try to listen to positive and uplifting things because at the end of the day, music has an effect on your subconscious. It really does. Music... a beat it's like a drum, it's like a heartbeat. It has an effect on your subconscious... And so, music has its own way of, you know, not seducing but you know, getting to your mind. And if you listen to this negative music enough, it's going to play in your subconscious and you may, you may have a higher tendency of doing certain things or acting out certain actions, so I just try to listen to positive stuff and stuff

that's, you know, informative. And stuff that I'm listening to is to a place of where I want to be, who I want to be with. So that's helped me with my academic career exploring.

For each participant, media has had some form of effect in their personal and academic journey. Whether directly or indirectly, media has been a catalyst in the way they choose to live their life, or the way society perceives they live their life.

### **Empowerment: My Brother's Keeper**

Lastly, empowerment was a critical theme in this investigation. As mentioned within the literature, HBCUs have had a profound impact on the lives of not only Black males but the Black community as a whole. These venues presented people of color with opportunities to further their education when other institutions would not admit them, as well as expose people of color to Black culture, and Black history (Palmer & Maramba, 2012). Equally, within this study these venues provided the participants with a space that accepted the qualities that made them unique as well as provided them with such items as an extended family and access to a hidden curriculum.

When the participants were asked why they elected to attend an HBCU, many of the accounts were similar. Terrence noted one of the main reasons he decided to attend an HBCU was because, "I was missing a piece of my culture or a piece of my heritage." Brandon stated that he wanted the experience because he went to a predominantly White high school. Derrick stated that he opted to attend an HBCU because of bad experiences he encountered throughout high school and because he wanted to be in an atmosphere where people loved him for him. Justin stated that he grew up in a predominantly White school system and he needed to gain his identity. Kendrick stated he wanted a one-on-

one connection with individuals that looked like him and wanted him to succeed. Lastly, Ramel modestly stated “Why not go around people that are like you and understand that whole thing and get more sense of yourself, instead of trying to go more far away from yourself.”

Being around individuals that resemble you is an important dynamic in Whiting’s (2009) Scholar Identity Model. In conducting his personal research, Whiting acknowledged working at a Black University (BU) in the Midwest. Whiting (2009) states:

Many administrators and teachers could have opted for employment at better-known local institutions (and several made the attempt), but BU was like a family.

It was nurturing and somewhat holistic, a mom-and-pop kind of place. Students with extenuating circumstances also found BU more accepting of them.

Within the process of being accepted or developing a family on campus participants such as Terrence equated the experience of having Black faculty and staff to “having a bunch of parents on campus.” Nonetheless, Terrence felt this dynamic was essential for student success because these individuals demonstrated tough love. Tough love is the notion of requiring an individual to take responsibility for their actions and seek out the answers for themselves. When observing a clip from the movie *Higher Learning*, some of the participants noted this experience from the scene. In the scene, a Black college professor and a Black student athlete are having a conversation after class. After receiving a questionable grade on an assignment, the student confronted the professor about his evaluation. When the professor articulated the reasons why the student received the grade such as misspellings, grammatical errors, and punctuation mistakes, the student

responded by saying the teacher's assistant probably graded the assignment. With this in mind, the professor replied back, if the student could spell as well as he performed in athletics, his grade would have been better on the assignment. Outraged that the professor said this, the student then proceeded to call the instructor a sellout. Promptly after saying this remark, the student was instructed to come to the professor's office. Once in the professor's office, the professor remarked that the student assumed that he was an Uncle Tom but what did that have to do with the student not being able to place a comma and a period in its proper place within a sentence. The student assumed that since the professor was Black that he would cut him some slack. The professor noted a few things to the student such as there are no breaks in the real world; entitlement breeds laziness and that the only person an individual must prove something to is themselves.

Participants such as Justin appreciated this example of tough love presented in the video. He believed that more professors and/or educators should adopt this mentality when it comes to their students' academic success. Owing to this belief, many of the participants elected to attend HBCUs because of these relationships and because of past interactions in grade school and secondary school. Terrence gestured that, "I didn't feel as though I could have matured or grew as much as a person if I attended a PWI." Kendrick replied, "[if I was at a PWI], I believe that the odds would be more stacked against me because I know I wouldn't... PWIs tend to be larger than HBCUs, so I know it wouldn't be that one on one connection." Kendrick went on to further explain:

I don't really believe it would be a bungee cord to help me back up [at a PWI], versus here at *Richardson University*. At a HBCU I know that if I do manage to



fail, it's always going to be some type of program, or some type of individual to help me get back on my feet and grab me up by the bootstraps.

These feelings of security played a major factor in the participants college decision making process, thus causing them to embrace smaller family atmospheres.

Within this newfound family, the participants noted being more confident in their academic ability because of university curriculum and being surrounded by likeminded peers who resembled them. Ramel reflected on feeling a sense of ease knowing that he was not an anomaly but there were others just like him. Justin stated:

And when I got to a HBCU and started to learn more about my African American history and just other things that I didn't grow up around, I felt, um, like I was just learning a lot more about myself and from learning more about myself, I felt like I was coming more into myself as a person and it allowed me to gain that confidence and my academic identity...

