Scholar Identity Development: A Book Writing Journey and Tips for Undergraduate Mentors

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ABSTRACT. Faculty on campuses of higher education do not reflect the cultural diversity within the United States. To create a pipeline of diverse faculty, it is necessary to foster the scholar identity development of underrepresented undergraduate students via research experience and mentor-mentee relationships. To address this gap in the literature, a collaborative autoethnography was used to investigate factors that helped mold the scholar identity of 6 diverse undergraduate students (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, first generation status, and class) and worked with their mentor on the writing process of a book. Participant researchers included 5 women (83%) and 3 first-generation college students (50%), with ages from 22–31 years. Ethnic identity was split between Latino/a (n = 3; 50%) and White/European American (n = 3; 50%). As part of the book writing process, team members used technology (e.g., reference management, asynchronous communication, online resource evaluation, and QR Codes), allowing them to work remotely outside the confines of the conventional research lab. Students provided feedback, reviewed resources, worked on references, and completed other tasks. Participant researchers reflected on how their experiences in the research lab impacted their scholar identity development. Qualitative analysis produced themes defining scholar identity and elaborating on ways the experience expanded personal and professional growth. Scholar identity development was supported via a trusting and safe environment created in two primary ways: (a) valuing each person and (b) closing the power gap. A full description of themes and subthemes will be presented along with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Collaborative autoethnography, scholar identity, mentor, protégé

According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018), among full-time professors in higher education in fall 2016, the gender and ethnic composition was comprised largely of White men and women (41% and 35%, respectively), followed by 6% Asian/Pacific Islander men and women (6% and 4%, respectively), 3% Black men and women, and Hispanic men and women (3% and 2%, respectively). To compare, the United States population is composed of 61% White, 18% Hispanic, or Latino, 12% Black/African American, 6% Asian, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, and <1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2017). This means less than a quarter of higher education faculty are ethnic minorities and less than half of faculty are women. Less is known about representation in academia for other minority groups based on identities such as sexual orientation, first generation status, and socioeconomic status.

Lack of diversity in the professoriate is an issue because the diversity in the United States is shifting and leadership on campuses in the...
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country are not mirroring this shift. The lack of diverse faculty cannot be fixed by only modifying hiring practices; it is also important to increase graduation rates of minority students from higher education institutions and mentor them into graduate school. For example, Latinx people are the fastest growing population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This population growth is not proportional to the growth of Latinx students on college campuses, where Latinx students continue to be underrepresented (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). With such a low percentage of minorities earning a bachelor’s degree, this means an even lower percentage go on to graduate school. According to the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Summary report (Cope, Michalski, & Fowler, 2016) for the 2014–15 year, African Americans and Hispanics together comprised approximately 20% of students in masters only programs, 13% of students in doctoral only programs, and 20% of students in combined master’s and doctoral programs.

Obtaining a degree from a graduate school is one of many stepping stones in the pathway to becoming a full-time faculty member at an institution of higher education. Graduate and professional schools are the highest and most difficult prerequisites for the professoriate (Wilds & Wilson, 1998). As aforementioned, achieving this prerequisite is difficult for underrepresented minorities due to the disproportion of degrees obtained by minorities. Then, once individuals are in academia, they must progress through the process of tenure and promotion (Pedilla, 2003).

To increase racial and ethnic diversity within higher education and the professoriate, it is important to create a robust pipeline of ethnic minority students from high school, to college, and into graduate school. One important way to accomplish this goal is to foster the scholar identity of ethnic minority students. In the following section, we discuss scholar identity development, the importance of mentorship, and provide an example of how being involved in the book writing process as an undergraduate student can support scholar identity development.

Scholar Identity

Scholar identity seems to be a newer area of study within academia, with most of the research emerging in the past few decades. Most of this research has been focused on reducing educational disparities for racial/ethnic minority (REM) kindergarten to 12th grade students. As one of the pioneering researchers in this area, Whiting (2006) defined scholarly identity as viewing oneself as intellectual and capable in academic settings, and discussed the many factors comprising scholar identity. These factors include self-efficacy, self-awareness, racial/ethnic identity, academic performance, aspirations, and multicultural education. Whiting (2006) suggested students who develop positive views of themselves as scholars have better persistence rates in education, and this is especially important for students from culturally diverse backgrounds who are often underrepresented in gifted education programs.

Although much research in this area has been devoted to the scholar identity development of REM males in K–12 education, Rosenthal, Levy, London, Lobel, and Bazile (2013) argued that scholar identity is also a key component of academic success for undergraduate women and their pursuit of higher education. Moreover, Murakami-Ramalho, Militello, and Piert (2013) found that among graduate students, developing relationships with faculty were particularly important for student research identity development. Relationships between faculty and students can be enhanced by social justice-informed pedagogy, wherein teaching and mentorship is informed by understanding and deconstruction of privileged and marginalized identities. For example, Hendrix, Jackson, and Warren (2003) suggested multiple identity representation (e.g., referring to the multiple identities one person may hold including race, gender, sexual orientation) among faculty increases positive scholar identity development among students from marginalized groups. London, Rosenthal, Levy, and Lobel (2011) also found greater retention rates among female medical students whose faculty shared their identities when compared to students who did not have faculty sharing their identities. Thus, scholar identity can be fostered by seeing
role models in the field who are minorities and by receiving culturally sustaining mentorship.

