

Black Girls' Conceptualization of Their "Scholar" Identity at FAMU DRS Freedom Schools

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Introduction

Positionality

My identity as a Black woman has consistently been one of my most salient, and my identity as a student/learner has become increasingly important throughout my life. However, these two identities have often been sources of dissonance and trauma due to negative educational experiences and internalized messages of inferiority. As a graduate student in a higher education program, I recognize the value and necessity of education, especially for Black women. It was difficult to separate myself as a "researcher" because I resonated deeply with the experiences of young, black girls I interviewed. They each reminded me of myself, my sisters, my mother, my stepmother – generations of black women who understand education as a tool, as a weapon, as a way forward.

Context

A significant amount of literature exists on the process of Black female identity development and the experiences of Black women in educational and academic settings (Parks, Carter & Gushue, 1996; Jacobs, 2016). However, a gap exists in research on how Black **girls** come to see themselves as scholars. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), Black women are the most educated sector of the United States population. Yet it is also true that black women often suffer from negative stigma in all levels education and struggle to overcome internal issues, such as imposter syndrome, and numerous external systemic barriers (Morton & Parsons, 2018; Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, & Watson, 2016).

Research Questions

The purpose of this research project was to explore how Black girls conceptualize their "scholar" identity at FAMU DRS Freedom School. I wanted to understand how the girls saw themselves and others as scholars, how they lived the word out, and perhaps what motivated them to do so.

Research Question

- How do Black girl scholars at FAMU DRS Freedom Schools define their "scholar" identity?

Method

Research Design

The following questions were included in an "exit interview" in which students reflected on their overall summer experience as scholars at Freedom schools.

- What does the word scholar mean to you?
- When do you feel the most scholarly?
- Who are the scholars in your life?
- How did you become a scholar?

Participants

The participant sample includes 6 Black girls who were enrolled at Freedom School during the summer of 2019. Five of the scholars attend Leon County schools, and four scholars had previously attended a Freedom School. Each participant had written consent from parents and further assented to an individual interview.

Rose	Daisy	Ivy	Jasmine	Iris	Azalea
Rising 4 th grader, previously attended FS	Rising 5 th grader	Rising 6 th grader, previously attended FS	Rising 8 th grader, previously attended FS	Rising 9 th grader	Rising 9 th grader, previously attended FS

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews from 6 Black girl scholars were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Each interview was about 15-30 minutes long and were recorded during breaks or aftercare by members of the PURPOSE research team. I coded each interview by hand using inductive, process coding methods. Throughout three rounds of coding, I combined, deleted, and redefined each code and theme that emerged.

Results

Preliminary Findings



Five final themes emerged from the interviews. Participants conceptualized their "scholar" identity through education, relationships, practicing inclusion, and finding voice culminating in a larger purpose of achieving future aspirations. The education and relationship themes had more literal concrete connections to the word "scholar." Whereas, finding voice and practicing inclusion are *how* the girls lived out the word "scholar."

Practicing Inclusion

You can always help, you can always help people who feel down. You can always stand up for them. Help them stand up for themselves." - Iris

"Like be respectful to others, be nice" – Jasmine

Finding Voice

So I like open discussions...yeah, the part that I enjoy is that being able to express myself and tell them what I feel. And hearing other people express themselves as well." - Azalea

Future Aspirations

"Like you should live your dreams to the fullest because you only live once. So you should live your life to the fullest and you should try to accomplish your dreams. Even if they feel so very far away, you can still gradually step closer to it to make that dream happen." - Rose

Implications

Referring to the students as scholars had very real, overwhelmingly positive, implications in the way the girls view themselves in the world around them. **There is power in the language we use to describe people.** Further questions emerged on whether similar themes would appear in interviews with non-Black girls or Black boys.

Key References

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PURPOSE

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