THE STORIES WE TELL: NARRATIVES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG BLACK

UNDERGRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

THE STORIES WE TELL: NARRATIVES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG BLACK

UNDERGRADUATES

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Discourse surrounding religion in the American public sphere, especially as it relates to young adults, primarily exists within *church decline narratives*; or the declining significance of faith traditions and institutions. Yet, when a framework that dismisses the role of religion and spirituality is utilized for interpreting and making sense of young adults' spirituality, interesting, revitalizing, and innovative ways in which young adults are doing spirituality and religion remain obscured. Thus, scholars must employ a different set of theories and methodologies to excavate the spiritual and religious from ostensibly secular spaces and practices. In postsecondary education the need to better understand shifting terrains of spirituality and religion among young adults is particularly acute. As such, this study was primarily interested in how Black undergraduate students describe their spiritual and religious identity developmental processes before and during college. Moreover, I was interested in understanding what role college experiences and environments play in Black students' spiritual and religious identity development.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, AND OVERVEIW OF THE STUDY

In 2010, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released *"Religion among Millennials: Less religiously active than older Americans, but fairly traditional in other ways"*. Documented throughout this report were practices, beliefs, and values of religiously affiliated, nominally affiliated, and unaffiliated Millennials – young adults born after 1980 – and ways in which these beliefs and values informed individual perspectives on sociopolitical issues, such as the ideal role of government and the "legitimacy" of same-sex marriage. Ultimately, authors surmised that although fewer Millennials professed religious affiliation in comparison to older cohorts, young adults remained traditional in other ways. While a higher percentage of Millennials resisted formal affiliation with a faith tradition and attended religious services less frequently, their beliefs concerning life-after-death, heaven, hell, and miracles ironically mirrored that of Generation Xers (individuals born from the early 1960s to the late 1970s). Too, the frequency with which they engage in and perform religious practices, such as prayer, were similar to rates at which older Americans prayed when they were young adults. The oft referred to generational gap as it pertains to Americans embracing faith traditions may be more a function of temporality along the lifespan trajectory. Put differently, it seems that as Americans age, they tend to embrace religion in more traditionally legible and commonly understood ways.

Notwithstanding the Pew report's findings, discourse concerning religion in the American public sphere as well as personal domains, especially as it relates to young adults, primarily exists within what Miller (2012) describes as *church decline narratives*.

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Consider the following titles of various articles printed in major news publications like the Huffington Post and USA Today: "Is Religion in American in Decline?" (Briggs, 2011); "Survey finds 19% without religious affiliation" (Grossman, 2012); "U.S. Confidence in Organized Religion at Low Point" (Saad, 2012); and "The Black Church is Dead" (Glaude, 2010). For sure, Glaude's purposefully provocative declaration, which highlights the shifting political, social, and economic landscape of Black Life in America, indicts and calls into question the relevance of formalized and institutionalized churches in the midst of high unemployment, increased incarceration, and deplorable rates of poverty. Similarly, in their own particular way, these articles and authors buttress notions of a declining significance of institutional and organized religion in American life.

The church decline narrative conforms neatly with taken-for-granted notions of young adults' relationships to (or rather rejection of) formal authority broadly speaking (Erickson, 1968) and religious institutions in particular. Yet, when a framework that dismisses the role of religion and spirituality among Millennials is utilized for interpreting and making sense of young adults' spirituality, interesting, revitalizing, and innovative ways in which young adults are doing spirituality and religion remain obscured. Thus, as Miller (2012) argues, scholars must employ a different set of theories and methodologies to excavate the spiritual and religious from the ostensibly secular. In postsecondary education the need to better understand the shifting terrains of spirituality and religion among young adults is particularly pressing.

Several higher education scholars have begun this work. For instance, in 2003 researchers with the National Institute on Spirituality in Higher Education launched a

multi-year project to explore spiritual and religious development among students during their college tenure. This study was groundbreaking for several reasons. First, it was the first known longitudinal study of students' spiritual development ever conducted. Second, it provided large scale, quantitative evidence that spirituality was essential in students' lives. Last, sensitive to the need to expand how we research and analyze spirituality among college students, religious qualities and spiritual qualities were investigated disparately and new constructs and language were used to capture students' spiritual selves (e.g., equanimity, spiritual quest, ecumenical worldview) (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010).

Although, scholars continually advocate for greater attention to American college students' spiritual lives (Astin, 2004; Astin et al., 2010; Bryant & Schwartz, 2006), fewer researchers are primarily attentive to Black students' spiritual and religious experiences (Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002). Even fewer studies attempt to understand and capture the spiritual identity development of Black students (Tisdell, 2003). Not to ignore what has been written concerning this particular topic, there is an emerging body of literature investigating the influence of spirituality on identity expression among Black students (Stewart, 2002) as well as how Black students' employ spiritual and religious practices in order to persist through matriculation and cope with racial, academic, and emotional stressors (Herndon, 2003; Patton & McClure, 2009; Strayhorn, 2011; Watts, 2003). Nonetheless, most scholarly examinations of Black undergraduates overwhelmingly focus on their raced experiences, while neglecting to analyze how gender, sexual orientation, or religion influences their educational

experiences (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Harper & Harris, 2010; Patton, 2011). As such, compared to what we know about Black students' racial realities, very little information is available regarding their spiritual and religious developmental experiences.

Explicating spiritual and religious identity developmental trajectories of Black students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) before and during college was the central concern of this dissertation. More specifically, I was interested in understanding how Black students tell their stories of identity development, both prior to enrolling in college and during their undergraduate years. In this chapter I present a statement of the problem that was addressed, the purpose and significance of my study, definition of key concepts critical to the investigation, and an overview describing how this dissertation is organized.

Statement of the Problem

I will refer to the problem that the core of this study attempts to respond to as *mishandling identities.* Mishandling identities captures a phenomenon whereby educators (e.g., faculty and student affairs administrators) offer misguided programmatic and counseling approaches that do not adequately account for critical aspects of students' multifaceted identities – or what Harper, Wardell and McGuire (2011) have termed *complex individuality*. Further, mishandling identities speaks to a lack of intentional educational environments and spaces constructed in postsecondary settings for students to critically reflect on and interrogate their full personhood. Although educators mishandle other facets of students' identities (e.g., socioeconomic

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class), in this dissertation I will focus primarily on spiritual identities and ways they intersect and interact with other dimensions of Black students' identities – namely, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

As it pertains to the content and form of Black students' spiritual identities and developmental processes, several reasons explain why educators mishandle identities. First, there is a lack of scholarship that explicitly explores this present, yet under examined phenomenon among Black undergraduate students (Pew Research Center, 2010). This is unsurprising considering the paucity of developmental theories and studies that explicitly attend to minoritized students' perspectives and experiences (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). Second, researchers who consider Black students' spiritual lives overwhelmingly engage the social, academic, and emotional functions of religious and spiritual practices. Put differently, rather than pursuing "what constitutes Black undergraduate students' spiritual selves and how this develops over time", scholars routinely ask, "how does spirituality or religion function to improve persistence and graduation rates, coping, and sense of belonging" (see Patton & McClure, 2009 and Watt, 2003 for notable exceptions). While the latter line of inquiry is paramount for redressing educational inequities, often researchers implicitly render the former set of questions subordinate and less important. Lastly, mishandling identities occurs when educators fail to account for students' multiple identities and instead, take a "one-identity-at-a-time" approach (Jones & McEwen, 2003; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Below I expound upon each of the aforementioned explanations.

Marginalizing Minoritized Students in Student Development Theory

Student development theorists, historically, failed to fully represent varied voices from minoritized students in their developmental models (Evans et al., 2010; Patton et al, 2007). As such, a range of theories dealing with psychosocial, moral, and cognitive identity development among undergraduate students privilege the experiences of White, heterosexual, males, while simultaneously disadvantaging students of color as well as working class, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons. This observation holds true for foundational and contemporary theories examining spiritual development among undergraduate students (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Considering that a substantial body of empirical evidence establishes how race and racism play a significant role in the educational experiences of minoritized students (Fleming, 1984; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper, 2012b; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzegerald, & Bylsma, 2003; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2009; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), to not probe how race influences students' spiritual development seems to signal a flawed scholarly project at best. Similarly, this critique resonates with the under examined developmental experiences of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Black students (Howard-Hamilton, 2004; Patton, 2011; Patton & Simmons, 2009). As such, educators who consult student development theory and scholarship in order to gain a deeper understanding of Black students' developmental needs in general and spiritual developmental needs in particular are woefully underserved. Thus, researchers broadly interested in Black students' developmental processes and more specifically concerned

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with Black undergraduates' spiritual development must generate resourceful

scholarship so that educators may better serve students and avoid mishandling

important aspects of their identities.

Still, educators must be cautious as to how educational "problems" are

investigated within the context of Black students' spiritual lives. Below I offer an

admittedly abbreviated consideration of how academic and public discourse

surrounding Black women and men in postsecondary education render scholarly

inquiries into Black students' educational experiences a tenuous intellectual endeavor.

Problem-Oriented Research and Black Undergraduate Students

Scientific research is usually problem-driven (Patton, 2002). Meaning, intellectual

projects are often activated by focusing on a particular problem to be solved. Of course,

not all problems are created equal. Certain postsecondary educational problems are

more than objects or processes of analysis that academics spend careers examining

within the silos of ivory towers. Other issues are elevated to local, state, and federal

concern, galvanizing energies from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. A

pertinent and illustrative example to consider is discourse, research, and policy

initiatives aimed at increasing college completion.

College completion, or the lack thereof, draws concern from many stakeholders.

Educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, policymakers, and philanthropic

foundations consistently commission and produce reports, convene meetings, and

create programs to improve persistence and graduation rates among undergraduate

students (Complete College America, 2010; Lumina Foundation, 2012). Although these

efforts focus on all students, public and academic discourse surrounding low persistence rates and college completion is very much raced and gendered. In one popular narrative highlighting low graduation rates, it can be effectively argued that Black and Latino students are the characters and Latino and Black men play leading roles.

Consider the following titles from several policy reports released in the last two years: The College Completion Agenda: 2011 Progress Report, Latino Edition (Lee, Contreras, McGuire, Flores-Regade, Rawls, Edwards, & Menson, 2011); The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color: A Review of Research, Pathways and Progress (Lee & Ransom, 2010); Ensuring America's Future by Increasing Latino College Completion: Latino College Completion in 50 States Executive Summary (Santiago & Soliz, 2012); The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males (Schott Foundation, 2012). While there are publications that attempt to constructively complicate this discourse (Harper, 2012a), most reports and articles reiterate a narrative that constantly positions Blacks and Latinos in a state of perpetual educational crisis. This crisis narrative often limits the scope of scholarly inquiries. Jackson and Moore III (2008) refer to this trend as the persistent and peculiar pattern of scholars to study Black students in relationship to problems.

The emerging body of scholarship that explores religion and spirituality among Black college students is one small, but telling example of how the "racial/ethnic minority student departure crisis" (Museus, 2007, p.5) over determines research on Black undergraduates. Spirituality is often considered as a resource to manage and deal with problems Black students encounter at PWIs, such as social isolation, low academic

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expectations from professors, and peers' suspicion of their intellectual capacities

(Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Herndon, 2003). While

educational challenges facing Black women and men "indisputably warrant ongoing

scholarly examination, aggressive intervention, strategic institutional leadership, greater

transparency and accountability, and bold policy responses" (Harper, 2012a, p. 4), such

a narrow focus forecloses other important analytical and educational lines of inquiries.

In fact, primarily focusing on the institutional "problems" Black students face has limited

attention paid to Black women because of their educational success relative to their

male counterparts.