Mentorship
Levinson (1978) described mentorship as one of the most important relationships a young person experiences in adulthood. Johnson (2016) argued the mentoring relationship is a unique relationship that is not often based on formal roles, but instead, based on the quality of the relationship and the goals set by the mentor and mentee. Johnson (2016) recommended the use of the Mentoring Relationship Continuum, which is a developmental model of mentoring relationships specifying the level of (a) engagement and (b) deliberate fulfillment of mentoring functions (e.g., accessibility, encouragement and support, and professional socialization). Castellanos, White, and Franco (2018) defined mentorship as a relationship intended to facilitate the development of a mentee (someone less advanced or younger), and they specified that both the mentor and mentee should grow and thrive as part of this relationship.

Castellanos et al. (2018) developed a multi-tiered model to mentor racial and ethnic minority undergraduates into the professoriate for their forthcoming book. Within this model, research is one of the pillars of higher education, in combination with academics, practical experience, leadership, and community service. Thus, one component of this holistic model involves scholar identity development. The model also highlights the importance of empowerment, cultural awareness, cultural validation, and social consciousness in scholarship. Often, research involvement for undergraduates is facilitated by research projects in class and extracurricular research lab experience. Research labs usually involve empirical projects, gathering data, analyzing data, and presentation. However, it is also important to consider how scholar identity development can be facilitated by involvement in other scholarly work, such as the book preparation process.

Scholarship and Book Writing
Writing in general, and writing a book specifically, can be an overwhelming, exciting, and humbling experience. Writing chapters and books is often a novel experience allowing authors to move beyond scholarship of discovery (e.g., empirical research studies) to application/engagement, integration of information across the discipline, and writing to educate and teach (Boyer, 1990). Being exposed to various forms of scholarship can expand student understanding of what scholars do and how creativity and innovation are part of academia. Students can benefit from exposure to this process, but book material can also be improved through involvement of students. Integrating diverse student voices in the writing and feedback process can improve the accessibility, resonance, and multicultural competence of the material. In the past decade, the American Psychological Association has aimed to increase diversity representation in curriculum (Boysen, 2011; Nguyen Littleford, 2013). Textbooks and curriculum should include representation across multiple aspects of cultural identities (e.g., racial/ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, first-generation). There are published resources for how to write research articles, but fewer resources for how to write books. Although authors might use undergraduate students as part of the book writing process, a literature search found no published work describing how this is done and how this process might benefit the scholar identity development of students.

Summary
In summary, diversity among professors does not mirror that of the United States. This is in part because minority students have low graduation rates and even lower rates of graduate school matriculation. Developing a scholar identity is essential for success in higher education especially among underrepresented minority students. Luebbe and Ogbaselase (2018) argued there is a strong need for qualitative research examining the experiences of underrepresented minorities in higher education. Mentors can help students in the development of their scholar identity, but the literature on fostering scholar identity among undergraduates is limited. Likewise, no literature was found discussing the potential role of undergraduates in the book writing process. To fill these gaps in the literature, the present study used a collaborative autoethnography to examine undergraduate students’ experiences through the book writing process with their mentors. Utilizing a qualitative approach can yield extensive data on the complexity of scholar identity. An autoethnographic approach removes the “yes or no” binary and allows for extensive examination of the motivations, barriers, and support of students which shape their scholar identity.

Research Question
We sought to answer the research question: In...
what way did participating in the book writing process and overall team experience contribute to scholar identity development? A collaborative autoethnographic research design was most appropriate due to the self-reflective nature of our research question. Goals included (a) to explore key elements impacting scholar identity development situated within a small group of diverse undergraduate students and (b) to identify tips for mentors interested in fostering scholar identity development within first-generation and underrepresented students.

Method

Collaborative Autoethnography

Collaborative autoethnography (CAE) is a qualitative research method consisting of two or more autoethnographers in a research team, with a shared experience told through the sociocultural standpoint of each individual in the group (Chang, Ngunjiri, Hernandez, 2012). Autoethnography is the process of using one’s own life story (autobiographical data) to gain understanding of sociocultural contexts, unpack social phenomenon, and interpret relationships between self and culture (Chang, 2008). In CAE, the autoethnographers reflect on their lived experiences and then collaboratively analyze and interpret the writings to find commonalities and differences (Chang et al., 2013). The experience of being undergraduate students developing our scholar identity was both an individual and joint journey; thus, we decided CAE was the best method to capture the experiences of six researcher participants.

Autoethnography and CAE are not common methods cited within psychology journals. However, they are powerful analytical methods more often used within education and other social sciences (Chang et al., 2013). In a recent article published in *The Counseling Psychologist*, Hargons, Lantz, Marks, and Voelkel (2017) used a CAE approach to analyze the leadership experiences of four diverse female counseling psychology students. CAE is unique because it is a method that sets the research team as the subject of their own inquiry and gives voice to the researchers’ experiences (Chang et al., 2013).