Within learning about one's history that is arguably overlooked in traditional K-12 education, Derrick gathered that he was aware of the many injustices he experienced throughout high school years but the knowledge he acquired in his mandated African-American diaspora courses revealed to him that he was not senseless. As Derrick stated, "I was woke in high school but now it's like, now it's like making sense and like now I have more information." From this new information, Derrick was able to learn and solidify how social constructs in America were created and how these same constructs are still in place today.

Lastly, empowerment played a critical role in this investigation on account of the various new forms of multimedia used to distribute content. The participants noted how

platforms such as YouTube and social media made the communication or distribution of content relatively seamless. In the past, content was distributed through avenues such as television; however, individuals readily did not have means to comment on such items on a global or national scale. With the arrival of the internet and its ability to connect individuals from different walks of life, the way they consumed and distributed knowledge changed. Ramel observed how “everybody can but their hand in YouTube” and explore other’s thoughts and belief systems online. Ramel noted how this ingenuity revolutionized learning and/ or behaviors because traditional forms of media such as television were aligned or attempted to align with certain belief systems. Justin went on to explain that, “[individuals] have the ability to control the way they advertise and portray themselves instead of always seeing themselves represented by like major brands or Hollywood and how they have pushed portrayals of certain groups or people.” Owing to this ingenuity, participants such as Terrence have used platforms such as social media to host informative events on his campus as well as to inform the masses of many African-American accomplishments. Terrence celebrated how he held a forum entitled, *The Miseducation of the Black Man* at his institution. Terrence explained:

I constantly see so much negativity when it comes to African American males [on social media].... I use that as a source of motivation to make me want to bring more attention to positive African-American males who are even like in education, in engineering, business, things of that in nature.

While Terrence and others are willing to change the narrative, it is society’s turn as a whole to take the steps necessary to embrace Black males emotionally, physically, and

holistically in their respective academic spaces. Until this measure is met, academic achievement for Black males may continue to sputter in comparison to their counterparts.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the themes illustrated by the six participants were examined in regards to the way they perceived their scholarly identity and ways in which multimedia has influenced its construction. From this investigation, there were three themes that helped shape this study: (1) external forces, (2) exposure, and (3) empowerment. From the contributor's participation, each individual's shared experience highlighted both negative and positive occurrences they believed challenged or helped shape their scholarly identity whether it was through their lived experiences or photo-elicitation. In the next chapter, the implications from the findings will be outlined along with recommendations for policy, practice, and future research

## **Chapter Five**

The intent of this investigation was to survey the influence multimedia has on the scholarly identity of Black males in higher education through the process of counternarrative storytelling. Through investigating this phenomenon, the researcher was seeking to understand how conscious and subconscious media programming influenced the educational journey of Black males in higher education by way of their interactions with family members, peers, educators, and other key stakeholders. From this investigation and the conclusions drawn from it, the investigator hopes to add to the field of higher education study through policy reform, institutional processes, and future research, all aimed at encouraging the advancement of Black male academic achievement and success.

### **Discussion of Findings**

As mentioned previously, this study uncovered three shared themes amongst participants in regard to multimedia's influence on their scholarly identity. These themes included: (1) external forces, (2) exposure and (3) empowerment. On account of these themes, the findings within this investigation helped fill a gap in the literature as it pertains to Black male scholarly identity development and multimedia influence. Largely, the findings revealed commonalities shared amongst participants from varying geographic regions as they navigated the educational pipeline. From these experiences, participants were able to construct their own realities of the world and the people around them.

## **Addressing the Research Question**

The two overarching research questions in this study were: (1) How do Black males perceive their scholar identity? (2) In what ways do media influence scholar identity development amongst Black males? From the literature review it was concluded that identity is influenced by two qualities, time and environment (Evans et al. 2010). This information is significant because in this investigation it was revealed that Black Americans were the leading consumer of media in America (Kidd, 2014; The Nielson Company, 2018); thus, Black Americans spent a large percentage of their free time-consuming media for a multitude of reasons whether it for escapism, entertainment, or enlightenment. Secondly, it was revealed that the American education system has systematically failed Black students at every level. Noguera (2003) notes that the lack of Black male academic success was not only systematic, but it was cultural. Owing to this knowledge, we sought to understand how these norms in turn influenced academic success.

While the study focused on multimedia's influence on Black male scholarly identity development, it was interesting to learn that half the participants openly stated that they did not actively watch television. Though the participants did not actively consume television regularly, all the participants did consume some form of multimedia daily whether it was social media (e.g. Twitter, Instagram), YouTube, or podcasts. From this revelation, it was deciphered that the means by which current student populations consume information and media has evolved. As it was stated earlier, participants cited how platforms such as YouTube and Facebook allowed them to comment on consumer posts. Commenting on posts presented them with the opportunity to communicate with

others across the globe whether it was in agreement or in disagreement with the messaging being broadcasted. Similarly, YouTube and Facebook aided students in the process of self-edification where they did not have to rely on a singular entity standing in front of the classroom depositing information. These platforms helped contribute to the notion of instant gratification because knowledge was now at the user's fingertips. No longer did the students have to read extensive textbooks or sit in drawn out lectures for extended periods of time. Students could learn content from multiple sources in a fraction of a second, as well as create original content that could resonate with peers. Whether it was through animation, video, song, sound bites, or archived footage this innovative content could come across in a more genuine way while potentially informing individuals better than their traditional classroom environment. Similarly, these platforms could support the distribution of content by contributors without the need and influence of marketing dollars as that shown in television and radio programming. As it was mentioned earlier, with the advent of multimedia, industries saw its power to influence consumer choice and opinion (Hunt, 2005); however, with individuals now being able to create original content, this type of influence could look different. With Black Americans being the overwhelming leader in media consumption (Kidd, 2014), the use and/or consumption of these new types of media could lead to nontraditional avenues of scholar identity development. With this new process of edification, it could also appease newer generations need for instant gratification.