Black students' educational existence is more than crisis and researchers must

disrupt this narrative to more fully understand undergraduates' complete selves. As

such, researchers must challenge the often taken-for-granted point of departure –

improving persistence and graduation rates – when studying Black undergraduates in

order to provide a more nuanced understanding of how Black students participate in the

universal process of seeking and discovering meaning and purpose in their lives and

rethinking themselves and their relationship to the world around them. At least one way

that researchers can challenge race-only representations of Black students is by

simultaneously attending to multiple aspects of students' identities.

Intersecting Identities

A majority of scholarship on student identity development analyzes one aspect

of students' identities at a time (Evans et al., 2010; Harper, Wardell, & McGuire, 2011).

Whether considering race, gender, sexual orientation, or spirituality, researchers often

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consider a single social identity category in their studies. In an earnest attempt to provide more textured presentations of students' identities several scholars have introduced useful and clarifying frameworks to research and analyze identity expression and development (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2003; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Stewart, 2008, 2009; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). By incorporating different conceptual models and theoretical frameworks – such as Multiple Dimensions of Identity and Intersectionality, respectively – scholars are beginning to represent students in ways students see themselves.

Nevertheless, recent student development literature on intersectional identities among college students typically has not employed Intersectionality in order to understand how spirituality, race, gender, and sexual orientation simultaneously shape the experiences of Black college students (see Dancy, 2010 and Stewart, 2002 for notable exceptions). While other social categories warrant further attention when considering Black students' identity development, my emphasis on spirituality and the ways it intersects and interacts with race, gender, and sexual orientation are warranted considering how salient these identities are in college students' lives (Dancy, 2010; Harper, 2004; Howard-Hamilton, 2004; Patton, 2011; Patton & McClure, 2009; Patton & Simmons, 2009; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Attending to these particular identities simultaneously will allow educators to respond responsibly to students' complex individualities. As such, educational environments and services will help students resolve (potential) tensions surrounding interacting identities and effectively negotiate

(sometimes) conflicting aspects of their multiple selves (Harper, Wardell, & McGuire, 2011).

As some critically cast Intersectionality as a buzzword (Davis, 2008), it is important that I articulate how I understand the intellectual legacy of Intersectionality and the import it holds for the present study's design. Although Intersectionality has a long history within the writings of women of color and the long tradition of Black Feminist writings (see Collins, 1991; The Combahee River Collective Statement, 1983; hooks, 1990), Kimberlé Crenshaw is often credited for providing a comprehensive articulation of the concept (Crenshaw, 1989 & 1991). Introduced as a corrective to both Black liberationist and mainstream (White) feminist movements' neglect of gender and race, respectively, Crenshaw (1991) demonstrates how these political struggles often ignore the unique marginalization of women of color. The simultaneous discrimination Black women are subjected to – as women, as Black persons, and as Blackwomen – is not fully accounted for through narrow(er) frameworks of Black liberation (re: male liberation) and mainstream feminism (re: White women rights). Instead, Crenshaw posited Intersectionality as a theoretical tool to better capture the raced and gendered oppression Black women encountered in their daily lives. Crenshaw outlined three forms of Intersectional analysis that is necessary: structural, political, and representational. Essentially, Cresnhaw argued that examinations of racism must be gendered and critiques of sexism must be raced.

Within the context of the present study on Black undergraduate students' spiritual developmental processes, Black Feminism's framing of Intersectionality not

only calls attention to how social identity categories interact on the intrapersonal level –

meaning, how students understand themselves as simultaneously constituting and

occupying multiple categories. But also attends to how power and privilege operate to

oppress some, while advantaging others. Or, as Collins (1990) describes the matrix of

domination: the interlocking systems of oppression of race, gender, and class. This form

of Intersectionality focuses our attention to the margins within the margins in order to

understand how certain dominant narratives and discourses (Representational

Intersectionality) and institutions (Structural Intersectionality) unjustly hide the lived

realities of those pushed to the fringes.

Considering these aforementioned problems leading to mishandling identities

among Black undergraduate students, one could reasonably conclude that educators

are not well equipped to address students' spiritual developmental needs. Thus, a study

that examines Black students' spiritual identity developmental trajectories, and how

race, gender, and sexual orientation inform these processes, is warranted.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black undergraduate students

enrolled at PWIs develop spiritual identities prior to and during college. Furthermore,

this study provides much needed insights into Black undergraduate students' spiritual

lives that will assist educators in their efforts to support students' spiritual

development. As discussed throughout this chapter, researchers are increasingly

investigating college and university students' spiritual and religious educational needs.

Yet, comparative energies are not being invested to make sense of and better

conceptualize Black students' spiritual developmental trajectories. This study responds

both to development theorists' calls for analyses that consider an intersectional

approach to students' spiritual identity (Evans et al., 2010; Tisdell, 2003) as well as

educators who are particularly interested in the role of spirituality and religion among

Black undergraduate students (Dancy, 2010; Patton & McClure, 2009; Walker & Dixon,

2002; Watt, 2003).

Research Questions

The primary and guiding research question that this study addressed: how do

Black undergraduate students describe their spiritual identity developmental processes

before and during college? Three additional sub-questions were also explored: (a) what

are Black students' conceptualizations of spirituality; (b) what factors influence

students' spiritual identity development; and (c) what is the relationship between

students' gender, sexual orientation, and racial identities and their spiritual identity

development?

Significance of the Study

The import of this study is cautiously ambitious, attempting to contribute

theoretically and methodologically to the study of student identity development as well

as offer practically useful implications for educators tasked with the responsibility of

cultivating student development on college and university campuses. Theoretically, the

central concern of this study engages an under-conceptualized and under-theorized

area of student development scholarship; namely how Black undergraduate students

develop spiritual identities prior to and during college. Further, by being sensitive to

how spiritual identity development processes are gendered and raced and interact with one's sexual orientation this study responds to educators' call for more scholarly work that employs intersectional analysis. Also, somewhat indirectly, purposefully attending to interacting identities challenges an (un)intentional historical bias within scholarship to not take seriously students' multiple identities.

The anticipated methodological contributions of the proposed study are threefold. First, by utilizing a qualitative method (Narrative Analysis) that seems underutilized in higher education research, this study expands the investigative tool kit by which researchers can potentially examine student development (see Jones, 2009 for a notable exception). Second, considering substantive critiques of linear, stage-based models, I intentionally resisted modeling and representing students' development as such. Rather, temporality and linearity was considered as two resources students could use, among others, to communicate their developmental processes (Mishler, 1986). Moreover, in this study I attempted to expand how a researcher's positionaltiy is situated within academic scholarship focused on student development theory, beyond simply naming certain social identities and experiences that may influence one's orientation and disposition towards the research topic. To put it differently, I attempted to self-reflexively make transparent my ideological and theoretical commitments that are likely to influence queries I pursue and my ultimate sensemaking of findings.

Lastly and arguably most important, the proposed study sought to render visible a salient, critical, yet underexplored aspect of Black undergraduate students' identities. As such, these findings can assist educators on college and university campuses

interested in develop programmatic initiatives, offer effective counseling approaches, and design educational environments to better support Black students' spiritual needs and aid in their developmental journeys.

Key Concepts and Definitions

In this section, I operationalize key concepts and definitions that are frequently used throughout this dissertation:

Black – Individuals of African descent who self-identify as Black and consider themselves to be a part of the African Diaspora.

Gender – Informed by Feminist Theory and Queer Theory (Butler, 2008; Collins, 1990), I think of gender as occupying at least three domains. First, and most importantly, gender is how one self identifies within traditional gendered categories (e.g., male, female) or outside of those traditional categories (e.g., transgender, gender queer). Second, gender is a social construct that explains what cultural communities validate as appropriate expressions of beliefs and behaviors for, traditionally speaking, women and men. Third, informed by Judith Bulter's performativity thesis, gender is established through both repetitive bodily acts and regulatory discourses that render certain gender expressions intelligible and acceptable, while delegitimizing others.

Spirituality and Religion – As I explicate in Chapter 2, the concepts of religion and spirituality are too diverse and contested to offer a succinct distinction. Yet, the following definition offered by Frederick (2003) is rather consistent with the overwhelming majority of higher education literature I review: "If religion and its

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constituent parts convey 'order' and the saliency of social institutions, spirituality

conveys creativity, the ability to invent, to reinterpret, to move beyond some of

the limitations of ritual and static notions of religiosity. The agency that

spirituality confers allow for active work in the public areas of life as well as the

more private areas" (p. 10). This tentative distinction between spirituality and

religion is complicated in Chapter 2.

Intersectional Identities – The interaction of an individual's multiple selves.

Although intersectional identities may seem to imply distinct spheres for each

social identity, these identities are always interwoven in ways that resist neat

reduction and separate categorization of each social identity.

Race – Informed by anti-essentialist and social constructionist critiques, I believe

"race is not based on biology but rather is a social construction influenced by

cultural norms and understandings about the relative merits of individuals from

different heritages" (Evans et al., 2010, pg. 15).

Minoritized – I borrow this term from Harper (2012b) who uses minoritized

instead of minority to "to signify the social construction of underrepresentation

and subordination in U.S. social institutions, including colleges and universities.

Persons are not born into a minority status nor are they minoritized in every

social context (e.g., their families, racially homogeneous friendship groups, or

places of worship). Instead, they are rendered minorities in particular situations

and institutional environments that sustain an overrepresentation of Whiteness"
(p. 9).

Sexual Orientation – Refers to an individuals' sexual attraction to other sexual
beings. This includes sexual attraction to individuals of the opposite sex (e.g.,
heterosexual).

Identity Development – Identity development is psychosocial, cognitive, and
expressive. Psychosocial development concerns "the important issues people
face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationships
with others, and what to do with their lives" (Evans et al., 2010, p.42). Cognitive
development focuses on "how people think, reason, and make meaning of their
experiences" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 43). A less discussed aspect of identity is
what I will term expressive identity. Typically, expressions or behaviors are
thought of as mere external reflections of some internal disposition or core
personality. However, following what I believe is the logic of scholars like Bulter
(2008) and Mahmood (2005), expressive actions actually help to establish an
interior self, even before that interior self can be said to exist as a coherent
whole.

<div align="center">Organization of the Dissertation</div>

Chapter Two of this dissertation proposal contains a review of published
scholarship that examines spiritual and faith identity development among
undergraduate students more broadly and Black students more specifically. In Chapter
Two I also introduce theoretical frameworks that ground and guide this study. Chapter

Three contains my methodological approach, including details about the site choice, sample selection, and data collection and analysis procedures. In Chapter Four I present findings from this study and in Chapter Five I place my findings in conversation with literature presented in Chapter Two. I conclude Chapter Five with implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Religious, spiritual, and faith phenomena among young adults are studied across multiple academic disciplines and fields, ranging from religious studies, sociology, education, history, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology. Each discipline and field, with its particularized norms concerning what and how individuals and social processes should be studied, emphasize different concerns. Further, intradisciplinary dialogues contest the very meanings of the concepts religion and spirituality; troubling presumably too narrow or too broad conceptualizations of these terms. As such, attempting to transverse multiple disciplines, as are my intentions, proves to be at times a disorientating endeavor. Yet, I believe, these intersections of contradictions and concurrence provide a productive intellectual tension. With this in mind, I engage most directly the fields and disciplines of higher education, sociology, religious studies, and psychology, selectively borrowing from anthropology.