Philosophical paradigms. Using a CAE framework, the research team rooted our research in both the critical-ideological and postpositivist paradigms (see Ponterotto, 2005). Consistent with the critical-ideological approach, all participant-researchers engaged in question development, coding, and data interpretation process to ensure fairness in representation. We collaborated with one another and reflected on our identities as underrepresented scholars. By using a CAE approach, we aimed to also empower ourselves. CAE breaks down the barriers between the research participant and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005). Our values and subjectivity were forefront, but we also deidentified the data during the initial analysis process to decrease power and privilege (e.g., prioritizing certain experiences) and to increase objectivity as we identified prominent themes. The team’s choice to deidentify data reflects our postpositivist training and beliefs around epistemology; more specifically, the team’s belief that data can only imperfectly approximate reality and objectivity can help gain perspective (Ponterotto, 2005). The critical-ideological and postpositivist paradigms are often at odds with one another in how research is approached, and we sought to be as intentional with decisions as possible to balance the team’s beliefs.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness—which known as validity, rigor, and credibility—was sought by aligning our methods with standards for quality qualitative research outlined by Morrow (2005). Based on Morrow’s (2005) transcendent criteria for qualitative research, we reflected on our subjectivity, beliefs, and experiences throughout the analytical process. Consultation with our team occurred throughout the research process and preparation for a conference symposium. The present CAE included six participant researchers, and having this number of collaborators is a strength due to offering a variety in kinds of evidence (i.e., adequacy of data; Morrow, 2005). Adequacy of interpretation involved reaching consensus based on themes and balancing quotes with interpretation.

Regarding the social validity of the study, the experiences of underrepresented undergraduate students is an important area of study that aligns with social justice values of equity, representation, and diversification of the field of psychology. The consequential validity of our study (i.e., achieving our goal to positively impact social change and improve mentorship of diverse students) cannot be determined until our research is published. Our hope is that this study inspires discourse and contributes to better resources and mentorship of student scholar identity.

Participant Researchers

Six participant researchers engaged in CAE. The campus Institutional Review Board designated the
study as excluded from Human Subjects Review. The team consisted of primarily undergraduate students (n = 5, 83.33%) and one recent alumnus. The group included five females, one male, and three first-generation college students (n = 3, 50%). Ages ranged from 22–31 years, with three students identifying as nontraditional college students who returned to undergraduate college following a few years away from school (50%). Participant ethnic identity comprised of Latino/a (n = 3; 50%) and White/European American (n = 3; 50%). In addition to participating in this research project, most participants also held part-time or full-time jobs during the school year and identified as coming from working class backgrounds. Every participant identified with at least one underrepresented identity within academia.

Shared research experience and book process. All six participant researchers participated in the same research experience. While rewriting and revising The “Troubled” Adolescent: Challenges and Resilience Within Family and Multicultural Contexts (Lovell & White, 2019), JL (the third author of this manuscript) created a summer 2017 research team to allow students the opportunity to be involved in the book writing process. It was important to involve diverse student voices because one audience for the book is upper-division undergraduates. Key components of the experience are outlined to contextualize the participant researcher narratives and to allow mentors to read an example of what involving students in book writing may look like.

Tasks and responsibilities. The full team met at the beginning of the summer to discuss the book writing process and build relationships. JL conducted training sessions on how to evaluate online resources, write discussion questions and summaries, craft learning objectives, and use technology for productivity (e.g., reference management, Google Drive, online search engines). We then held weekly meetings with the majority of work completed remotely. Two teams were created: a resources team (six students) and a references team (two students). Within each team, students were assigned one partner who they were responsible for communicating with and checking each other’s work.

The resources team was responsible for reading assigned chapter drafts, identifying topics for elaboration, reflecting on cultural factors, creating reflective questions to help readers think deeply about the content, reviewing and adding discussion questions and resources, and adding key terms to the glossary section for each chapter. Another important responsibility was finding, reviewing, and evaluating QR codes (i.e., in-text resources such as videos, audio clips, or readings) to make the material relevant and interesting for diverse audiences. Each team had a week to review one chapter, and then the following week the same chapter would be reviewed by a different team to evaluate the resources and feedback provided by the first group. The references team was responsible for using Mendeley, a reference-management software plug-in for Microsoft Word, to enter missing references, link references, edit or add missing information to these references. This team also reviewed and drafted chapter abstracts and learning objectives for each chapter. This team had a week to review each chapter, and shared the workload by having one person work on odd-numbered chapters, and one on even-numbered chapters. In the last weeks leading up to submission, this team also worked on compiling the final glossary.

Use of technology. Being able to participate in the book process and research team was largely dependent on the team’s ability to utilize technology, work remotely, and communicate both asynchronously and synchronously. Technology allowed students to work on the project because most team members were working part or full time, not living on campus, and/or providing for families. Utilizing tools like Google Drive enabled the team to work remotely and outside the confines of the conventional research lab. Use of Mendeley allowed the references team to work remotely and ensure content was given appropriate credit.

Including QR codes and links to resources in each chapter enabled the inclusion of relevant and easily accessible material for students to deepen their understanding of supplemental content on cultural topics influencing the mental health experiences of youth (e.g., youth caregivers, school-to-prison pipeline, racial justice, and sexual minority youth). Numerous students expressed an interest in being involved in research teams during the semester but could not fit it into their schedule, and so meeting over the summer also increased inclusion and diversity of team members.

Cultural identities and relationships. Throughout the research and book process, our team sought to foster strong relationships and cultural sharing. During each team meeting, the team discussed situations in which we felt confident, were struggling, and could improve upon. JL also contributed to these discussions, and would share her own
moments of pride and insecurity (e.g., imposter phenomenon) throughout the book process. These regular check-ins helped the team grow closer.

By the end of the summer, the team had reviewed and added resources for 9 of the 12 chapters. Six students decided to remain involved during fall 2017 to finish the other chapters, finalize the glossary, and submit the manuscript in February 2018. During spring 2018, the same group of six students decided to conduct the present study to reflect on how the experience impacted their scholar identity development. Initial results were presented at the 2018 American Psychological Association Convention (Lovell et al., 2018), and the full results are presented in the present manuscript.