From this investigation, the overarching themes of external forces, exposure, and empowerment, came together to express the need for cultural competency and curriculum reform. In higher education, the phrase diversity and inclusion is consistently thrown

around, but what does that truly mean? Is higher education as a whole just worried about having warm bodies to occupy seats or do they really care about inclusivity? It is understood that higher education is a business, but it can be debated whether or not higher education overall has moved away from its core values of imparting knowledge and developing one's critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are imperative for student success. As Jenkins (2006) mentioned within the cultural structure of hip-hop, freedom of thought, expressiveness, inclusivity, and competitiveness were all encouraged aspects of the artform, nonetheless these principles were absent within the educational arena. Even Freire (2000) confirmed that the socially, culturally, and economically oppressed were deposited knowledge from a hierarchal standpoint with the belief of outside enlightenment or debate being frowned upon. If you look within the confines of higher education, along with the education component, higher education institutions are now marketing other facets of their campus such as state of the art recreation facilities, athletic programs, and residence halls, while some of its students are marketing the university's party culture. These superficial elements are a far cry from the foundational roots of higher education. In all, the university along with current students are trying to demonstrate to impressionable parents and students that their institution is the best choice for post-secondary education but where is the intentional marketing of cultural competency, sensitivity, and other soft skills. Debatably, you only see the marketing of inclusivity on campus as it pertains to people of color on university brochures and websites. Within this marketing you may see cultural centers, Black student organizations or historically Black Greek letter organizations within them; however, this marketing should be within the fabric of the institutional culture at the university.

Institutions on a monthly basis should highlight students in various clubs and organizations on their website or on social media (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, YouTube). In theory, a student of color or an individual from a marginalized community would be presented periodically on these platforms to showcase successful individuals within the academy. This showcasing of successful students from marginalized communities can serve as inspiration to aspiring students stating that they can be successful too in academia. In addition, these electronic platforms such as the internet and social media are the means by which modern day students obtain information.

From an historical standpoint, there has been a divide within American education. People of color were initially refused the right to an education, so they had to discretely teach themselves. Next, Blacks were granted the right to education, but they could not learn in the same facilities as Whites. African Americans were provided with second rate educational tools such as tattered and outdated textbooks, but some individuals made the best of what they were given and succeeded both academically and professionally. Next, integration took place but, in some areas it was met with objection. Protests and riots occurred in some cities like New Orleans, Detroit, and Chicago thus causing White flight (Logan, Zhang, & Oakley, 2017). White flight is the act of White Americans leaving urban areas and settling into suburban areas, all while parents enrolling their children into private schools (Logan, Zhang, & Oakley, 2017). These private primary and secondary schools were void of people of color thus causing racial and funding disparities within school districts (Logan, Zhang, & Oakley, 2017). Unlike primary and secondary schools, public post-secondary institutions could be selective in their admission process; therefore, they could deny and did deny people of color from admittance for a plethora of



reasons. Even with the onset of desegregation, public institutions had to be threatened with the possibility of losing federal funding until they decided to fully open their doors to minorities (Preer, 1983). From this information, it can be concluded that money has and continues to be a contributing factor for minority student admission and not solely for the means of diversity and inclusion. Research shows that a diverse student population within the classroom promotes engagement, critical thinking skills and empathy (Quaye et al., 2015), but as long as institutions keep recruiting minority students and providing them with the bare minimum amenities such as cultural resource centers, students are going to keep accepting the educational product they are given and not question the structural, organizational, psychological, behavioral or compositional climate of the university.

While others may benefit from having students of colors within the classroom how are students of color benefiting physically, culturally, mentally, and spiritually on these campuses? In these spaces, some people of color are still viewed as threats or out of their element (Edwards, 2019; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007), all while the existing curriculum does not attempt to negate the critical tropes conveyed about people of color across media. While some may argue it is not the institution's job to battle media's portrayal of minorities, institutions are however being complicit in not providing all of its students with an education that is unbiased and representative of a culturally inclusive and global society. For the average Black student, in certain educational spaces they are potentially battling these systemic and structural forms of oppression on a daily basis. For other Black students, such as student athletes, on Saturday's during the collegiate football season and throughout the winter season for basketball, they are praised for their

athletic prowess and dedication to the university. Once the season is over with or they encounter a career ending injury, some of these same individuals are back to being relegated within the communities they served.