Organizationally, the literature review proceeds as follows: first, I discuss multiple methodological approaches to studying religion, spirituality, and faith, attempting to bridge disciplinary dialogues. This section offers a more macro-level approach that identifies (some) broader trends and themes, with less critical attention paid to individual studies. I then critically examine literature pertaining to spirituality among undergraduate students at U. S. colleges and universities. More narrowly, I review scholarship that investigates spirituality, religion, and faith as it relates to students' identity formation and lived experiences. Then, I examine studies specifically related to spirituality and religion among Black women and men in college. Throughout

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the literature review, I discuss gender-specific trends when these issues are salient to the framing of a study or reported in the findings.

Crossing (Disciplinary) Borders: Various Approaches to Studying Religion and Spirituality

Spirituality, religion, faith, and belief are often used interchangeably (Astin et al., 2010; Bender and Taves, 2012; Dancy, 2010; Fowler, 1981; Mattis, 2000; Mattis & Jagars, 2001; Stewart, 2010). While there is space for potential overlap among these concepts, most researchers treat spirituality and religion as two distinct, yet related, phenomena. Stewart (2010) offered one definition of spirituality that is extremely consistent with how higher education scholars conceptualize this concept:

> Spirituality is the engagement of 'big questions' (Parks, 2000) about meaning, purpose, belonging, and values that may transcend the organizational and doctrinal dogma of religion (p. 10).

As stated above, spirituality is often defined in contrast to and broader than the presumably parochial preoccupations and doctrinal commitments that are said to characterize many religious and faith traditions. In addition, some have argued that spirituality is multidimensional and thus not exclusively the province of those who engage in specific institutionalized, religious practices (Mattis, 2000). Conversely, religion is often associated with a specific organized faith tradition (e.g., Islam, Buddhism), with a particular historical legacy and certain external behaviors and practices (e.g., reading of sacred scriptures, attending synagogue, and tithing). Overwhelmingly, most scholars in higher education focus on spirituality (or faith), while

remaining sensitive to the ways spirituality can be enacted, expressed, and achieved

through religious practices (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Parks, 2000).

Traditionally, both psychologists and scholars whose work is foundationally

based on psychosocial human development models (Fowler, 1981; Mattis, 2000; Mattis

& Jagers 2001), approach religiosity and spirituality similarly to Stewart's (2010)

definition. Religion is typically measured by considering institutionally sanctioned

involvement (e.g., church attendance) and adherence to specific theologies (e.g.,

inerrancy of the Bible). Conversely, spirituality (or faith) is assumed to preexist and

extend beyond faith traditions and thus, is engaged at the individual or belief level

(Mattis & Jager, 2001). In this vein, studies point to physical, psychological, and

emotional benefits associated with particular worldviews or orientations (spirituality) as

well as participation in faith-based institutions (religion) (Blaine & Crocker, 1995). For

instance, spirituality and religion arguably help people cope, resist, and manage a range

of stressors including, fear, anxiety, and guilt. Typically, consistent with disciplinary

norms, the individual remains the unit of analysis. Spirituality or faith, thus, is

understood as an internal, pre-cultural object or mental state (Bender, 2007) that

reflects how individuals frame, interpret, and make sense of their life worlds (Fowler).

Resisting this tendency, some psychologists have argued for a more relational

framework when studying spirituality and religion as phenomena (Mattis, 2000; Mattis

& Jagers, 2001). This turn in methodology emphasizes human ecology and pays closer

attention to socializing institutions and agents, across various relational domains.

Further, this framing attempts to capture how spirituality and religion *produces*

affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes and how those outcomes inform and

structure relationships to self, family, communities, and society writ large.

Sociologically, the unit of analysis being individuals' interactions with and within

institutions, in part, focuses on political and socioeconomic functions of formal religious

and spiritual organizations within society. At least two trends within sociological studies

of religion are: (1) projects concerned with religious institutions and spiritual beliefs'

role in producing pro-social and pro-democratic sensibilities (Smith, Christoffersen,

Davidson, & Herzog 2011; Smith & Snell, 2009), and (2) those that consider how

typologies of identities mark distinctions between groups of people making competing

cultural claims (Bender & Taves, 2012). In the latter grouping of studies, spirituality and

religion are not approached as static concepts that exist identically across disparate

contexts (Bender, 2007; Bender & Taves). Rather, researchers attempt to understand

how various communities and individuals discursively deploy terms such as spiritual,

spirits, religious, and authenticity to make claims about what they value and find

important (Bender & Taves). Moreover, sociologists who incorporate anthropological

and historical analyses of religion and spirituality, wrestle to understand how certain

notions are a part of longer historical theological lineages and how these notions are

authorized through rituals and everyday practice.

Another trend in sociological studies of religion and spirituality, especially when

focusing on young adults and youth culture, highlights "positive" benefits associated

with participation in religious institutions. For instance, these studies posit that youth

who are actively involved in faith institutions are less likely to commit crimes, smoke

cigarettes, abuse drugs or alcohol and conversely, are more likely to exhibit educational

resilience, attainment, and achievement (Barrett, 2010; Miller & Dixon-Roman, 2011;

Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009). Further, faith institutions are said to

promote social order in economically oppressed communities and offer social and

human capital to young adults whose networks are traditionally circumvented in this

regard (Barrett; Smith & Denton). Ostensibly this research seems overwhelmingly

positive, promoting social stability and pro-social development.

 However, Miller (2012), a religious studies scholar whose work largely focuses on

youth culture, offers a prescient and immanent critique of such "buffering

transgression" studies: "the heuristic 'buffering transgression' is used to connote a

process that employs religion as a moral contraceptive – buffering threats of cultural

and social aggression" (Miller, 2012, p. 21). Put differently, the morality of religious

institutions is assumed and taken for granted, thus leaving un-interrogated what may be

potentially problematic or counterproductive about young adults relationship to and

involvement within religious institutions. The import of this critique is at least twofold.

First, it resists conceptualizations of religious organizations that present them as

primarily positive socializing institutions that produce *good* people. Second, Miller calls

for a complicating of the category of youth deviancy itself; particularly when such

notions of deviance are linked to demographics oft considered social problems.

 Arguably, and perhaps predictably, the question of how scholars should study

religion seems most contested in the field of religious studies. While my brief sketches

of disciplinary engagements of spiritual and religious phenomena in sociology and

psychology are decidedly narrow, my attempt to identify trends within religious studies

will, at best, be equally constrained. The study of religion within this field ranges from

historical treatments of individual faith and spiritual traditions that trace evolving

theological and community traditions; comparative studies that look across multiple

formal religious communities; close hermeneutical readings of sacred texts; inquires

that try to understand the role of theology in liberation struggles; and day-to-day

practices among spiritual and religious communities, or lived religion (Bender & Taves,

2010; McCutcheon, 2001; Miller, 2012; Orsi, 2003). Miller's (2012) work on religion, hip

hop, and youth culture is informative and influential to how I interpret the field of

religious studies; particularly studies of Black American religious and spiritual life.

Specifically, Miller approaches the study of religion with at least four intellectually

grounded assumptions: (1) nothing is unique or universal about religion; (2) religion, like

race and gender, is a social construct; (3) searching for meaning is not necessarily

religious; and (4) what has come to count as religious is a product of "disciplinary

manufacturing" that stands in for what ultimately amounts to human doing and activity.

With this in mind, Miller argues for a radical rethinking of the category of religion itself.

Instead of asking "What is religious?" Miller suggest scholars investigate, "*why* certain

social processes come to be understood *as* religious, and furthermore what these

classifications accomplish among particular groups across time and space." (p. 178)

Miller convincingly argues a need to methodologically expand what constitutes

legitimate religious sites (i.e., Hip Hop culture) and re-tool theoretically by employing

postmodern thought and social theories (e.g., Bourdieu's *habitus*, Derrida's *play*, and

McCutcheon/Beckford's *social formation/construction*). These points of emphases

situate religion among lived experiences and human subjects. Other scholars advocate

similar refocusing and reconsidering of the category of religion. Consider the following

put forth by another religious studies scholar:

> Rethinking religion as a from of cultural work, the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, concern what people *do* with religious idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them, and how, in turn, men, women, and children are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making as they make these worlds. (Orsi, 2003, p. 172)

This foray into disciplinary arrangements of religious and spiritual phenomena

makes poignantly clear that we cannot afford to take the categories of religion and

spirituality for granted and no single definition, conceptualization, or framework

suffices. Taken together, however, each disciplinary contribution provides a

methodological and theoretical assemblage (Miller, 2012) through which I explore

spirituality among Black undergraduate students in postsecondary settings. Before

offering an integrated framework, I consider how spirituality and spiritual development

historically and presently is studied within higher education. In addition, I summarize

burgeoning research pertaining to religion and spirituality among Black women and men

on college campuses.

Beyond (Scientific) Reason: Studying Spiritual Development in Higher Education

Instead of immediately offering varying definitions of spirituality and religion, as I

review thinkers and scholars who address these issues within higher education

scholarship, I will present each author's conceptualization of these terms within the

context of their studies. Admittedly, I engage the work pertaining most explicitly to

student development and students' lived experiences (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000;

Tisdell, 2003). However, considering my interest in Black students' lived religious and

spiritual experiences, such a narrow focus is justified. Nonetheless, informative

scholarship advocating more attentiveness to spirituality in student affairs practices

(Kocet & Stewart, 2011), pedagogical tools to enhance students' spiritual development

through classroom curricula (Bryan & Schwartz, 2006), as well as equity and social

justice appeals for appreciation of religious pluralism (Estanek, 2006) provide valuable

perspectives for scholars interested in varied intersections of higher education,

spirituality and religion. Further, as the first three scholars (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000;

Tisdell, 2003) whose contributions I critically review created faith developmental

models, I review them separately for clarity. Yet, I interweave throughout, discussion of

how each model relates to and builds upon earlier contributions.

Fowler's Stages of Faith

Faith development theorist James Fowler contributed much to our

understanding of humans' spiritual development over a lifespan through many

publications (Fowler, 1981, 1996, 2000). His most comprehensive perspective was

offered in *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development* (Fowler, 1981). Fowler

offered in this text his model for human's faith development. This research was based

on interviews with 359 individuals between the ages of three and a half and 84 years

old. The sample was overwhelmingly White – 97.8 percent to be exact. Moreover,

participants in his sample were 45 percent Protestant, 36.5 percent Catholic, 11.2

percent Jewish and 3.6 percent Orthodox; the remaining 3.6 percent of participants in his sample identified with other belief systems. It was from this sample, Fowler derived his theory of faith development.

Although the majority of Fowler's (1981) sample maintained religious affiliations, he did not conflate religion and faith within his own thinking. For Fowler, faith was both broader and more personal than religion. Fundamentally, Fowler argued, faith was universal – innate to every human being – and relational. Primarily faith concerns a quest for meaning and how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. Moreover, faith for Fowler meant an immense engagement with one's imagination, particularly through religious and secular symbols, rituals and images. It is worth noting, Fowler himself never offered his theory as universally applicable; rather, he suggested that the descriptions were generalizable and could be tested across cultures. For Fowler, development theory was always broad, general, and formal and therefore unable to capture developmental particularities.

Fowler's (1981) faith development model consists of one prestage and six stages: primal faith (Prestage 1), intuitive-projective faith (Stage 1), mythic-literal faith (Stage 2), synthetic-conventional faith (Stage 3), individuative-reflective faith (Stage 4), conjunctive faith (Stage 5) and universalizing faith (Stage 6). These stages are loosely organized around age cohorts.

According to Fowler (1981) during Prestage 1, an individual develops an idea of faith primarily based on their relationship to their main caretakers and consequently these sets of relationships helps the individual form their idea of "God". For Fowler,

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"God" encompassed secular and religious worldviews that reflected an individual's

primary source for making meaning of their world. As such, God could be an image, a

symbol or an ideology.

In Stage 1 (intuitive-projective faith), which correlates with the emergence of

language around age two, children construct images of God based on stories they hear.

