A Case Study of First-Generation Students' Scholarly Identity Development

Ramón García, Assistant Professor, Resident Information Literacy Librarian

University of Northern Colorado

Darren Ilett, Assistant Professor, Teaching & Outreach Librarian

University of Northern Colorado

Background: The McNair Program

- First-generation, low-income college student and/or underrepresented in field in terms of race/ethnicity

- Support for first-generation students seeking graduate level degrees

  - Students design & complete research with a faculty mentor

  - Support for applying for & navigating graduate school

Authors' Involvement with McNair

- Embedded liaison librarians
  - Guest lecturers
  - Office hours
  - McNair events
  - Forthcoming credit-bearing McNair library course

Research Questions

- How do first-generation college students experience becoming scholars?

- How can librarians use what we learn from students' experiences becoming scholars to inform library support?

Selected Literature Review

- Beal (2007) is the only study specifically on McNair students' scholarly identity development

- Other studies described development of scholarly identity among underserved populations (Edwards, 2019; Luedke et al., 2019)

- Yosso (2005) provides asset-based framework of elements informing community cultural wealth: aspirational capital, family capital, navigational capital, etc.

- We add the focus on the role of the library

Methodology

- Qualitative case study
  - 22 participants
  - IRB approved
- Triangulation of data sources
  - Interviews at beginning & end of school year
  - 8 class observations
  - 4 assignments reflecting on scholarly identity
- COVID-19 impact
- NVivo software
  - Descriptive coding followed by theming the data categorially (Saldaña, 2021)
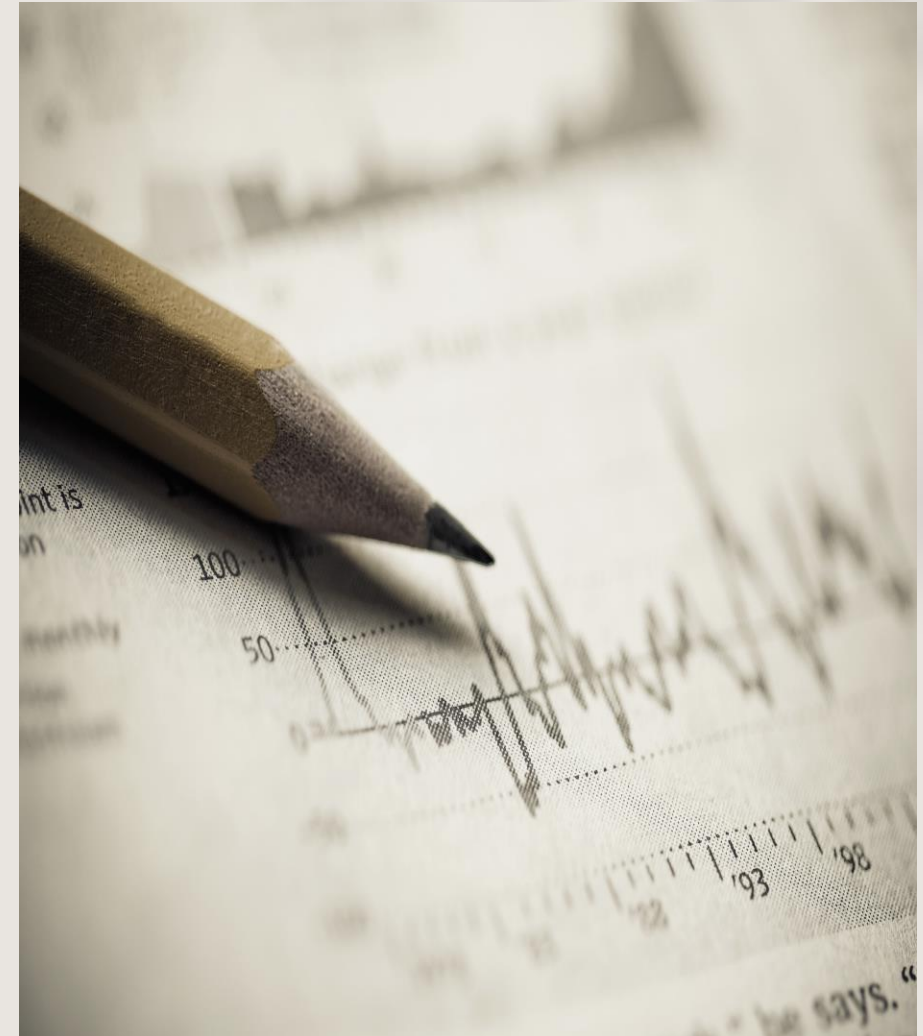
Analysis: Strengths

- Drive, curiosity

- Previous research experience

- Communities

- Research projects related to lived experiences

- Connecting multiple identities to self-image as scholar

Barry: Relationships that helped me push forward

"Even, like, the word [scholar] intimidates me a little bit, but I feel like the communities I've...I'm in, like, in the Mexican American community and Human Services, I've just built a lot of relationships that helped me push forward into this. And, again, it's, like, giving me more confidence to just, you know, toss that word around and call myself a scholar and just give me more confidence in regards to that kind of stuff."