The College Sport and Racial and Gender Report Card reported that in 2018, 53.6 percent of Division I men's collegiate basketball players were African American and 49.2 percent of Division I men's collegiate football players were African American (Lapchick, 2019). Despite making up only 6 percent of the United States population, Black males are statistically overrepresented in the two top revenue generating Division I collegiate sports thus adding to the narrative that Black males are only good at athletics and entertaining others. From these top two revenue producing collegiate sports, income is drawn into universities whose demographics do not statistically represent the individuals who participate in them. While the universities do donate a portion of the revenue garnered from athletics to campus scholarships, it is feasible to believe that these funds do not go to the same statistical percentage of students who make up these athletic programs. To help reform this, institutions should allocate at least this percentage of their scholarship money to academic scholarships geared towards Black males or initiatives geared toward the recruitment and retention of Black male academics.

### **Scholar Identity Reimagined**

As it pertains to Black male achievement in post-secondary education, one interesting notion came to mind when interviewing Derrick. When we were conducting his photo-elicitation interview, Derrick made a particular comment after listening to a snippet from Kanye West's *College Dropout* album. Within the snippet, a character within the parody stated such things as "So you finish college and it's wonderful... Now

you'll get that \$25,000 job a year... You'll come in at a entry-level position... You'll move up to the next level, Which is being the secretary's secretary... You get to take messages for the secretary, Who never went to college, She's actually the boss's niece!"

After listening to this snippet, Derrick responded by stating:

Yeah, he's really saying don't go to college. I feel like the message is, 'College is a waste of money, a waste of your time.' You know, I'm don't know what he could be saying. He didn't say anything about trade school. But, yeah, you know, I don't agree with it but there are other things in the album I do love though.

In recent years, higher education most specifically four-year degrees have been pushed as the means to economic success. While this can be true, four-year degrees can also put many individuals in a financial deficit. Within Whiting's (2009) scholar identity model, it is closely linked to traditional four-year college education, but who determines whether or not scholar identity is developed in community colleges, trade schools, or other less formal venues. In recent decades, it can be argued that vocational schools and the nobility that comes along with working with your hands has been overlooked.

Historically, proponents for minority upliftment such as Booker T. Washington felt that African Americans should learn vocational trades to persist in society (Shu, 2019).

Learning trades in the field of carpentry, heating and cooling, automotive repair, electrical repair, welding, plumbing, graphic design, and cosmetology are valuable skills that are practical, cheaper than most traditional four-year educations and are potentially more lucrative. In addition, entrepreneurship is a skill not talked about much in education. It can be argued that schools, especially public institutions in the primary, secondary, and post-secondary sectors, teach students how to get jobs and be compliant,

rather than how to create jobs. Most of the skills learned from entrepreneurship are learned from trial and error and are just as valuable in developing an individual's augmented scholarly identity. Such skills learned through the art of entrepreneurship are accounting, marketing, finance, management, supply and demand, as well as a host of other things. From the skills learned in these endeavors, one's scholar identity is shaped and molded in ways Whiting (2009) did not and could not imagine. Far too often in visual media, occupations such as plumbing and automotive work are depicted as "dirty jobs". There is even television programming dedicated to these professions that goes by the same name. According to Farr (2015), professions such as these bring up conversations on class politics within America and media's stigmatization of the working class. While these jobs are labor intensive so are other professions. To be successful in any career you have to get your hands dirty and put in sweat equity. While individuals such as plumbers and mechanics do not wear suits to work on a daily basis as other professions, the individuals who own and operate these types of businesses should be celebrated more within the communities they serve. Often within media, *white collar* jobs are depicted as more professional and more desirable while the individuals who embark upon these careers arguably accrue the most student loan debt. Also, in times of crisis, majority of these professions are not even deemed as essential.

In recent years, some educators have attempted to meet students where they are as it pertains to technology and learning. Black scholars such as Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson and Dr. Boyce Watkins have created online content through the assistance of social media platforms. Through the process of interactive lectures these scholars have not only educated the larger community in aspects such as science and finance but in their own

way they are ‘recoding Blackness’ for modern generations. Similar to entertainers in the 1980s who wanted to recode Blackness through imagery that was in opposition to past poverty centric sitcoms, these scholars are also redefining Blackness and Black masculinity through modern day media platforms. These scholars are defining Black masculinity as intelligent, selfless, and hardworking. The act of being selfless could be attributed to these individuals willing to share to the masses, the knowledge and information they acquired through years of schooling. They are also displaying aspects of hard work through their daily devotion to *edutainment*, the art of educational entertainment.

Correspondingly, the incorporation of platforms like YouTube into the educational process may differ for those who have traditional learning styles versus those with online learning styles (Buzzetto-More, 2015). As Duvenger and Steffes (2012) confirm, newer mediums such as YouTube are appropriate for modern-day students since “Internet videos tend to be free or cheap and good-to-high quality, in addition to being moderately to highly convenient” (p.53). Furthermore, these mediums are ideal for modern-day learners since these students are viewed as “digital natives”, people born into technology and whom anticipate instant responses (Duvenger & Steffes, 2012). Through the creation and distribution of videos or content on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, educators are seeking mood primers and content primers that students find entertaining because it is believed that mood and content influences attentiveness, student learning and student retention. Also, it is believed that these mood and content primers support the encryption and the retrieval of information when it is matching with material that is being taught within classrooms.