Around ages six and seven young children move into Stage 2 (mythic-literal faith). While

children are developing their ability to see other people's perspectives and remember

stories told to them, children in Stage 2 uncritically accept these stories as truth and

adopt them as their personal beliefs. It is worth noting, that adults could display this

form of thinking as well, which is true of other stages too. As children move into Stage 3

(synthetic-conventional faith) around early adolescence, they develop the ability to

think abstractly and embrace ideas from peers, media and other social surroundings.

However, individuals still need external validation and affirmation for their faith and

thus, are still not able to view their faith critically.

In Stage 4 (individuative-reflective faith) an individual's concept of self becomes

self authored. Although Fowler (1981) initially stated that this stage occurs around

young adulthood, he later claimed this stage occurs between 30 and 40 years of age and

is often the result of relationship changes or environmental challenges (Fowler, 2000).

Next, Stage 5 (conjunctive faith) typically occurs around midlife or even beyond.

Characteristic of individuals inhabiting this stage is an ability to understand and

appreciate the complexity of life. Moreover, individuals within this stage are able to

deeply hold onto their faith commitments, while simultaneously being accepting of

other faith traditions. Folwer argued that few people ever reached Stage 6

(universalizing faith). Examples of persons who Fowler argued achieved this stage were

Martin Luther King Jr., Ghandi and Mother Teresa. Fowler's *Stages of Faith* model

continues to be widely adopted by researchers to explore college students' spiritual

lives and evolving perspectives (Evans et al., 2010).

One potential shortcoming in the application of Fowler's (1981) model to

university and college students is the model's lifespan spectrum and lack of attention to

young adulthood. This theoretical-developmental void is in part filled by the work of

Sharon Daloz Parks (1986, 2000).

Park's Forms of Knowing, Dependence, and Community

Parks's (2000) most recent articulation of her model is presented in *Big

questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning, purpose,

and faith*. Intellectually, Parks is transparent about her indebtedness to and

appreciation for Fowler's (1981) faith development model. One of Parks's central

contributions to the study of spirituality among college students is attention paid to the

temporality of young adulthood (ages 17 -29). Essentially, Parks does not perceive this

"era" as prolonged adolescence, but rather argues this time prior to entry into

adulthood represents a fertile developmental stage where life's meaning is made and

re-made. Parks argued that this era, though fraught with ambiguity and ambivalence, is

also marked by vulnerability and promise.

Parks's (2010) integrated model of spiritual development is based on over 30

years of research, teaching and counseling with young adults in postsecondary

education institutions (e.g., Harvard Divinity School, Whitworth College), workplaces and religions organizations – both formally and informally. Unlike Fowler (1981) it is not clear the religious affiliation of Parks's participants. For certain, the difficulty of securing and providing a demographic profile of participants over a 30-year period is formidable. Yet, without this knowledge readers are unable to understand how faith and religious traditions may or may not be reflected within Parks' model.

Similar to Fowler (1981), Parks (2010) argued that faith and spirituality are centrally about processes of making meaning of self, the world, and "God". Faith, as Parks described, is "the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience" (p. 7). Accordingly, this seeking and discovering of meaning occurs in at least three domains: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Cognitively (or forms of knowing), Parks was not interested in the content of what we know, but the internal structures through which we frame our knowing. Intrapersonally (or forms of dependence), Parks was concerned both with how meaning is created as individuals seek to balance tension between their inner voice and external influences as well as the role of affect and emotions in the development of one's faith. Essentially, this domain is attentive to individual's interiority – "a dialogue with one's self" (Parks, 2010, p. 85). Lastly, interpersonally (or forms of community), Parks explored the various mentoring communities (e.g., colleges and universities) where young adults' develop meaning. For the purposes of this literature review, I focus on Parks' explication within the first two domains – cognitive and intrapersonal development.

Parks (2010) described five forms of knowing that occur across four

developmental periods – adolescent/conventional, young adult, tested adult, and

mature adult. She argued that the first two forms of knowing – *authority bound* and

unqualified relativism – typically occur during the first developmental stage of

adolescence, but could last throughout one's entire life. Authority bound represents a

form of knowing based primarily (if not exclusively) on an external Authority embodied

by an individual person, yet most often "functions in diffuse but subtly powerful forms

that pervades a person's conventional ethos: media… culturally affirmed roles and

personalities… and custom" (pp. 54-55). Also, this form of knowing tends to be dualistic

and individuals may emerge from this *form* when their lived experiences prove

incongruent with their ways of thinking. Parks' second form of knowing unqualified

relativism is characterized by an individual who embraces all knowledge as relative;

meaning "all knowledge is shaped by and thus relative to, the context and relationships

within which it is composed" (p. 57).

Probing commitment represents the third form of knowing and is associated with

Parks's (2010) developmental stage of young adulthood. Individuals embracing this form

of knowledge construction make tentative and sometimes fleeting commitments, yet

they are a result of critical reflection. The fourth form of knowing*, tested commitment*,

corresponds with Parks' tested adult developmental stage. At this point, an individual's

form of knowing is no longer defined as divided. Conversely, "one's form of knowing

and being takes on a tested quality … a recognition that one is willing to make one's

peace and to affirm one's place in the scheme of things (though not uncritically)" (p. 69).

Lastly, around midlife, individuals develop a *conventional commitment*. Persons who display this form of knowing are able to embrace paradoxical thoughts and ideas. Referred to by Parks as mature wisdom, one is able to remain firm in one's own beliefs, yet appreciate the validity of another contradicting perspective.

In addition to the five forms of knowing discussed above, Parks (2010) also privileged emotions as a critical component within the process of faith development. More specifically, Parks explores sites of relational dependence to access the affective dimensions of meaning making. Similar to cognitive modes of knowing, each form of dependence correlates to one of Parks's four developmental stages. During adolescence, individuals may be described as *dependent* or *counterdependent*. Dependent individuals simply accept and hold familial and societal norms as their own. Those who are counterdependent have a qualitatively different relationship to Authority than persons who are dependent and behave in ways that are in direct opposition to Authority figures. For example, a counterdependent teenager would do exactly the opposite of what authority figures ask her or him to do.

During young adult status, individuals develop a *fragile inner-dependence*. Parks (2000) carefully noted the difference between inner-dependence and independence; unlike the latter term's emphasis on individualism within Western culture, the former signifies the relatedness of human life. At this point, within the promise and vulnerability of young adulthood, individuals balance views of others with their own views. Parks offered a young plant emerging from the soil as a metaphor for individuals

during this stage. Feelings associated with this period include bewilderment, loss, and being at sea.

As tested adults, individuals develop *confident inner-dependence* (Parks, 2000). Here, individuals possess a greater capacity to configure her or his own values and demonstrates a greater equilibrium between inner self and external voices (i.e., mentors). Last, around midlife individuals develop *interdependence*, an affective place where one "must trust the truth that emerges in the dialectic, or better, in the communion between self and other, self and world, self and 'God'" (p. 87).

To be certain, both Fowler's (1981) and Parks' (2000) faith development models offer critical contributions to our understanding of meaning making processes among young adults in college and university contexts. Nonetheless, several critiques are worth noting.

First, each model is based on stages. There are many critiques of stage-based identity models. These critiques include the presumed linearity of development, the notion that an individual exhibits one form of knowing or one form of dependence at a single time, and the unexamined relevance of racial and ethnic culture in faith development processes (Evans et al., 2010; Tisdell, 2003). Based on the racial composition of Fowler's sample, one must question the utility of his *Stages of Faith* for understanding spiritual and faith development among students of color. Moreover, as Fowler's study was cross-sectional in nature, his ability to speak to development over-time should be received with serious caution (Evans et al., 2010). Similarly, Parks's amalgamation of multiple research endeavors as well as informal interactions over 30

years raises questions regarding her ability to draw conclusive findings about development over-time. Stated differently, neither Folwer's nor Parks's sampling and methodological choices could allow them to effectively speak to individuals' developmental processes over time.

Lastly, though Parks (2000) posited that her model is attentive to affective aspects of faith development, her articulation of various *forms of dependence* are extremely limited in this regard. At best, Parks's model described potential feelings and emotions resultant from individuals' shifts in ways of thinking and knowing. Consider, for instance, how explanations for authority bound (form of knowing) and dependent/counterdependent (form of dependence) mirror each other. Overall, the cognitive components and affective domains in Parks's model seem equally preoccupied with how individuals make meaning based on relationships to knowledge sources such as people, media, and environmental cues. Thus, the affective domain becomes less about how individuals engage their feelings and emotions as epistemological sources for knowing. Some scholars have argued this limitation seriously restrains the efficacy of Parks's model as an interpretive framework for the experiences of Black women (Watt, 2003).

The lack of explicit articulations pertaining to the influence of race and gender in student development theory in general (Patton et al., 2007) and faith development models in particular remains an ongoing concern (Evans et al., 2010). Nonetheless, Elizabeth J. Tisdell's (2003) scholarship offers much needed insights into how culture is always present during one's spiritual journey (Evans et al., 2010).

Tisdell's Culturally Relevant Spiraling

Published within the last decade, Tisdell's (2003) *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education* created space for a discussion of how additional social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, inform and are informed by faith and spiritual development. While Parks (2000) and Fowler (1981) each considered development over time as presented through stages of change, Tisdell's focus is less invested in outlining a developmental model, per se. Her primary concern is to provide insights into intrapersonal and social mechanisms (e.g., spiraling backwards, rituals, symbols) by which spiritual development is facilitated, as well as intersections between individual's multiple identities and spiritual journeys.

Tisdell's (2003) conceptualization of spirituality is based on semi-structured conversations conducted with a racially and religiously diverse group of 31 adult educators. Within her sample, there were 22 women and nine men. Racially, nine were White, four were Black, four were Latina, three were Asian American, one was American Indian, and one was of East Asian descent. Tisdell purposefully selected participants who were educators working on *cultural* issues in adult and higher educational settings and who considered spirituality to be a significant component of their work. From her findings, Tisdell offers a multifaceted conceptualization of spirituality:

> Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people are interrelated …
> spirituality is about an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the
> interconnectedness of all things ... spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-
> making … spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the
> learning environment … spiritual development constitutes moving toward
> greater authenticity or to a more authentic self … spirituality is about how
> people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic

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processes, often made more concrete in art forms such as music, art, image, symbol, and ritual which are manifested culturally … [and] spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise (pp. 28-29).

Evidenced in her first descriptive statement, Tisdell acknowledged spirituality and religion as occupying distinct, yet interrelated domains in peoples' lived experiences. This is particularly true for individuals who were reared in a faith tradition. Religions, according to Tisdell, are organized institutions that include theological doctrine, expected behaviors, and established faith communities. For some people, regulatory behaviors actually provide opportunities to engage with the sacred. For example, Ahmed Hasan (pseudonym), a Black Muslim man who participated in Tisdell's study, explained how praying five times daily allows him breaks throughout his day to focus on what is most important in life and reflect on his life's purpose. Yet, other individuals encountered spiritual experiences outside of religious contexts. Many participants in Tisdell's study discussed spiritual experiences through their engagement with nature, the cosmos or interactions with other people.

Moreover, consistent with Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000), Tisdell posited meaning-making as fundamental to what constitutes spirituality. Further, portraying spirituality as a journey to one's more authentic self, Tisdell mirrored Parks's and Fowler's final stages in which individuals are most committed to their inner-selves, while sustaining relationships with others. Yet, Tisdell did not represent development as progression through cognitive or affective stages. Instead, a central component of how Tisdell conceptualized spiritual development involved what she termed *spiraling back*.