**Researcher-as-instrument statements.** Involvement in this manuscript was offered to all participant researchers. However, the majority of participant researchers graduated and moved from the area. Thus, only two from the original team decided to participate in authorship of the manuscript for publication. In qualitative methods, we recognize that the authors’ subjectivities can influence the research process and analysis (Morrow, 2005). In this CAE, the first two authors were participants in the study, and the third author is their mentor. At the time of data collection, Jorge Cabrera was in his senior year with interests in health care policy for undocumented children in California. He is a Hispanic, heterosexual, able-bodied, lower middle class male born in Mexico raised in the United States. He is married and a father of three children. Jennifer Gilmour was a second-year teaching assistant and research assistant in clinical evaluation and studying people living with first episode psychosis. She is a White, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender female from a rural, middle-class background. Jennifer Lovell was a second-year assistant professor during data collection. She is a White, multi-ethnic, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender female from a middle-class background.

**Procedure**

The participant researchers decided to take a rigorous approach to reflection and analysis of their own personal journeys (i.e., CAE). The team cocreated a list of questions that each person individually answered (see Appendix). These answers were then deidentified and qualitatively analyzed by the full group using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Google Docs and Nvivo were used to manage the qualitative transcripts.

**Qualitative questions and reflective practice.** Participant researchers conducted a meeting to formulate reflective questions to be used for analysis. We identified topics of interest for our reflective writing based on our identity development as scholars. Two primary topics of interest included (a) the mentor-mentee relationship and (b) the impact of cultural variables on individual scholar identity development. Scholar identity, for the purpose of this study, referred to students’ ability to see themselves as competent intellectuals who can function and perform as scholars (e.g., researchers, authors, editors). The six participant researchers formulated a total of six questions (see Appendix). Team members answered each question in a personal reflection free write form. These essays were used to identify initial themes, and then the team met together as a group to share, reflect, ask questions of one another, and finalize our results.

**Thematic analysis.** Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytic method for identification of patterns within data, analysis of themes, and reporting of qualitative results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For our study, we used an inductive thematic analysis approach which is a “bottom up” approach as compared to theoretical thematic analysis which is “top down.” We also initially used semantic themes, which is the process of identifying themes by looking at the surface meaning of the data and not looking beyond what is written. We followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) step-by-step guide for conducting thematic analysis.

Phase 1 included the process of familiarizing ourselves with the data. This phase requires a clear understanding of the research question shaping interpretation of the data. Our team had a clear understanding of the questions because we had formatted them together. We familiarized ourselves with the data by each reading the transcripts multiple times. The second phase, generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), involved each participant researcher identifying important segments of thought/words within the data to form codes. Codes are a general list of ideas. We worked in threeperson teams to generate a list of codes, and then the whole team met in-person to discuss the results and reach consensus. These codes were then sorted in to broader themes during Phase 3, searching for themes. We worked together to identify similarities and group the codes. We then began Phase 4, reviewing themes, the process of deleting/adding/merging themes so they best match the data.
Phase 5, defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), involved a process of defining each theme and refining our conceptualization. For this phase, our group went through the process of redefining, merging, and renaming our themes. Only the participant researchers were involved in phases 1–4 to avoid influence of the mentor. JL became involved in Phase 5 and 6 to help facilitate conversation and work with the group on how to finalize themes. We made sure we had clearly defined themes that did not overlap. The last step in the process, Phase 6, producing the report, involved finishing analysis of the data and sharing the results.

Results

Through thematic analysis, the six participant researchers reflected on their journey during the book contribution process and research team experience. We identified three overarching themes: (a) defining scholar identity, (b) sharing areas of personal and professional growth, and (c) outlining qualities of the trusting and safe environment that helped support scholar identity development. These themes along with subthemes are described in the following sections along with illustrative quotes.

Scholar Identity

Many of us considered ourselves researchers, but had never thought about how we define being a scholar. Based on our answers, three themes defining a “scholar identity” emerged from the data: (a) a scholar is in constant pursuit of knowledge \( (n = 5, 83\%) \), (b) a scholar engages in multifaceted roles \( (n = 5, 83\%) \), and (c) a scholar endeavors to educate others \( (n = 4, 67\%) \).

Constant pursuit of knowledge. Most of us \( (n = 5, 83\%) \) identified the pursuit of knowledge as one of the fundamental qualities of a scholar. For example, Participant Researcher (PR) 2 defined and self-identified as a scholar in the following way:

I define scholar as any individual who pursues knowledge, who has a passion for learning both in the classroom and outside of it. I have always loved learning and believe that my pursuit to gain more knowledge would identify me as a scholar.

Similarly, PR5 wrote, “I define a scholar as an individual who has reached a high level of education or knowledge through study and dedication… A scholar is also on a never-ending pursuit for more knowledge.” Both examples encapsulate our teams’ fundamental understanding and general consensus that the constant pursuit of knowledge is a quality of scholarship. Pursuit of knowledge also involved a “passion for learning” and an intention to “better the world” through knowledge. Thus, being a scholar is an active process of joyful learning and a drive to seek, find, and consume new knowledge that can improve social conditions.

Multifaceted roles. Another emergent theme from the data was an understanding that scholars engage in multifaceted roles \( (n = 5, 83\%) \). Scholars’ never-ending pursuit of knowledge is enhanced by their ability to take on multiple roles \( (e.g., \text{researcher, author, mentor, leader, activist}) \).