## **Connection to Conceptual Framework**

The participants within this investigation's scholarly identity was shaped by several factors. As Gilman Whiting (2009) attests, scholar identity development for Black males is an image building process that must be cultivated and supported by educators so that Black males can increase their motivation, academic success, and ambition within the classroom. Whiting's (2009) emphasis on nine tenets (e.g. self-efficacy, future orientation, willingness to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, self-awareness, need for achievement, academic self-confidence, racial identity, and masculinity) working in unison to create the ideal scholar were novel but from conversations held with the participants, the reinforcement of these traits were not likely supported in their K-12 upbringing. Overwhelmingly, from the conversations with the participants, racial identity was at the forefront of their scholarly identity crisis. At varying stages within their educational journey each participant either questioned their racial identity or were challenged about their identity. This questioning of their identity essentially led the participants to attend a historically Black institution for post-secondary education.

Within the participant's construction of their academic identity, self-awareness also came into play on a multitude of levels. Participants, such as Derrick, experienced racism in his K-12 journey which provoked and enlisted emotions that influenced his educational experience. Participants such as Justin and Terrence noted how being placed in advanced courses and being separated from their same race peers caused an internal and spiritual divide. Lastly, Ramel and Brandon recalled how talking proper enlisted specific responses of "acting White" from their peers. Owing to Whiting's (2014) tenets,

he acknowledges that “as a part of self-awareness, young Black and Brown men must be able to code switch as they make the transition into adulthood” (p.96). Codeswitching is the process of shifting and conforming to the expectations of listeners with Boulton (2016) asserting that code switching is a valuable skill for people of color. While codeswitching can be viewed as a valuable asset to connect with individuals from varying cultural backgrounds, Whiting (2014) gives examples of how specific youth culture from various eras converted to *contemporary vogue* despite going against the status quo. Whiting (2014) acknowledged how, in the 1960s, hippies donned long hair and, in the 1920s, women smoked cigarettes. Whiting (2014) reasoned that current adolescence behaviors such as wearing pants below their waist was a type of *contemporary vogue* for this era’s Black youth. While these actions along with using slang vernacular are cultural means of expression for Black youth, Whiting (2014) recognizes that these behaviors are seen as troubling to a large percentage of society. Ironically, self-awareness in each of the participant’s cases had nothing to do with them exemplifying cultural norms, *contemporary vogue*, or stereotypical behavior but rather the opposite. The students’ self-awareness was centered on them feeling out of place in their educational environment or others recognizing their non-contemporary behavior. While the students who questioned Brandon’s and Ramel’s use of proper English may have been in tune with their racial identity, they may have lacked other aspects within their scholar identity development. Likewise, the participants within this study may have been more in tune with other aspects of scholarly identity development (e.g. needing to achieve, willingness to make sacrifices, etc.) but lacked the decisive element of racial identity.

For the participants, their internal locus of control came down to perseverance. As mentioned prior, some of the participants viewed success as not giving up but rather learning from their mistakes. In reference to one's success and failure, Derrick postured that "of course you got to help yourself, you got to put in the work"; even Ramel quantified his outlook on success and failure to being personal. Ramel stated that "you have to make a goal for yourself each and every time... I believe that everybody's success and failure can have an environmental aspect, but it's up to that person to keep on pushing for that success." As Whiting (2014) emphasizes, individuals with a scholar identity do not blame external factors such as the test, their seating arrangement, or the instructor if they perform poorly on an examination. Rather, these individuals take responsibility for their setback and challenge themselves to work harder to succeed in the future.

Similarly, the participants within the study exemplified academic self-confidence because they took charge of their education. Academic self-confidence was looked upon as not feeling the need to hide or downplay one's academic abilities (Whiting, 2009). None of the participants attempted to lessen their academic ability. They embraced their intelligence and often felt as if they were anomalies within their academic spaces growing up. It was not until they reached college that they realized it was other students of color just like them. Participants such as Kendrick recalled how he was upset that a classmate did not cheat off him on a standardized test. Kendrick knew that he was smart and more than capable in assisting his classmate; however, his classmate opted to seek the assistance of another student. Additionally, participants such as Terrence and Justin knew that they were intelligent; therefore, they enlisted in dual enrollment courses while in high school, sometimes even taking courses at a physical college campus.



Nonetheless, Whiting (2014) acknowledges that “teachers’ expectations drive student achievement; therefore, developing a strong sense of academic self-confidence in young Black males must be understood as an imperative—pushing without coddling” (pg. 97). Contributors such as Kendrick provided accounts of his grade school upbringing. From kindergarten through eighth grade, Kendrick attended the oldest ran African-American public charter school in greater Houston, Texas. At this school Kendrick recalled, “It was a tight knit family... they all wanted to see you thrive... I think that school defined who I am.” Kendrick even went on to state that his history instructor at this school, who was a White male, was one of the best teacher’s he ever had. This instructor was the only White educator at the school but he treated every student fairly. Nonetheless, when Kendrick entered high school within his new school district, the culture changed. Kendrick was lucky to have the confidence instilled in him at an early age in his academic journey to offset some of the negative experiences and responses he encountered within high school. While Kendrick’s academic self-confidence was in conjunction with other elements, he was nurtured at an early age; however, this is not always the case for most students.