When engaging one's prior religious or spiritual socialization, participants in

Tisdell's (2003) study described a process of spiraling back. Although many young adults

(particularly college students) either move away from or question faith traditions they

were raised to follow (Astin, Astin, Lindholm, 2011), significant childhood and

adolescent spiritual experiences still remain relevant, even if not for the same reasons.

According to Tisdell, spiraling back requires re-membering, or actively appropriating

new value to past religious or spiritual experiences, rituals and narratives so that they

become more consistent with one's current beliefs. Tisdell explained how one of her

participants who no longer identified as a practicing Catholic, still drew inspiration when

re-membering Easter celebration and the story of Jesus' resurrection. While the

resurrection of Jesus did not contain religious value in adulthood, the participant

described how the story provided strength and hope when she faced difficult situations.

Thus, spiraling back is an ongoing process that involves a reevaluation of enriching

spiritual practices or experiences from one's adolescent years to make them relevant in

one's present spiritual journey.

Another distinguishing aspect of Tisdell's contributions in comparison to Fowler

(1981) and Parks (2000) is her sensitivity to how culture informs one's spiritual journey.

Tisdell (2003) described culture as "a specific social group with a shared set of values,

beliefs, behaviors, and language, such as Black culture or Puerto Rican culture" (p. 37).

For Tisdell, culture was never peripheral, but always central to her participants' lived

experiences. This was especially true, Tisdell argued, for people of color in North

America whose racial identity often renders them presumably inferior by the dominant,

White culture. As such, culture was a central lens through which individuals in her study made meaning of spiritual and religious activities, symbols and rituals. One of Tisdell's participants' connections to Aretha Franklin's music effectively exemplified this assertion. Anna Adams (pseudonym), a Black woman raised in a Black Christian tradition who no longer identified with any organized religion, spoke of the ways Aretha Franklins' music had spiritual and cultural resonance in her life. Spiritually, Franklin's music touched Anna's soul and "[connected her] to something beyond [herself]" (p. 60). Culturally, Franklin's music reminded her of growing up in a Black community and invoked memories of "the way of walking, the way of talking … the music of the church, the choir" (p. 61). In this example, one is able to see how Anna's racial identity and being raised in a Black church tradition framed how she interpreted this spiritual experience of listening to Aretha Franklins' music. This, Tisdell argued, typifies the influence of culture on spirituality and spiritual experiences for *all* people.

Lastly, Tisdell's (2003) discussion concerning intersections of other social identities with spirituality undermines assumptions about all individuals following a single spiritual developmental path. Harriet Smith's (pseudonym) explorations of her sexual orientation reflect how other aspects of individuals' identities matter in their spiritual development. Harriet, a middle-aged White woman, was raised in a rural Southern working-class family and in a Pentecostal Church. She began to question her sexual orientation after her ex-husband (with whom she had parented two children) referred to her as queer. After he explained the term, Harriet agreed with his proclamation.

Raised in a geographical region oft-referred to as the *Bible Belt,* due to the infusion of a Christian ethos within the cultural and physical landscape, Harriet faced formidable external and internal challenges. When she sought ministerial counsel, homophobic religious tenets caused some ministers and clergy to invoke guilt within Harriet. Even further, her rearing in a Pentecostal church created internalized notions of homophobia, which made it difficult for Harriet to accept her emerging identity as a self-identifying queer person. Yet, it was not until Harriet experienced what she described as a miraculous healing that she believed God was not displeased with her being a lesbian. For Harriet, it was inconsistent to believe that God would heal her in the present life if she were to be condemned to punishment in eternity. Harriet Smith's case demonstrates how additional social identities (e.g., sexual orientation) influence spiritual development processes. More specifically, Harriet's spiritual journey illustrates additional challenges that may exist for individuals whose spiritual beliefs and spiritual communities conflict with other aspects of their identities.

Tisdell's (2003) central contributions to concepts of spiritual development consist of the following: (1) foregrounding culture as central, instead of incidental or peripheral, to how individuals interpret spiritual experiences and develop their spirituality; (2) paying attention to intersections of multiple social identities and spiritual development; and (3) providing spiraling backwards as an intentional departure from other models that present development through stages. Tisdell's latter contribution is of critical importance for scholars interested in the spiritual lives of Black and other racial minoritized undergraduate students, as she deconstructs the idea of normative

developmental paths for spirituality and faith. Stated differently, by acknowledging that no one model can reflect the myriad spiritual developmental trajectories of all students, Tisdell challenges the efficacy of stage developmental models in general and those based on predominantly White participant samples in particular.

Notwithstanding, there are at least two methodological critiques of Tisdell's (2003) study when considering the utility of her scholarship for young adults in college. First, no one in Tisdell's sample was presently enrolled in college and most participants were not of traditional college age. Second, most participants were reflecting on their development from years past, instead of reporting in real-time developmental processes and challenges. Essentially, each critique highlights the necessity for more scholarship to directly incorporate diverse students' voices in our search for the ways spiritual development occurs among college and university students.

Taken together, Fowler (1981), Parks (2000) and Tisdell (2003) frame how research on spirituality among college students is typically studied. This is certainly true for Fowler's and Parks's models (Dancy, 2010; Evans et al., 2010; Patton & McClure, 2009). Tisdell's relatively recent intellectual contribution, however, is a noteworthy step in the right direction by considering culturally diverse representations of spiritual experiences. While these scholarly investigations provide a critical overview of how higher education scholars engage spirituality and faith development among young adults, they offer little for understanding Black college students' spiritual experiences as they occur in real-time. In the next portion of this literature review I consider research conducted on Black students' spiritual and religious experiences.

BLACK STUDENTS' SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS LIVED EXPERIENCES AT

PREDOMINANTLY WHTIE INSTITUTIONS

Substantial evidence points to the historical centrality of spirituality and religion among Black communities (Charters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999; Jackson, 2005; Hunt & Hunt, 2001; Jagers & Smith, 1996; Mattis, 2000; Mattis & Jaggers, 2001; Pinn, 2003). In particular, Black Americans reportedly have higher levels of religious engagement and stronger religious beliefs when compared to the total American population (Charters, Taylor, & Lincoln). Likewise, relatively recent findings confirm that patterns of religious practices observed in non-college going Black populations are consistent among Black undergraduate students, namely higher frequency of religious practices among Black students in comparison to their White peers (Walker & Dixon, 2002). Burgeoning research pertaining to religion and spirituality among Black college students show that religion and spirituality matters in the lives of Black university students (Herndon, 2003; Constantine et al., 2006; Patton & McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2010; Watt, 2003). Both quantitative and qualitative studies illustrate that spirituality and religion are associated with several positive educational benefits for Black undergraduate students; particularly academic performance, coping and persistence and healthy identity development (Patton & McClure, 2009; Walker & Dixon, 2002).

In a quantitative study examining the relationship between spirituality and academic performance, Walker and Dixon (2002) had 192 college students (109 European American and 82 Black) complete questionnaires related to spiritual beliefs and religious practices. In their study, the authors measured spirituality (belief system)

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and religious practices (connected to formal church affiliation) as distinct constructs. Two significant findings emerged from their study. First, Black students were more likely than White students to embrace spiritual beliefs and demonstrate greater engagement with religious practices. Second, spiritual beliefs and religious practices were salient for Black students' academic performance. There was a positive correlation between spiritual beliefs and spring semester grade point averages (GPAs) and a modest relationship between spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and Black students' cumulative GPAs. It is worth noting that correlation does not establish causation.

Constantine, Miville, Wrren, Gainor, and Lewis-Coles (2006) investigated how spirituality and religion informed career development and vocational choices among a sample of Black undergraduate students. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Black women and four Black men attending a predominantly White, private university in the northeastern United States. Similar to Walker and Dixon (2002), Constantine et al. operationalized spirituality and religion as distinct concepts. Religion, the authors posited, referred to beliefs and behaviors prescribed by an organized religion. Conversely, spirituality represented "sacred nature of life in all of its forms and the manifestation of this belief in a quest for goodness and interconnectedness with other persons and things" (p. 228). These a priori definitions of religion and spirituality as separate concepts were consistent with their findings, as most students self-identified as spiritual, but not religious.

While some participants in Constantine et al.'s (2006) study did not identify a relationship between religion or spirituality and their vocational decisions, most did. For

instance, many shared that they believed God had particular plans for their lives and career choices. Due to this, participants felt it was necessary for them to serve others through their future employment. Also, for students whose spirituality was relevant to their academic and career choices, accruing financial means was secondary to actualizing their full personal and professional potential and ultimately being happy. Moreover, participants employed spiritual and religious practices to deal with and manage academic and career-related challenges.

Consistent with Constantine et al.'s (2006) reported findings, additional qualitative and quantitative investigations found that Black undergraduates who relied on spiritual resources, religious practices, and participated in religiously-affiliate organizations learned to cope with life and academic stressors, enhanced psychological resistance to demeaning racist stereotypes, gained motivation to persist through college, developed a sense of purpose (i.e., responsibility to younger siblings), engendered ethnic pride, increased their resiliency, improved their sense of belonging, and facilitated critical thinking (Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Dancy, 2010; Herndon, 2003; Patton & McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2002; Strayhorn, 2011; Watt, 2003).

Among a sample of 144 Black undergraduate students from three large PWIs in the mid-Atlantic and northwestern United States, Constantine et al. (2002) quantitatively explored relationships between spirituality, religious participation, religious problem-solving styles, and Africultural coping mechanisms. Overwhelmingly, participants self-identified as Christian (80.6 percent); a few were affiliated with other

faith traditions or religiously unaffiliated. The authors hypothesized that spirituality and

religious participation would predict styles of problem-solving and Afrocultural coping

among Black women and men in their sample. In fact, higher levels of spirituality were

associated with collaborative and deferring religious problem-solving styles as well as

spiritual-centered Africultural coping mechanisms. Intuitively, Constantine et al. argued,

this finding made sense, as students who recorded higher levels of spirituality would

rely more on spiritual resources to manage stressors in life. Also related to higher levels

of spirituality and greater religious participation were decreased use of self-directing

religious problem solving styles and fewer use of cognitive/emotional debriefing

mechanisms. Again, the authors posited these findings as unsurprising, considering that

self-directing religious problem solving styles and cognitive/emotional debriefing

mechanisms emphasizes self-agency as the primary means of problem solving. Some

highly religious and spiritual Black undergraduate students may perceive usage of said

coping and problem-solving styles as a lack of faith. Put differently, students'

conceptualizations of faith may preclude them from employing coping and problem-

solving styles to manage and deal with stress or challenges.

Inquiries grounded in qualitative methodologies have provided more nuanced

and textured representations of students' spiritual and religious coping strategies

(Herndon, 2003; Watt, 2003) and have illuminated the role of religion and spirituality in

students' lived experiences (Patton & McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2002). In their respective

investigations, Watt (2003) and Patton and McClure (2009) captured how Black female

students utilized spiritual and religious resources to cope, resist, and persist through

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college. Patton and McClure used a phenomenological approach to better understand how spirituality served as a source of strength among 14, self-identified Christian Black women. While Patton and McClure separated religion, spirituality, and faith in their literature review, the Black women in their study struggled to disentangle the three. Instead, living spirit-led lives were of greater import when compared to defining these terms and articulating relationships between each. Realities of race, one theme that emerged in the findings, were sources of stress among participants in the study. The students spoke of feeling alone and isolated as well as burdened to represent their entire race to White peers and faculty who may encounter few Black persons in their lives.