Analysis: Barriers

- Discrimination
- Few role models on campus and in their fields
- Hidden curriculum
- Costs
- Tension between academia and students' values
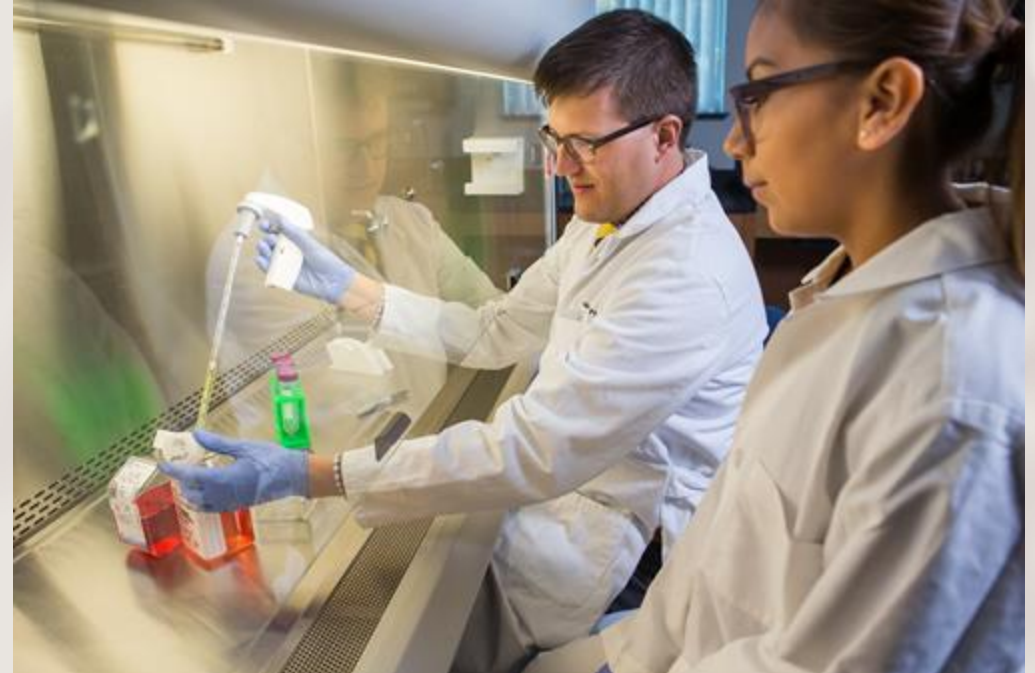
Violet: I'm here to break down those barriers

"The world is against me, I faced all of the challenges! [...] I'm first generation, me being who I am, I'm mixed—I'm Black and Hispanic—a woman, you know, [...] like, all things are put in place for...to see me not succeed. And that's, like, that's what made me succeed even more. [...] The tattoos and my skin color [...] do define who I am, but they don't, they don't affect my, like, my job etiquette, they don't affect my intelligence, like, I'm still doing the same things, even though I have tattoos, even though my skin color's darker, like, everything's just put in place to, like, not see us succeed, but I'm here to, like, break down those barriers."

Analysis: Support

- UNC faculty mentors

- Peers

- McNair staff

- Financial support

- UNC Libraries

Candy: Librarians are even really excited for you

"And sometimes they're even really excited for you as well. That's kind of motivating, going, 'He's excited, I should be excited cause this is interesting to other people as well.' […] For libraries, I really like that they've incorporated, like, these kinds of programs like McNair."

Implications: Fostering Students' Scholarly Identity

- Culturally responsive support

- Hiring and retaining diverse faculty and staff

- Involving diverse students and faculty in designing services, collections, and spaces

- Showing up as whole people

Selected References

Beal, R. Y. (2007). *"You mean they'll pay me to think?": How low-income, first-generation and underrepresented minority McNair students construct an academic identity as scholar* (Publication No. 3273744) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

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Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.) Sage.

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We welcome questions & comments!

- Ramón García, ramon.garcia@unco.edu
  - Twitter, @el_librarian

- Darren Ilett, darren.ilett@unco.edu
  - Twitter, @IlettDarren