Correspondingly, the participants in this study were willing to make sacrifices for the betterment of their academic and future occupational careers. Terrence shared how he quit participating in athletics so that he could devote his time to academics. Equally, Kendrick, Derrick, Brandon, and Ramel all left their family and friends behind and moved out of state to attend their respective institution. Family and friends were an integral part to the participants sense of community. In spite of his sometimes-strained relationship with his mother, Derrick acknowledged, “I wish my parents were closer, but

it's like, you know... I just... I mean sometimes I miss them.” Lastly, Ramel commented, “Probably the one thing I can think [about when it comes to sacrifices] is like leaving my mother, because that’s really like one of my like, I guess you could say best friends... I was always her support.” Some of the sacrifices the participants made were very personal but they knew for the advancement of their academics and career, these sacrifices were necessary.

Lastly, masculinity while it was never at the forefront of the participants identity development, some participants did notice how they did not live up to the status quo of Black masculinity. Justin responded by stating:

I feel like I stressed myself out a lot growing up... I was fighting against, kind of like what I know to be generational curses in my family. Fighting against those and also with what media portrays, you know, a “bad Black man” to be. I was always trying to prove myself to be a good Black man.

Even Terrence questioned his masculinity by stating, “...at a point it made me question myself simply because I was never the type to be much interested in anything that is street or gang related... I was always like an odd number out.” While masculinity alone did not hinder their scholar identity development or perception of themselves, as Ramel postured “when it comes to like my masculinity, I take everything from media with a grain of salt.” Ramel recalled how his mother taught him that his manhood was what he wanted it to be and not to let others dictate it to him. From this knowledge instilled in him from his mother, Ramel said that his manhood simplified down to being compassionate. This compassion trickled down to taking care of himself, his family, and the community around him. As all the participants mentioned, their purpose in life was

being of service to others. Overall, each participant had scholarly identities prior to enrolling in higher education; nevertheless, they had to navigate the perception others had of them via media portrayals. On account of this, the participants had to upkeep and maintain their scholar identity in the face of adversity. This adversity not only came from peers but from society as a whole. From this investigation, the maintenance of one's scholarly identity was just as important as the creation of it.

While Whiting's (2009) scholar identity model is innovative, I feel that it lacks one key element, which is altruism. Altruism is the act of selflessness by way of being of service to others without expecting anything in return (Ekström, 2018). Throughout this investigation the participants constantly mentioned that giving back to their community and others was important to them. In Whiting's (2009) model he shows a hierarchy within scholar identity model development by way of the model presented below in image 1A. I suggest that the model be updated to incorporate the notion of altruism as reflected in image 1B. Altruism is important because the foundational genesis of education is learning but what is learning if you are not able to teach or share vital information with others so they can mature and develop as well. As noted with the premise of mass media, was the decimation of information to the masses. What this generation liked about new forms of media such as YouTube, Facebook, and podcasts was the ability to connect with others across the globe as well as the sharing of information. It only seems fitting that altruism be a new tenet within the scholar identity model scope. As it has been attested, the best way to understand a concept is to explain it to someone else. This notion is the essence of a true scholar; therefore, it should be added to the prism of scholar identity development because what is information or

knowledge if no one else has it. While it may be asking a lot for a child to take initiative and responsibility to teach his peers, students unknowingly exhibit this behavior in classrooms and within their daily lives as it pertains to schoolwork, technology, athletics, etc. As these students mature into teens and young adults, these same qualities continue to manifest themselves and resonate better with audiences who resemble them.

**Image 1A: Gilman Whiting's Original Scholar Identity Model**



**Image 1B: New Proposed Scholar Identity Model**



## **Implications**

To improve the scholar identity of Black males in relation to their depiction in media, universities must take the proper steps needed to ensure their success. Frequently, Black males find their identity in non-academic activities therefore universities must reverse this ideology so Black males can develop self-worth within their academic settings.

## ***Policy***

To aid in the process of Black male academic success in higher education, institutions should look into implementing inclusive curriculum. While this conclusion has been argued before, educators should understand that there should not be an inherent divide between a United States history course and an African American history course. Each experience that took place in the United States helped shape this country to what it is today. Ironically, in American education, coded language has been employed and is still being utilized in textbooks. In a recently released history book that discussed American immigration, it was stated that millions of workers from Africa came to the United States to work on plantations in the southern United States (Reed, 2015). While this may seem innocent to some, this statement is far from the truth. Institutions on all educational levels need to be more selective in the literature they disperse to their students because all history is not grounded in facts but rather written by those who win wars. If we truly want to be a great nation, we must acknowledge and accept our sins and move forward by educating everyone on the great accomplishments' minorities contributed to the growth and development of this country. Similarly, we should acknowledge other accomplishments contributed to the culture; therefore, there should

not be a divide between American literature courses and African American literature courses as well as other ethnic forms of literature derived in the United States.

Secondly, it is recommended that institutions look at their teaching model and course catalogs. Far too often in education, instructors stand in the front of the classroom and deposit information to students without student engagement. Instead of a lecture style model, institutions should encourage challenge-based learning where students are provided with real world applications. Through real world applications, students would be required to think critically and not just accept the lecturers' lessons as truths. In updating and developing the university catalog, institutions should look at relevant and modern ways of social justice, expression, and student interaction. Similar to the Civil Rights and Women's Rights era, higher education should explore modern forms of civil disobedience coupled with edification that promotes critical thinking. While controversial during their era, various forms of civil disobedience challenged the status quo by questioning socially constructed norms. From these oppositions, civilization as we know it was pushed forward for the better.