In response, most participants relied on spiritual beliefs and practices to manage academic and social obstacles. Patton and McClure (2009) argued that each Black woman followed a similar coping strategy. Initially, women would have instant-internal responses that included crying, becoming socially recluse, sleeping, or stressing out. Afterward, students reached out to friends, family members, and mentors for encouragement and support. Students would then read Bible scriptures, pray and finally, "leave it in God's hands". These women saw themselves as a part of God's larger plan and as such, found peace to endure their environmental and academic stressors. Moreover, prior personal traumatic events, including "domestic abuse, rape, single-motherhood, and working multiple jobs to make ends meet and support family members" (p. 47) convinced these women that they could overcome any and all obstacles and challenges they encountered in life.

Consistent with Parks's (2000) investigation of spiritual development in young adulthood, college provided space and time away from direct parental influence for these Black women to redefine their spiritual beliefs and religious practices in order to create better alignment with their personal convictions (Patton & McClure, 2009). However, many participants had to seek resources for spiritual development off-campus because they perceived little opportunities on campus to practice and exercise their spirituality.

Watt's (2003) four focus group interviews of 48 Black undergraduate women's experiential realities further confirmed that some Black female students relied on spiritual beliefs and religious practices to cope and psychologically resist racist and sexist stereotypes that inaccurately characterize them in demeaning fashion. Reflective of Black women's voices captured in Patton and McClure's (2009) study, participants in Watt's focus groups reported using spiritual beliefs to cope with stress from their home-to-college transition and traumatic events in life, such as the tragic death of a peer. Also, Watts' presented multiple non-material symbols and imaginings from which Black undergraduate women derived strength. For instance, sororities' crests inspired some women towards communal fellowship, sisterhood, and volunteerism. Women were also empowered by explicitly religious symbols like the Christian cross. Moreover, some described events where ancestors and spirits actively intervened in dangerous and unsafe situations they faced. These findings broaden our understanding of how spirituality informs Black women's college experiences by taking seriously intangible aspects of spiritual realities that are not easily reduced to cognitive framing. Instead, we

gain rich insights regarding how spirituality is more than a set of beliefs, but also includes domains where angles, ancestors, and spirits are *real* and actively influence the materiality of lived experiences.

In addition, Black undergraduate men were found to utilize spiritual beliefs and practices to persist through college (Dancy, 2010; Herndon, 2003). Herndon examined spirituality among 14 Black male students to understand how spirituality related to retention. To frame chronic racialized experiences his participants faced at their predominantly White university, Herndon presented the Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress (M.E.E.S.) model. Essentially, this model operationalized racial stress as mundane, extreme, and environmental. The prevalent and routine nature of racial stress (e.g., dealing with racial stereotypes) for Black undergraduate men rendered it mundane. Yet, the stress was also extreme due to the resultant adverse impact on Black male students' emotional health and self-confidence. Further, because the stress was imbedded within the institution's cultural fabric it was also environmental.

Herndon (2003) argued that spirituality was an under-examined resource Black undergraduate men in his study relied on to manage and cope with significant racial stress. In fact, spirituality bolstered students' resilience and provided a sense purpose for present and future tasks. Similar to some Black women in other studies (e.g., Patton & McClure, 2009; Watt, 2003), Black male students' prayed, read scriptures and inspirational writings, and attended church to manage and cope with academic obstacles and stress. Moreover, spirituality gave purpose to students' present and

future educational tasks, namely pursuing a bachelor's degree. Lastly, off-campus religious communities acted as extended families and provided networks where Black males received emotional support and sage advice.

Lastly, scholars have argued that spirituality plays a significant role in identity formation among Black women and men during college (Dancy, 2010; Stewart, 2002). For some Black undergraduate students in Dancy's and Stewart's investigations, spirituality and faith, respectively, grounded and facilitated integration of their multiple identities. Stewart sought to understand what role faith and spirituality played in five Black student leaders' efforts to integrate multiple sociocultural identities such as race, class, and gender. To make sense of students' identity negotiations Stewart relied on Fowler (1981) and Parks's (2000) faith-identity typologies. Each faith-identity typology describes how individuals make meaning and derive value from various relationships. Specifically, Stewart argued that each student reflected polytheist, henotheist or radical monotheist meaning making processes. Two students, Kashmir and Ophelia (pseudonyms), were described by Stewart as polytheist, which means both utilized multiple power and value centers. Participants like Kashmir and Ophelia made meaning of their identities and developed their values based on multiple relationships (e.g., sorority sisters) and these values changed as the relationships shifted in each environment. Conversely, Poke and K.B. (pseudonyms), exemplified a henotheistic meaning making orientation. As such, these students relied on one central source for meaning making and choosing values (e.g., family, college peers). Yet, their respective sources were not capable of supporting them during times of stress and crises. Finally,

Stewart stated that Sage (pseudonym) exhibited the most mature faith-identity

typology, radical monotheism. Sage placed her trust in one source and center of power

and her center was her interpretive lens for understanding and making sense of her

lived experiences and multiple identities. Stewarts' study represents one of the most

extensive engagements with Fowler's (1981) faith identity typology when exploring

Black students' identity development.

The emerging body of literature reviewed in this section offers timely

contributions to research concerning spirituality and religion among undergraduate

students. In addition to providing a better understanding of how race influences Black

students' spiritual and religious experiences, findings from the aforementioned studies

illuminate how many Black students at PWIs employed spiritual and religious practices

and beliefs to cope with academic and social challenges. Further, spirituality was found

to influence and ground Black students' multiple identities.

Notwithstanding, our knowledge of how spirituality and religion matter in Black

students' lived experiences remains relatively limited. Very few studies considered in-

depth how students' conceptualized spirituality, religion, or faith, but rather often left

these categories uninterrogated. Further, few studies (e.g., Patton & McClure) paid

particular attention to students' spiritual and religious socialization experiences. For

example, researchers (Dancy, 2010; Herndon, 2003) reported that Black students

utilized prayer to respond to and cope with environmentally induced racial and

academic stress. However, we do not know other information that would nuance how

prayer works in these students' lives. For instance, what these students' prayed about

specifically, what constituted prayer for them, what were their "theological" rationales for praying, how did they come to believe prayer was an effective coping mechanism, or whether prayer was a skill that they practiced and developed over time? (see Patton & McClure and Watt, 2003 for notable exceptions). Rather, we simply know that prayer was used to cope with stress.

These limitations are not a consequence of methodological mistakes, per se, but are a function of researchers' focus on finding solutions to Black students' racialized experiences on predominantly White campuses and scholars efforts to improve persistence and academic achievement among Black undergraduate students. While such a focus is warranted, it is a result of a persistent phenomenon of primarily studying Black students in relationship to problems, as explicated in Chapter One. Further, most of these studies leave unexamined the category of religion itself and take for granted what is "religious", routinely linking it to institutionally sanctioned activities within a faith organization. Investigations that rely on Fowler (1981) and Parks' (2000) faith development models reduce spirituality to individuals' quest towards meaning making across relational domains. To expand our understanding of spirituality among Black undergraduate students, I suggest employing an integrated framework most explicitly informed by scholars in religious studies, higher education, sociology, and psychology.

Consistent with Miller's (2012) approach, I do not assume a priori any notion of what is religious or spiritual on a universal, cross-cultural level. Instead, more emphasis is placed on exploring how individuals use and produce (and are produced by) these socially constructed categories. First, psychologists Mattis and Jagers' (2001) relational

framework is useful for considering how one's spiritual and religious socialization

experiences produce affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes. Second, sociologists

Bender and Taves (2012) are helpful in thinking through how different

conceptualizations of spiritual and religious are first authorized and then practiced and

how these practices and discourses help individuals mark identity distinctions between

themselves and others. For instance, identifying as spiritual, but not religious or

religious, but not spiritual. Third, Tisdell's (2003) idea of spiraling back offers a

productive contribution to understanding how individuals re-member and appropriate

meaningful past experiences in their developmental journeys. Lastly, I follow Miller's

suggestion to empty the category of religion by suspending the question: what is

religious about a particular phenomenon? Instead, by viewing religion and spirituality as

human activity not necessarily tied to institutionalized traditions, I emphasize what

people are doing, through discourse and practice, to reclaim identities and practices

sometimes considered oppositional to religion.

This integrated framework focused my dissertation on the following lines of

inquiries: (1) how were students' socialized to understand certain concepts, ideas,

symbols, and practices as religious, spiritual, or secular; (2) what institutions and agents

played significant roles in this socialization process, authorizing certain framing of terms

over others; (3) how do students understand their relationship to these various social

categories and how this marks distinctions between themselves and others; (4) what is

the multidirectional relationship between students' "beliefs" and "practices"; and (5)

what are the implications of each aforementioned question on students' identity

development and lived experiences across at least three domain – affective, cognitive, and behavioral?

In the next chapter I discuss how employing Narrative Inquiry will allow me to put this frame to work in order to understand students' spiritual developmental trajectories.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter I present the research methodology and methods I employed to examine spiritual development among Black undergraduate students. First, I discuss my epistemological framework to briefly explicate my relationship to this project. More specifically, I hope to make clear my commitment to reflexive scholarship, to productively wrestle with my subjective positioning throughout this research process and offer a reflection on my role as researcher, listener and the primary data collection "tool". Second, I propose Narrative Analysis as a qualitative methodology that is particularly useful for engaging presumably diverse spiritual developmental trajectories of Black undergraduate students. Lastly, I offer details about my research site, my participant recruitment strategy, and demographic profile of participants, data collection and analysis procedures, efforts I employed to ensure trustworthiness and reliability, and limitations of the study.

<div align="center">Epistemological Framework</div>

Ideological inheritances from the Enlightenment epoch remain embedded in evaluation standards of what constitutes rigorous research (Harding, 1986). Emphasis on neutrality, objectivity, generalizability, and reliability, for instance, largely influence how trained and lay consumers of scientific studies judge the quality of scholarly outputs. Some qualitative methodologists, challenging the appropriateness of such standards, have argued for different measures of quality or "good" science. For instance, they propose transferability versus generalizability, trustworthiness instead of reliability, and reflexive subjectivity rather than objectivity (Mishler, 1986; Patton,

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2002). Rather than trying to achieve neutrality and objectivity, some argue that making clear how one's positionality informs data collection and analysis processes more accurately represents research activities.

My own thinking concerning these issues is informed by feminist scholars' critique of androcentric and Eurocentric scholarship that attempts to pass as genderless and raceless, respectively (Collins, 1991; Haraway, 1988 ; Harding, 1986). Specifically, I find feminists' proposals for standpoint epistemologies intellectually and ethically persuasive. Choosing not to perpetuate a fiction and "desire to see from nowhere", standpoint epistemology calls for accountability through location (Haraway). Put differently, such a positioning requires scholars to reject the idea of a dispassionate or disembodied gaze and instead interrogate their "seeing" as products of occupied social positions (e.g., social class, race, academic) and technological mediation (e.g., data collection instruments, audio/video recorders). As Haraway, in concert with others, succinctly phrases – all knowledge is situated.

Yet, just how one is to systematically account for their positioning remains a challenge. Stated differently, what methodological procedures can be called upon to actualize such necessary, but difficult reflexivity? Qualitative researchers employ diverse techniques to engage their subjectivities. Some attempt to identify their "biases" and set them aside (e.g., bracketing in one tradition of Phenomenology) during analysis (Van Manen, 1990). Others bring multiple perspectives to bear on data analysis in order to enhance Inter-rater Reliability (IRR) (Patton, 2002). Essentially, both of these approaches and similar strategies aim to regulate subjectivities in an effort to decontaminate

research processes. However, I argue this analytical move supports a different fiction that imagines one can suspend and distance oneself from one's own subjectivities.