For example, PR4 stated “It really helped me see another side to the academic process, seeing the professional revision process.” The participant’s mention of “another side” of academia refers to the fact that scholars do not have a single role in the academic scene, and sometimes the challenging process of professional writing and editing is not shared with students. Also, this theme captured our excitement and the newness of being part of the book writing process specifically. With each new experience, developing scholars begin to broaden their understanding of the diversity of roles scholars can have as well as the diverse research methods and ways of pursuing and sharing knowledge.

Educating others. The third prominent theme within scholar identity highlighted the importance of scholars educating others \( (n = 4, 67\%) \). Educating others involved the dissemination of knowledge, raising awareness, and taking ownership of one’s social and professional responsibility. As PR4 explained, “a scholar is someone who works to educate themselves and then educate others, and seeks to explore ideas and answers on behalf of others.” PR6 wrote:

I also think that scholars have unique social and professional responsibilities. A scholar should understand some basic framework for their field so they can best communicate with others about topics within their field. I also think that scholars have the responsibility to not misinform others and accurately portray their field, as a sort of representative.

Thus, scholars have an ethical, social, and professional responsibility as they share knowledge and work to educate and collaborate with others.

Personal and Professional Growth

Participant researchers saw growth in their personal...
Empowerment and pride in self. Most participant researchers (n = 5, 83%) reported moments of empowerment and pride in self. Empowerment was connected to pride via feelings of confidence and competence in one’s work. In particular, feelings of empowerment and pride were described when personal contributions were valued by the mentor and other team members. One participant described a moment of pride when selected to be part of the summer book team. PR3 shared:

Being part of the book process has developed my identity as a scholar by giving me more tools to continue my own work in the future. It has given me the confidence and knowledge to continue exploring the realm of research.

Another participant (PR2) noted, “This experience also boosted my confidence, not necessarily because I improved my abilities, but from the general fact that I know now that I can work hard for academics that are self-selected outside the classroom.” In this case, PR2 felt empowerment in being able to choose to participate in academic activities beyond coursework. PR5 also stated, “The process of working on this project itself was empowering as well because Dr. Lovell was trusting me to read something that she knew was not perfect and she cared about my opinion.” Therefore, inclusion in the book process through self-initiation and in being selected by a mentor lead to student empowerment and pride.

Another component of empowerment and pride discussed by half (n = 3, 50%) of participants was receiving positive feedback from family about their contributions. For example, PR2 stated:

This process was not just a process for myself but rather a topic of discussion with my family, a pillar of pride actually. When I first told them that I got the job, they were thrilled I remember my father saying, ‘I knew you could do it, you smarter than you give yourself credit for.’ My family has been supportive through the whole process, they have listened to me talk about the interesting articles I am reading and rant on about the impact this can have on my pursuit of higher education. They have continued to express the pride that they have in the fact that I am finishing my degree as well as incorporating valuable academic pursuits outside the classroom that are only adding to my passion for learning.

Having family and friends understand, appreciate, and praise their scholarly pursuits was also reported by PR6:

Friends and family who are not interested in psychology still understand the impact of writing a book on a topic, and so their perception of scholarly identity got pushed on to me a bit. I can definitely feel like a scholar when explaining my work or interests to friends and family not in the psychology field.

Thus, feelings of empowerment and pride involved an individual process as well as a joint process of receiving positive feedback from others. Positive feedback from our mentor, family, and friends played a role in how we view ourselves as scholars.

Skill acquisition. Another prominent theme and area of growth reported by participants was skill acquisition (n = 5, 83%). Qualitative data revealed moments when students either learned a new skill or improved upon an already existing skill. PR6 stated:

After working on the citations in several of the chapters, I would return to previous chapters and realized my skill level had increased. Additionally, chapters were faster to complete as time went on, so I knew the work eventually fell into a comfortable territory. I took some pride in figuring out a new program (Mendeley) and realizing my skill and efficiency for citations and evaluating written work had increased.

Another participant noted, “…the impact that this experience had on my writing, editing, and research abilities was profound” (PR2). Yet another participant reported improving, “attention to detail in APA—really important for me as I advance towards a degree in psychology” (PR4). As would be expected from a research lab, participants were able to reflect on skills learned and skills that were enhanced. Practice using American Psychological...
Association (APA) style in writing, utilization of online/digital tools, and participating in editing and creating the glossary are some of the skills mentioned.

**Future goals.** Most participants mentioned reaching or setting goals as an aspect of their professional and personal growth \(_n=5, 83.3\%\). PR2 noted, “It is my hope that this experience will be a stepping stone to my pursuit of a masters and/or PhD,” and “The impact that this experience has had on my life as a scholar is imperative; this experience shifted what I believe I was capable of.” PR1 wrote, “For the first time I entertained the idea that I could publish a book.” Thus, the experience contributed to our ideas about what is possible and fit with goals of higher education.

Three participants reported feeling inspired to hold diversity in the field as a priority in their professional goals \(_n=3, 50\%\). This was demonstrated in PR4’s statement:

> Coming from a community made up of primarily Latino/a youth has also allowed me to see the disparities in education and scholarship opportunities for these youth and also motivates me to pursue scholarship and bring more education to communities like my own.