Lastly, unconscious bias training should be implemented throughout the institution. As noted in the research, some forms of media can influence individuals' perceptions of reality. By implementing mandatory unconscious bias training in curriculum (e.g. freshman seminar courses) and/ or faculty and staff training, institutions can become proactive in averting acts of intolerance on campus.

### ***Practice***

To further aid in the persistence and success of Black males in higher education, institutions should look at their hiring practices. Minorities make up 39.6 percent of the

United States population with Blacks making up 13.4 percent of the total United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Within in this percentage, Black males make up roughly less than half the percentage of that population. As noted previously, Black students tend to gravitate towards minority faculty and staff because of their inherent belief of student centeredness (Guiffrida, 2005). Institutions should look into potentially hiring minority faculty and staff that mirror the national population or they should attempt to hire minority populations that at least mirror the ratio of their minority student population on campus or the population in the surrounding city and/or county in which the institution resides. Similarly, in advertising campaigns universities need to not only display diverse student populations in advertisements but faculty and staff as well. With the portrayal of not only diverse students but diverse faculty and staff on campus in visual advertisements and on social media, these images could potentially go against any negative representations impressionable youth see across media.

For HBCUs to further enhance Black student engagement and enrollment in higher education, they should use various modes of multimedia such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter in their daily practices. These institutions can use these platforms to broadcast guest lectures, workshops, or symposiums that were often only available to individuals who attended the institution. Since many institutions are now implementing online learning platforms to meet the needs of non-traditional students, they should also employ these means to engage these students as well as prospective students. Students tend to learn just as much or more outside of the classroom as they do inside the classroom. By implementing more guest lectures or symposiums around topics that are



not often discussed in classroom settings, both students and prospective students' scholarly identity can be engaged in less formal settings.

Lastly, HBCUs can also look at offering certifications or associate degrees. As mentioned previously, there is nobility that comes along with learning trades or learning a specific skillset. With learning precise vocations, students are increasing their scholarly identity and supporting their own economic advancement. Opting to go this route can not only ensure that institutions such as HBCUs can maintain relevancy in today's culture, but they can also alter the perspective of scholarly identity development.

### **Future Research**

For future research this study should look at the influence media representation has on Black male scholar identity for those who attend non-minority serving institutions. Also, institutions should look at data driven metrics on how inclusive curriculum supports the persistence and retention of Black males at non-minority serving institutions. This data should be compared with data collected from HBCUs to see the effectiveness at both types of institutions. Finally, once inclusive curriculum is implemented on collegiate campuses, climate surveys should be evaluated based on discrimination cases and the university's responses to such cases in order to gauge its effectiveness in retaining not only Black males but also other students of color.

From the investigation, it was established that at PWIs, students of color tend to gravitate towards faculty and staff of color due to their belief that these individuals are more student centered (Guiffrida, 2005). Since people of color would more than likely be the minority population at these institutions, it is foreseeable that these students could experience feelings of marginality and/or covert acts of racism. These acts of

marginalization could easily be influenced by media portrayals. With that being said, it would be significant to study these individuals experience and whether or not it impacted their academic achievement.

Lastly, data driven metrics should be implemented in regards to the persistence rates of marginalized communities. One such way of doing this is through implementing culturally inclusive curriculum in the classroom. At the end of the semester when institutions distribute course evaluations, there should be questions pertaining to whether or not the student felt if the instructor implemented culturally inclusive content into lesson plans and whether or not this addition of culturally inclusive lessons dictated their decision to persist or withdraw from the institution, and if culturally inclusive lessons or dialogue within the classroom made the students feel as if their culture mattered. From the data collected over a sample size of six years, we could see if minority student retention and matriculation was at or above the national average.

### **Limitations**

While this investigation was fruitful, there were several limitations within the study that must be addressed. Since Black males are not attending and persisting in college at a rate as consistent as other racial and gender demographics, this study used HBCUs as host sites for participant recruitment. While Black males are the target demographic of study, a limitation within this investigation could potentially been participant feedback. Black males are known to exhibit behaviors and emotions that are restrictive in nature because they do not want to show vulnerability or lack of knowledge (Majors & Billson, 1992). The participants may not have fully disclosed their perceptions about their scholar identity or the various social, cultural, or environmental

issues that influenced their academic development. To help address this and ease participant apprehension, photo-elicitation was employed as a methodology to communicate such narratives.

Secondly, another limitation within this study is the possible sexual orientation of the participants. While the contributors would ideally come from a heteronormative background, the contributions and lived experience of a non-openly gay male of color at an historically Black institution could have had the potential to alter the scope of this study as a result of disparate social and/or cultural stigmas associated with being Black, male, gay and/or bisexual. As stated before, a focal point of this study is Black male masculinity, therefore the researcher wanted to stay within the realm of heteronormative culture.

### **Delimitations**

A delimitation within this study is its range of participants. This study focused on Black males who fall within the scope of post-millennial undergraduate students who attend a four-year HBCU. Presumably, there are other interested parties who attend schools such as predominantly White institutions (PWIs) or Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs); however, for this study HBCUs were chosen because of their high success rate in producing Black scholars. Additionally, Black males who were pursuing bachelor's degrees at HBCUs but fall outside of the designated age range may likewise be interested in this study. Nonetheless, their personal accounts and lived experiences may not have been relatable to the experiences of the other scholars consulted for this investigation.