More ethically productive, I believe, are efforts to make transparent one's social positions and earnest attempts to trace how said positions mark data collection and analysis. Such strategies include dedicating sections of manuscripts to explicate political, ideological, and philosophical perspectives held by the author(s) (see Harper & Gasman, 2009 for an effective example). In contrast, other scholars allow their positionalities to surface at various points within the text and footnotes. I attempted to systematically interrogate and unveil my own sociopolitical and ideological locations through the following strategies: memoing throughout the dissertation process about affective and intellectual changes, epiphanies, and states of being; and making clear how I arrived at certain interpretative positions when competing conclusions could be reached. To this end, prior to discussing how I materialized this epistemological framework through employing Narrative Inquiry and what makes this methodological choice particularly useful for addressing my proposed research questions, I offer a critical reflection on my own spiritual developmental journey.

Role of the Researcher

This attempt at providing both a justificatory and explanatory accounting of my arrival to this topic of study, in many ways, offers an illustrative example of the impossibility of an objective researcher's position. That is to say, my entire life and developmental journey casts a haunting shadow onto this empirical investigation and as

such, it is most appropriate to state that this topic, spiritual identity development, found me.

While my mother did not raise me in church from the time I was born, my spiritual-religious journey did begin very early in my life. Infrequently, as an adolescent, my mom would take my twin brother, Donté, and I to church. Sometimes for an Easter service, decked out in our best K-Mart, two-tone blue suits with clip on bowties and other times enrolling us in a week-long Vacation Bible School, we found ourselves learning (and then reciting) Biblical parables, the Ten Commandments, and Jesus' Be-Attitudes. These earliest memories were my entrée into formal, institutionalized Christian faith. However, informally, growing up in a small town in southeastern North Carolina – a part of the Bible Belt – Christianity was literally and figuratively everywhere. The physical presence of cathedrals, storefront churches, and ubiquitously sprawling bumper stickers that read "Jesus Saves" or "Jesus is my co-pilot" were cultural mainstays. And although attending church was not an activity we engaged in regularly, I recall gracing meals (*God is great. God is good. And we think Him for our food. Bow our heads as we are fed. Give us Lord our daily bred. Amen*) and saying bedtime prayers *(Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake. I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen)*. In retrospect, my adherence to these acts of reverence and acknowledgment that of a Christian God were some of my earliest scenes of instruction (Awkward, 1999) in Christianity. More so, the very fact that these activities were routine for a "non-church-going" family speak to the larger community and familial ethos of what a participant in my study referred to as *culturally Christian.*

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Meaning, even for those of us who were infrequent attenders at weekly religious services, we still participated in practices reflective of and embedded in a theology of after-lives, souls, and a benevolent (re: great and good) supreme being who provided physical sustenance. While I would soon come to view these as vacant acts of religious piety, it taught me a powerful lesson: to be Black and to be southern was to be (at least somewhat) Christian.

For the sake of not allowing the shadow (my story) to speak too loudly and overwhelm, I will discuss three long-moments stretching from adolescent to present. The first long-moment covers ages 8-18. It was at the age of eight that I received salvation, accepted Jesus Christ into my heart, and was baptized. Looking back, this for sure constitutes a major turning point and defining moment in my life. About a year prior to this moment I spent the summer at Taylor Holmes Recreational Center, in the north side public housing neighborhood. It was during this summer that I me Luther H. Moore, III who, in addition to directing the recreational center, also was a Tae Kwon Do instructor and Christian minister. Little did I know at the time, he would soon become my pastor, Godfather, and undoubtedly the most important spiritual advisor in my life. In the meantime, after Tae Kwon Do class we would head to the second floor of the center where Mr. Moore would lead a Bible Study. It was my first experience with such lesson, but it was exciting. Learning Bible verses and singing Gospel songs in that game room-turned-sanctuary -- with its pool and foosball tables and chalk boards – led me to the realization that "I need to be baptized! I need to be saved!" At least that is what

Donté and I exclaimed to our mother, who at the time was cautiously curious and began to inquire into just what we were being taught.

Fast forward about 8 months and myself, Donté, and my mother, Latanya Howard, are standing next to a cold baptismal pool, dressed in all white, as on-lookers sang *"Take me to the water. Take me to the water. Take me to the water. To be baptized"*. It was in this Pentecostal-Apostolic community of about 50 consistent parishioners that I grew up over the next 10 years. It would be several years before my (step) Dad, Derrick Howard, would join the church, Emmanuel Temple. However, once he did he soon became a Deacon and my mother – who did everything from teach Sunday School classes, collect and count offerings, keep financial records, ushered, and planned events – never really had a title worthy of her distinction. In addition to the 30-mile drive to church, we spent countless of hours at Emmanuel Temple. As my brother and I were bridges to (re)introducing our parents to the Gospel, we became living examples of the Bible verse "the children shall lead them". Suffice it to say we loved Emmanuel Temple and soon begin to serve as Armor Bearers (re: mini-assistants) to Elder Moore, which only formalized our apprentice-mentor relationship.

More than anything, it was in the private moments in Elder Moore's church and Taylor Holmes' offices, ride-a-longs as he ran errands for work, and working the half-acre garden that were the most formidable in my spiritual development. As my first Black male mentor, he simultaneously modeled what it meant to be a Blackman in this world. Eventually, and perhaps expectedly, my brother I would become youth ministers at 16, participating in a range of ministerial activities, including leading prayer, teaching

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Sunday School and Bible Study classes, and praying with and for parishioners during alter call. I refer to this first long-moment as *structured sincerity* (Jackson, 2005). Meaning, that while my experiences were in many ways over-determined by environmental factors and agents, none of it *felt* forced and as such, allowed for experiences full of depth, meaning, and agency along my quest for a personal relationship with Jesus through, yet beyond, the rituals. For brevity, I left out moments of frustration, moments of inconsistencies, or even moments of questioning the validity of a God – a minor episode that pales in comparison to my third long-moment. Nonetheless, the larger arc holding this long-moment together is aptly reflected in what was shared above.

The beginning of my second long-moment coincided with my first year of undergraduate studies at Wake Forest University and lasted until my senior year. In contrast to the master narrative that students become less religious in college, my tenure exhibited an intensification of previous experiences. In addition to thinking about course selection, potential majors, and meeting new friends my brother and I were reflecting on ways we would promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We were to be both students and evangelical witnesses. Our first attempt at the latter involved a bi-weekly informal Bible Study, Men in Motion, which was held in our residence hall room. Specifically targeted at Black men, for half an hour a group of 4-8 of us would meet to review a Bible passage and then pray. Intimate and personal, this provided a space for those of us who were Christian-identified to maintain a level of commitment to values

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that we were raised with in a community of support. However, this group lasted through the fall of our first year.

After this group dissolved, I spent the remainder of the semester attending a few churches with several upper-class students. The defining moment of this long-moment arrived at the end of my first year. Before heading home for the summer I was invited by my friend and big brother, Cassiel Smith, to attend a weekend retreat at a church I visited once before. My only other interaction with the ministry prior to that moment was a campus bible study I attended where the youth pastor was teaching. I sat in the back for the majority of the meeting and swiftly exited disagreeing with some portion of the theology being taught. Little did I know, in just a year's time I would be standing in her position.

Called an Encounter, this weekend retreat launched my long-moment of intensification. To further clarify what I mean by intensification, I will share an illustrative example by way of a scene from that weekend. The 2.5 days were full of mini-lessons that covered topics such as forgiveness, healing, purpose, music and media – all in relationship to how we should govern ourselves as *true* believers. The Encounter's apex was on Saturday night when all participants gathered for a final lesson aptly titled *The Cross.* The thrust of the message centered around three conclusions: (1) we were all sinners; (2) Jesus died for our sins; and (3) because he died for our sins we were all somewhat responsible for his crucifixion. Thus, the question placed before us was: how do we respond with gratitude for such a faithful act of sacrifice? Replete with props worthy of a theatrical production (e.g., 6 foot wooden cross, crown of thorns that

was passed around to participants), the message was forcefully preached and ended with a clip from *The Passion of the Christ* – itself an *intense* visual dramatization of Jesus' death. In the midst of the clip, deep wells would begin as we were instructed to not turn away from the gruesome consequences of our savior's love-gift. Laid across the alter were 12-inch long, 1-inch wide nails that were painted red three-quarters of the way up the nail, indicative of blood. We were then told to grab a nail once we were ready in order to never forget what great price was made on our behalf. For you, the reader, imagine the imprint such an experience branded on one's conscious. This is intensification.

I refer to this second long-moment as my *zealot pursuit of authenticity.* Energized by *my encounter*, I returned to Wake Forest for my second year with both a revitalized commitment to evangelism and dogged dedication to *becoming* a true believer. Along side my brother, I doubled down on sharing my beliefs in hopes of converting peers on campus – at one point standing on the dining hall table asking my peers to join me in prayer – and street witnessing throughout Winston-Salem. I spent more time reading the Bible and praying then I ever had before with the goal of committing at least two hours a day to these activities. My ultimate goal was to be an *authentic* believer – an authenticity based less on my interpretation of the Bible and more on what I was being taught. A goal that was ever elusive, concerned with demonstrating outward expressions to mirror espoused beliefs. At the height of this long-moment, I was doing some form of ministerial work seven days a week. Beneath the certitude I displayed, was a humming anxiousness that just possibly I was out of

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place. However, in my *zealot pursuit of authenticity*, there was no room for uncertainty and all doubt was met with more fasting, more praying, more witnessing, and more *doing*.

It was only a matter of time before the pure psychological stress of such an approach would expire. Ushered in through a painful experience of disappointment from my youth pastor, my second Black male mentor, to whom I had become extremely close and unwaveringly loyal. The hurt threw everything into disarray and created the distance I needed to engage in serious personal reflection. A year and a half before moving to Philadelphia for graduate school, this moment was a turning point and stand as a developmental land post marking an overlap of my second and third long-moments.

I am presently in my third long-moment, or my *reclaiming the grey* phase, where I have many questions, but also many "answers". This long-moment started in large part due to my physical distance away from home and family as well as my first extended stay in a city outside of the south. As much as I did not want to fulfill the young-boy-moves-to-the-north-and-drastically-change stereotype, in fundamental ways I "lost" the religion of my youth. The process of deeply questioning long-held beliefs was frightening, but seemed urgent in the most liberal environment I had ever lived. Some questions I had held at bay for years, afraid where the answers would lead. For instance, as I was raised by my mother and grandmother for the first eight years of my life, I was always suspicious of a theology that seem to empower my stepfather and disempower my mother concerning gender relations in the home. This was the prerequisite for facing the question: what value, if any, does a text written only by men hold to me?

Other queries I had no language or prior experiences to properly frame or prepare for. For example, how did I explain having sex positive or queer friends who were not Christian-identified? Would my *love the sinner*; *hate the sin* approach still work?

While there were short stints of church attendance, by and large I have not regularly attended church in the last five years. I have carved out spiritual-religious practices and community that consists of brunches and music listening-sessions with close friends. I took part, reading a Bible verse, at my friends' same-sex wedding ceremony – an unthinkable act to my family. In fact, my family does not fully know how to make sense of my present spiritual-religious identity, except for somewhere outside of the bounds of a true believer. Yet, I firmly reclaim the Christian moniker as I still draw powerful life lessons and values from Christian traditions and Biblical teachings. Further, fingerprints of my Christian upbringing are forever present, whether acknowledged or not. Now, my Christian ethics are conjoined with Black Feminist principles, queer sensibilities and more refined anti-racist and anti-colonial groundings. For me, this version of being a Christian is less about chasing a version of authenticity that I did not create. Rather, it is about applying Christian principles alongside other ways of being, in my work for equity and justice.