Diversity of gender was also mentioned as a concern. Only one of the participant researchers was a male, and he was inspired to join the field and become a scholar, “because I saw that males were a minority in the field of psychology.” Participant’s social identities based on ethnic identity, gender, and intersecting identities impacted our experience engaging in the book project as well as future goals. This theme is further exemplified by a quote from PR3:

> The academic field of psychology needs to be more diverse and I want to be a part of that change. I want to contribute my perspective and research ambitions. Being a woman of color motivates me to continue my work as a scholar and touch on topics that have never, or rarely, been explored.

The growth experienced by participants included developing awareness of possibilities and future career paths. For some, this growth also included an internal commitment to diversification of the field of psychology, and this served as motivation to reach career goals.

**Voice as a scholar.** All participant researchers \(_n=6, 100\%\) reported encountering struggles along their educational journey as well as ways they have overcome obstacles to get to where they are as scholars and students. PR1 described this experience:

> Coming from a lower middle-class family where my parents worked through entry-level jobs most of my life, I felt like an imposter taking on the identity of a scholar. My parents often struggled relating to my experience in high school and that gap of knowledge widened when I continued on to a four-year university.

The participants who identified as first-generation college students and working class felt like it took longer for them to understand and believe in themselves as scholars. Receiving validation from people outside the family (e.g., professors, mentors, friends) was sometimes important for these students to be able to explain to their family the importance of their work. Also, some participants discussed how the goals of this book project were different from the goals of other research labs, and so this influenced how they presented and explained their work. For example, PR4 wrote:

> In sharing with another research mentor, the main reaction was asking what product would come out of it, so I think it made me see it as more of a collaborative/other-centered research project because I didn’t see myself as a presenter of the project per se. I think it helped me look at myself in my future work as a scholar as also an assistant to others.

Thus, as students began to explain their involvement in the book to others as research, feedback from both friends, family members, and professionals aided students in being able to express their perspectives as researchers and scholars in the book process.

**Trusting and Safe Environment**

When reflecting on what made the book contribution experience meaningful and successful, all participant researchers \(_n=6, 100\%\) mentioned the importance of having a trusting and safe environment with their mentor and the team to support development as a scholar. Within this overarching theme, participant researchers identified
Feeling valued. One of the most persistent themes we found in our data was that each one of us felt valued \((n = 6, 100\%)\). This sense of feeling valued by our mentor is an important aspect of the mentor-mentee relationship, which benefited each member of our team. Feeling valued involved our mentor (a) acknowledging our individual contributions, (b) respecting each team member’s perspective, and (c) celebrating accomplishments.

Acknowledging individual contributions and showing appreciation is vital in creating a positive work setting for both mentors and mentees. A positive work setting then translates into productive and creative work, which benefits all involved. PR1 expressed feeling valued in the following way: “Compared to other research experiences I felt the most valued in this setting…there was no doubt that our opinions were valued.” PR4 expressed the sense of value in the progression of the project: “Seeing the work progressing and knowing I was a part of it…being asked to take on additional things towards the end (of the project).”

In addition to acknowledging contributions throughout the project, respecting each team member’s perspective was an important way in which participants reported feeling valued. Respect for difference in perspectives and beliefs helped improve the communication and collaboration between mentees and mentor. PR2 said, “She [Dr. Lovell] provided me with an incredible first experience in research that was informative, knowledgeable, and filled with respect and passion for this experience as a team.” PR3 expressed a similar experience, and wrote, “I felt respected and knew my thoughts were as well.”

Feeling valued also involved celebrating accomplishments. Celebrations vindicate all the hard work put into research projects or any other endeavors, and multiple participants mentioned how important it was to celebrate the completion of the project. PR6 expressed excitement of being included in the celebration of completing the project:

> After finishing all of our work, I really enjoyed being included in Dr. Lovell’s celebration party. Sometimes I feel like professors or professionals will tell the people working with/under them that they are important just to keep them doing their work, but being included in celebrating the final moments made me feel like I was genuinely appreciated. Knowing that I learned new skills and was appreciated for my work empowers me to continue research.

Thus, our results indicate students feel valued when mentors include perspectives of individual students, integrate student perspectives into group work, and celebrate accomplishments.

Closing the power gap. Closing the power gap \((n = 3, 50\%)\) is a key theme contributing to why participants felt valued and trusted. By closing the power gap between mentor and mentee, the relationship flourishes and it allows both parties to be vulnerable and human with one another. PR1 said, “It was the first time that where I did not feel treated as an inferior because of my status of an undergraduate student.” Similarly, PR4 described how the experience “helped reduce the ‘power’ gap between me and professors ‘they’re people too.’” Overlooking titles and seeing each individual as equal and having valued expertise helped to close the power gap in the “professor” and “student” relationship.

Participants referred to a few specific strategies for closing the power gap, and these included (a) seeking feedback and allowing students to edit the mentor’s work, and (b) being genuine. First, mentors seeking team feedback, opinions, and questions was mentioned as an important component of the experience that helped close the power gap and made participants feel valued. Communication is key in all relationships, and in the mentor-mentee relationship it helps foster a beneficial and productive environment for both parties. Our mentor also helped close the power gap by allowing students to edit her work, as PR2 explained, “The trust that Dr. Lovell extended to each of her team members was immeasurable, allowing us each to edit her words, provide ideas and suggestions, with her full support and enthusiasm even when things were stressful.”

Being genuine was another construct that emerged under this theme \((n = 2, 33\%)\). PR3 stated, “Dr. Lovell has a genuine desire to share her knowledge with others through teaching, mentoring and everything else.” PR2 also noted trusting Dr. Lovell because she was open about her own experiences, stating, “Dr. Lovell herself is very conscious of mental health and the welfare of others, I believe because of her personal experiences...
and her experience as a clinical psychologist.”