## **Conclusion**

The way students consume media has greatly influenced how they can manage and generate their scholarly identity development. Compared to the past generations, the ability to access knowledge and awareness of one's environment is now at their fingertips thanks to the advancement of mobile technology. From this investigation, the researcher hoped that this study could advance the way in which educators seek to reach their students both inside and outside of the classroom. Through interactive mediums such as YouTube and social media, educators can meet current and future students where they are now on a consistent basis. Similarly, non-formal educators could also reach students and others where they are while also aiding in their scholarly identity development. By having classroom discourse that challenges the status-quo with the addition of culturally relevant topics, materials, and mediums to deliver material, this could potentially increase student engagement and retention. While we are not advocating for instructors to become social media enthusiasts, they should become self-reflective and more creative with the development of course content. Likewise, educators should encourage critical thinking within the classroom, invite subject matter experts into these spaces, and provide real world application and scenarios into learning so that students can become actively engaged in their educational experience.

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## Appendices

Appendix A

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Christopher Broadhurst in the College of Education and Human Development Department at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting research in order to study and describe the influence multimedia has on the academic identity and achievement of Black males in higher education.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve you taking part in two separate interviews. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, as it will not affect your treatment or academic standing at your institution. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation could help with the future persistence and academic success of Black males in higher education.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Kevin McClain

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O' Hanlon at the University of New Orleans [REDACTED]

## Appendix B

### **Recruitment Script**

*Script:*

Welcome and thank you for your participation in this investigation. My name is Kevin McClain and I am a graduate student within the College of Education and Human Development at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting my research in partial fulfillment for the degree requirements for Doctor of Philosophy in Education Administration. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule for this interview. Prior to the start of this interview, I would like your permission to audio record our conversation, so that I can accurately document the information you provide to me today. As stated in your written consent form, your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw or choose not to participate in this study at any time. Your responses in this interview will remain confidential and will be used to develop better understanding on how multimedia has influenced the academic identity and achievement of Black males in higher education.

You and I have both signed and dated the written consent form for this investigation. Do you have any questions or concerns prior to the start of our interview? If you do not have any questions, with your permission we will start the interview process.

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions

1. Describe to me how it feels to be a Black male in America?
2. Can you describe the various types of media you typically consume daily? (e.g. genre type, general themes, character description, environmental setting, etc.)
3. What was or is your favorite television show or movie growing up?
4. Describe to me the role media has played in defining your masculinity? Can you provide examples on how Black male representation in media has positively and/or negatively influenced your life?
5. Describe your general belief about success and failure, and one's responsibility in these outcomes.
6. Tell me how your current behavior and decisions influence your future goals.
7. Describe to me your K-12 academic experience.
8. How has attending an HBCU has influenced your academic identity?
9. Why did you choose to attend a historically Black institution versus a predominantly White institution?
10. Tell me more about your racial identity.
11. Can you describe a time where you took an honest assessment of your limitations academically and what steps you did to improve upon them?
12. Can you provide an example where your desire to achieve a goal was more important than receiving a reward or public recognition?
13. Can you describe to me some personal sacrifices you had to make to pursue your academic dreams?

14. Describe to me the role media (e.g. music, movie, television, social media etc.)  
has played in your academic identity?

## Appendix D

### Photo Elicitation Questions

Please watch or listen to the following clips. After each selection, you will be asked a series of questions in response to the content presented. As you view the images please talk through your emotions and explain your thoughts.

#### Cartoons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UacUR7bPnMM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlquOmv7Kk8>

- How do you think this cartoon portrays people of color?
- How would you feel if Blacks/African-Americans were still portrayed this way in cartoons?
- How would this cartoon possibly influence your identity if you grew up watching this?
- If you were not a person of color, how would you think Blacks/African-Americans behaved?

#### Fox News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJIA2lkpXsw>

- What are your thoughts on Laura Ingram calling LeBron James a dumb jock?
- How does it make it you feel when Laura Ingram states that LeBron James and other athletes should “shut up and dribble” and leave politics alone?

#### Good Times Television Show

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qw0sY9L3mxU>

- What are your thoughts on standardized tests and people of color?
- Is standardized testing an accurate measurement of one’s aptitude?

#### A Different World Television Show

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrXoWvjIU3I>

- What are your thoughts on this clip and its underlining message?
- How are Black educators important to the growth and development of Black youth?

#### Higher Learning Movie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5HIw9MUJ9Y>

- What are your thoughts on the professor’s and Mr. William’s interaction?

#### Kanye West College Drop Out Album Snippets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9xopViBKOQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xL9VLARq8k>

- After listening to the snippets, what are your beliefs on the value of education?

#### Summary Questions



- As new mediums to distribute content arise (e.g. YouTube, Facebook) how do you believe these platforms can or have combated traditional forms of media?
- How have these platforms aided in your knowledge and growth as an individual?

## Vita

Kevin McClain is a self-described critical constructivist who seeks to unpack the role power plays in the creation and validation of knowledge. Kevin has worked professionally as an academic advisor at two universities in New Orleans. In these roles Kevin's focus has been the recruitment, retention, and persistence of first year college students. In his free time, Kevin researches and writes about diversity, equity, and inclusion and Black male achievement in academia.