Therefore, our results revealed that, when mentors are intentional about sharing their own genuine experiences, weaknesses, and moments of pride and struggle, students feel a closer personal connection to their mentor. This, in turn, decreases the power gap between mentors and students. Additionally, when mentors allow students to provide the mentor with constructive criticism, it helps students grow in their confidence as scholars.

**Discussion**

This research sought to explore how contributing to the book writing process was meaningful for participant researchers’ scholar identity development. Through CAE and thematic analysis, we identified three primary themes: (a) defining scholar identity, (b) experiencing personal and professional growth, and (c) creating a trusting and safe environment. Illustrative examples of these themes and subthemes contribute to the literature on scholar identity development of diverse undergraduate students and have direct implications for mentors as well as research students.

First, participant researchers worked to define scholar identity. This theme included three subthemes: constant pursuit of knowledge, multifaceted roles, and educate others. Predominantly, scholar identity has been defined in the kindergarten through 12th grade using terms such as academic achievement, viewing oneself as intelligent or competent, and compatibility or representation with faculty and peers (London et al., 2011; Whiting, 2006). This study made unique contributions to the literature on scholar identity development, specifically for undergraduate students. We would add to previous definitions by highlighting the importance of viewing oneself as a lifelong learner, being adaptable to various challenges in academia, and disseminating knowledge as educators.

Second, participant researchers identified four specific areas of personal and professional growth including empowerment and pride in self, skill acquisition, future goals, and voice as scholar. One specific skill identified was use of technology. In particular, use of a reference management system, navigation within Word documents, and linking online resources are potentially unique and important skills when working on a chapter or book due to the sheer amount of content. Subthemes related to personal and professional growth align with some of the mentoring outcomes identified within Castellanos et al.’s (2018) model for mentoring racial and ethnic minority students. Desired outcomes included supporting mentee’s confidence, academic efficacy, goal setting, skill development, work ethic, feeling valued/mattering, connections to academic family, and pursuit of graduate school. Similarly, Chan (2010) highlighted the importance of developing protégé’s skills by discussing dreams and goals, building their confidence with positive words, giving quality feedback, giving practical support, and overcoming self-limiting beliefs. Our results support these findings by emphasizing skill development, goals, and empowerment, but a unique theme emerging from our data was the importance of finding one’s voice as a scholar.

Lastly, participant researchers found that a trusting and safe environment was important for achieving high levels of personal and professional growth. This theme included two primary subthemes: feeling valued and closing the power gap. Trusting and safe environments are created by mentors. Johnson (2016) identified five characteristics of excellent mentoring of undergraduate students which are consistent with our identified theme of creating a trusting and safe environment and our subtheme of feeling valued. In particular, Johnson (2016) argued a mentor should (a) approach and praise talented students, (b) be sensitive to unique cultural and ethnic backgrounds, (c) recognize students’ need of encouragement, (d) provide social support, and (e) allow students to develop their identities without withdrawing from the mentoring relationship. In her book on mentoring across differences, Chan (2010) identified ways to build trusting relationships with mentees. Two of these themes are related to our subtheme of closing the power gap: acknowledging limitations and acknowledging and repairing mistakes. Our findings provide new and unique information specifically identifying closing the power gap as an important component in the mentoring model.

**Implications for Mentors and Students**

The participant researchers used their experiences to identify tips for mentors who are interested in supporting the scholar identity development of diverse students. These tips are paired with actions students can take to improve scholar identity development.

**Offer and seek various opportunities.** Mentors should include students in a variety of research processes (e.g., book writing, meta-analyses, grant writing, institutional review board applications).
A range of experiences allows students to develop skills in multiple areas and helps students to explore their scholarly identity. When possible, some scholarship opportunities should be offered during summers or school breaks utilizing technology; participant researchers in the present study were able to participate in this research experience over the summer due to the hybrid nature of the project. Sharing technology tools with students can promote professional growth and awareness around ways to increase efficiency and productivity in scholarship. Providing flexibility with technology can make experiences accessible, but participants also found great value in the interpersonal connections when together as a team. Thus, finding ways to reinforce the relationship via in-person or video conferencing may be important.

Students should also seek experiences that give them a broader sense of scholarly work (e.g., chapters, empirical projects, literature reviews, teaching, presenting). This diversity of experience with projects and mentors will help them know what domains of scholarship interest them most and highlight their strengths (Ritzer, 2018). Seeking opportunities involves putting oneself out there and following up when faculty offer mentorship or research experiences. It may take a while to get a research position, but keep trying.

Close the power gap. Mentors should give students opportunities to provide them with open and honest feedback, concerns, and ideas they may have (e.g., editing written work, including resources they suggest for content). Also, mentors should consider sharing personal moments of both pride and struggles. When opening up to students, students feel less intimidated, and more like the research is a shared space for them to contribute their ideas, values, and skill sets. A mentor’s individual identity is complex and will not match each mentee, but mentors should find and highlight commonalities between their identities and that of their students. In doing so, mentors help close the power gap by creating a relationship no longer defined by superior and inferior. However, it is important to note that closing the power gap might be riskier for faculty who identify as minorities or are new to teaching. This was not evaluated in the present study, but would be an important area of future research.

Regarding students’ roles, mentees are encouraged to share their perspectives if a faculty member seems genuinely interested in receiving feedback. Sharing constructive criticism with a faculty member can feel intimidating. Students should not let imposter syndrome, or feelings of inadequacy, keep them from sharing ideas and opinions. Imposter syndrome, or phenomenon, refers to feeling like an intellectual fraud, experiencing difficulty internalizing achievements, and fearing exposure as an imposter (Clance & Imes, 1978). Imposter feelings are associated with increased risk for mental health challenges within female (Cusack, Hughes, & Nuhu, 2013) and ethnic minority students (Cokley, McClain, Encisco, & Martinez, 2013). It can often be challenging to find a balance between humility and confidence when speaking to a faculty member. Although mostly focused on graduate students, there are resources for identifying and dealing with imposter syndrome online via the American Psychological Association (e.g., Craig, 2018). Faculty can also share their personal experiences with imposter syndrome, and this can help foster discussion about “expertise” and whose voices are valued in academia.

Develop meaningful relationships based on respect and trust. Faculty should develop meaningful relationships based on trust and respect with their mentees through seeking alternative perspectives. Including diverse experiences within the research processes, providing students with positive feedback, and praising students individually for their work fosters positive relationship development. Diversity is a key component of creating a safe space in which mentees feel valued, and this includes diversity in content (e.g., social identities represented in research and scholarship), diversity in access (e.g., in-person, remote, accommodations), and diversity in the team membership (e.g., ethnicity, class status, first-generation, nontraditional status; Gallor, 2017). Mentors are encouraged to celebrate both individual student contributions and team successes because this can build a sense of ownership and joy in the learning process.

Students should look for mentors whom they identify with and/or hold similar values (Welsh & Campbell, 2017). Seeking faculty who are inclusive of diverse perspectives can be particularly important for underrepresented students. Students should also take moments throughout the scholarship process to acknowledge their individual contributions to projects along with what they appreciate about their mentor. Being responsible, taking ownership, and recognizing accomplishments can help solidify respect and trust between mentor and mentee.

Explore and define scholar identity. Mentors should collaboratively define scholar identity, and
ask students how they see themselves as scholars. Next, mentors can identify areas where students can grow in their definitions, such as seeing value in lifelong learning and seeing beyond course-based work. Students should continually revisit their definition of scholar identity and what it means as they navigate academia and explore areas in which they feel confident and areas in which they struggle or need further scholarly growth.

Conclusions
This research is unique because we used a collaborative autoethnographic (CAE) research design to explore the scholar identity development of a diverse group of undergraduate students. Our mentor provided us the opportunity to join her in the book writing journey, and as part of this journey we utilized technology to collaborate, develop our skills, and deepen our relationships. Our identities based on ethnicity, first-generation status, socioeconomic status, and gender were affirmed within the process. Three overarching themes emerged from the data (i.e., scholar identity, personal and professional growth, and trusting and safe environment). We believe the creation of a trusting and safe environment is the most important theme. Mentors are responsible for both creating this environment as well as identifying a diverse group of students (mentees) who will thrive in the environment. Once the environment has been created and the promising mentees have been identified, the stage is set for the development of scholar identity. Mentees are responsible for being open to the experience and using it to foster growth as a scholar. Scholar identity development is a continuing quid pro quo between mentor and mentee. Mentors provide opportunities which allow the personal and professional development of their mentees.

Although the depth of qualitative data is a strength that helps to illuminate the experiences of the participant researchers in this study, the results likely lack generalizability due to the small sample size and autoethnographic design. However, the findings can still be used to inform diversity-affirming mentorship approaches and inspire future research. Also, because we sought to focus on scholar identity development of undergraduates, we did not incorporate content focused on the mentor’s experience into our design. Future studies examining the relationship between mentorship style and scholar identity development should include both mentee and mentor perspectives to better represent this complex relationship.

Future studies can also seek to explore the impacts of a broader range of social identities on scholar development. Although the participant researchers sought to include information about socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic identity, gender, and first-generation status, we did not discuss the impacts of sexual orientation or ability on our scholar identities. The sample was not large enough to make comparisons between participants who identified within each of these diverse identities. However, exploration of scholar identity development among underrepresented students is an important area for future research. Also, one area of interest that emerged from our data was the impact of family and peer relationships on our scholar identity development, and this is also an important area for future study.

The scholar identity development of undergraduate students is important, especially for students who are underrepresented in academia. The mentee-mentor relationship allows both parties to grow and learn from each other. Within this study, a diverse group of participant researchers reflected on our experiences so we could share our insights. We hope our study will be used by faculty at institutions of higher education who aim to promote diversity, utilize technology, and foster the scholar identity development of undergraduate students.

References


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APPENDIX

List of Reflective Questions for Collaborative Autoethnography

1. How do you feel your identities (e.g., racial/ethnic, first-generation, gender, class, ability, sexual orientation, etc.) impact how you think about or perceive “scholarship”?

2. How did working on the book impact your identity development as a scholar? How does this experience compare to other research/mentorship experiences?

3. How did working with your mentor impact your identity development as a scholar (interpersonally)? In what ways did your mentor’s ethnicity/race and other characteristics impact your relationship?

4. What moments of pride/empowerment did you experience as part of this project?

5. How did working with your mentor impact your identity development as a scholar (interpersonally)? In what ways did your mentor’s ethnicity/race and other characteristics impact your relationship?

6. How do you define a “scholar” and how do you see yourself as a “scholar”?
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