These three long-moments all brought me to this present study. After reading the works of scholars who discuss issues of faith, spirituality, and religion in the context of student development theory, something felt missing. Absent from the discussions of stages was the messy, nuanced, and complicated experiential realities of students' journeys. To me, the theories read like sterile prognoses and diagnoses, preoccupied

with cognitive dispositions and as such, incapable of capturing a certain depth and gravity I knew to be true of my own story of transitions. A hunch that I believed could be true of others' stories.

In some ways I am cognizant of how my shadows inform the questions I chose to ask and the interpretations I made. Throughout my analysis I am aware of areas where I perceive overlap between narratives of others and my own. Yet, there are many other important divergences from my own experiences. For sure, there will remain some places in which my own shadow exists in an analytical blind spot. For that reason, I enlisted the assistance of colleagues as a part of a peer debriefing team to share their sense making of a select few student narratives. Further, 11 of the 21 participants received and provided feedback on their coded transcript. Lastly, the reader may perhaps make certain connections between my story and the final product that elude me regardless of my best efforts at critical reflexivity. That is a hope that I hold out and invite.

Narrative Inquiry: Methodology and Data Analysis

Narrative Inquiry (or Narrative Analysis) is a methodological tool that is becoming increasingly popular across disciplines. It entails incorporating data derived from diverse methods such as historical analysis of archival data, oral life histories, and extended answers to both closed and open-ended questions (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008). This "turn to narrative" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012) has incited renewed interest in stories individuals and groups tell and the sociopolitical work these stories do and goals they accomplish.

Sociomedical scientist Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008) and social psychologists Elliot Mishler (1986), focusing on how narrative data are analyzed, offer a similar typology for organizing studies that span academic disciplines: thematic analysis, structural (or functional) analysis, and dialogic/performance (or interpersonal) analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on the "what" or content of multiple narrative responses. Scholars who engage in thematic analyses are interested in meanings circulating through narratives. Researchers focus on extrapolating categorical themes from elements of narratives across multiple participants. Scholars could either use theories to establish preexisting themes or employ a "tacking" between theory and data (such as in grounded theorizing) to more inductively arrive at thematic categories (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007).

Conversely, structural analysis concerns *how* a narrative is organized and composed of functional parts. Both Mishler (1986) and Riessman (2008) point to Labov and Waletzky's 1967 paper "Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience" as a foundational and extremely influential contribution to the study of narratives. Too, both Mishler and Riessman categorize Labov and Waletzky's approach as structural analysis. Labov and Waletzky argue that every narrative consists of six units or parts – abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. Typically, a complete narrative sequentially orders these elements. While I will not expound on each component here, suffice it to say structural analysis is preoccupied with what the organization of a narrative tells us about a particular phenomenon. Notwithstanding, as structural analysts' (like Labov and Waletzky) prioritizing of how multiple parts or units

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function in narratives, Mishler (1986) argues in practice scholars place more emphasis on the ideational function of narrative units (e.g., Evaluation). Stated differently, most attention is given to what these stories tell us about the meaning people make of their past experiences.

The last category of narrative studies identified by Mishler (1986) and Riessman (2008) is dialogic/performance or interpersonal analysis. Critical of narrative studies that render invisible researchers' participation as questioner/listener, Mishler and Riessman advocate for more scholars to account for how their inquiries and probing co-produce narrative responses. Dialogic/performance analysis deviates from traditional data presentation norms by formally including a researcher's questions and other audible commentary when presenting data within manuscripts. More so, interpersonal analyses examine how context – immediate/local and macro/global – inform participants' narrative statements. Lastly, a scholar interested in interpersonal analysis may include as data for analysis what motivated certain interview questions.

For my study, I employed thematic, structural, and interpersonal analysis. More specifically, I used thematic analysis to answer the following questions: (a) what are Black students' conceptualizations of spirituality; (b) what factors influence students' spiritual identity development; (c) how do Black students' gender identities inform their spiritual identity development; and (d) how do students' express their spiritual identities. To address how Black undergraduate students describe their spiritual identity developmental processes before and during college, I employed structural/functional analysis. This allowed me to identify how students talk about their developmental

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trajectories and what meaning they make of their experiences. Consistent with my

epistemological framework, I utilized interpersonal analysis to account for my location

in the process of analyzing and interpreting data.

Data analysis happened formally in three phases. In phase 1, after receiving all

transcripts, I read through each transcribed interview in order to gain a sense of what

the narratives were saying. During which, I jotted down notes in the margins just to

record initial sensemaking of what I was reading. After reviewing all of the notes, I

transferred phrases to an excel sheet that reflected the notes I had taken. In phase 2, I

read through all interview transcripts for a second time using the phrases recorded on

the excel sheet to code the data for emerging themes. I then edited the excel sheet to

drop phrases that were not as salient across the narratives and refined the remaining

ones into codes. Lastly, in phase 3, I listened to the audio file of each interview while

reading the transcript in order to get a sense of tone and affect in students' telling of

their narratives. This was primarily for me to come as close as possible to understanding

the student's narrative self.

In the next sections, I explain sample recruitment strategies and site selection

decisions as well as how I increased the trustworthiness of findings. However, first I tend

to two issues Mishler (1986), Riessman (2008), and Wortham and Gadsen (2006) argue

are fundamental to narrative analysis – (1) theories of "the self" (or identity) and (2)

relationship between narrated events (past events) and narrative events (the story told

about a past event).

Riessman (2008) and Wortham and Gadsen (2006) posit that many narrative studies proceed, to their detriment, without any serious consideration of how "the self" exists within narrative statements. Put differently, researchers take for granted that the idea of "the self" is universally understood rather than proffering how they theoretically understand identity representations. However, Riessman and Stanton and Gadsen (as well as Mishler, 1986) argue that the self is conceptualized in at least two contradicting ways. First, some imagine interviewee interactions as a verbal exchange wherein an interviewer solicits and extrapolates information of interest from an interviewee. Presumably, interviewees are analogous to bank vaults, possessing valued content (data) that is accessible to researchers who carefully deliver interview questions. In this scenario, "the self" is a preexistent and constant object for analysis.

Another perspective understands the self to be discursively co-produced through interview exchanges. This postmodern interpretation of identity emphasizes the performative and context-specific aspects of the self. Thus, narrative statements are opportunities for individuals to (re)create and (re)present who they are. If one carries this theory of self to its "logical" endpoint, there is no self outside of rhetoric, discourse, and performances. Put differently, no internally coherent self exists prior to rhetoric, discourse, and performance. However, simply because identity or "the self" is performed and context specific, that does not foreclose the opportunity for there to be patterned performances enacted in certain contexts, repetitively. This latter perspective is most consistent with my own understanding of the self and the theoretical framework that guided this proposed study.

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Regarding the second issue, Mishler (1986) states that researchers must consider how to "take into account, in theory and analysis, relations between events in the real world and these events expressed in narratives" (p. 82). For instance, how important is it that temporal ordering in a narrative mirrors the narrated event? Or how closely must a narrative event reflect actual (past) events? In agreement with Mishler, of more import than confirming congruence between narrated and narrative events is the analysis of how narrative statements function to construct the self, others, and the world. In other words, although important, I was less interested in locating corroborating or confirmatory evidence for narrated accounts when considering spiritual identity developmental processes.

Although not explicitly addressed to narrative analysts, per se, David Scott's (1991) discussion of anthropological engagement with narratives of Diaspora and Diasporic belonging provides a parallel response to Mishler's emphasis on function in narrative analysis. Critical of archives as sanctioned subjectivities, Scott argues against anthropological attempts to use archival data as a rubric for measuring the accuracy of participants' reports of past (narrated) events. Instead, Scott calls for an analysis of how stories told about narrated events function and allow people to make sense of themselves and their place in the world. As my primary research question focuses on spiritual development, I find great use in trying to understand how a discursive construction of a past event helps an individual make meaning. By employing functional analysis, I was able to capture how students' relate previous experiences to their present developmental realities.

Participant Recruitment and Site Selection

As I employed Narrative Inquiry to explore Black students' spiritual developmental trajectories prior to and during college, this qualitative study was designed to engage 21 Black undergraduates attending the University of Pennsylvania. In order to recruit students to participate in the study, I emailed leaders of student organizations that were either purposefully established to support Black students or where a sizable amount of Black students were members. In my initial email, I requested five minutes at their upcoming General Body Meeting to share the purpose of my study with their members and ask if any one present was interested in participating. I then collected the names and email addresses of those students who were interested or requested more information before making a decision. In total, I visited five student organizations, sent out an email blast to one student organization (as they did not hold a General Body Meeting that semester), I visited on undergraduate course were at approximately 25 Black students were enrolled.

I followed up via email with each student who expressed any interest in the participating to expound on the purpose of the study, confirm their willingness and availability to participate, and field any questions or concerns the student had. A total of 21 participants agreed to and ultimately participated in individual, semi-structured interviews. Three students were selected for follow up interviews, as particular aspects of their narratives I believed deserved more probing and could offer insights into students' spiritual developmental processes. Thought I intended to interview each

student two additional times, only one student was available. The other two were interviewed one additional time.

Upon arriving at the interview, I went over the consent form with each student and we both signed the document after the student had a chance to read the form and ask any questions. After which, students completed a demographic profile form. Each individual interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. I coded and analyzed the transcribed interviews using the qualitative analysis software, Dedoose©.

To offer a closer look at the student profiles of the participants of the study, I pulled several key facts from students' demographic forms. First, of the 21 students in the study 16 were women and 5 were men. Of the five men in the study, three identified as gay. There were 2 first-year students, 6 second-year students, 4 juniors, and 9 seniors. The overwhelming majority (n= 16) was raised in Christian households, while one student was raised Roman Catholic; one student was raised in a Muslim household; two students were raised in what they consider secular households; and an additional student was raised in what he described as a secular household with Christian overtones. Twelve students were either currently or at some point in their educational careers members of a faith-based student organization. One question on the demographic profile form asked students to select from four identity categories: (1) spiritual-and-religious; (2) spiritual-not-religious; (3) religious-not-spiritual; or (4) other. In all, 14 students identified as spiritual-and-religious, 6 students identified as spiritual-not-religious, and 1 student identified as other (re: "I just love Jesus").

It is worth noting how most students understood the category religious-not-spiritual as it addresses early on one my sub-research questions: what are students' conceptualizations of spirtualty? Most students drew a distinction between spirituality and religion similar to how higher education scholars did in the studies reviewed in Chapter Two. That is, religion was described as a set of beliefs and practices that could be tied to a specific community and tradition. Comparatively, spirituality was described as a more personal and individualized phenomenon that was hard to pin point. However, despite how students identified themselves, they portrayed individuals who they believed to be religious-not-spiritual as uncritical people who simply prescribed to beliefs because they were raised to do so. In a sense, they categorized these persons as inauthentic and argued that they lacked any *real* connection to their professed faith tradition.

As it relates to my proposed research site, my justification is threefold. First, my decision to interview 21 Black undergraduates led me to select one instead of multiple sites. While the import of my findings may only be transferable to similar institutional types, I thought it would be ineffective to spread such a small sample over multiple institutional types. Thus, an admitted limitation of my proposed dissertation is the narrow representation of institutional context. Yet, I believe the alternative would provide too thin a representational profile of students' spiritual developmental realities in institutional contexts.

The institution I selected as a research site provided a unique opportunity to consider spiritual development considering the religious diversity present at the

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university. For instance, no single faith tradition represents more than 25% of the student body, and 29% of students identify as religiously unaffiliated.

Lastly, I chose this specific institutional context because of a resourceful professional and personal relationship I have with a key stakeholder (University Chaplain) at the University, who also serves as a member of my dissertation committee. In particular, the University Chaplain has close connections with Black undergraduates and various religious and spiritual communities within the institutional context. This particular relationship assisted in recruiting participants and gaining access within the communities of interest.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

To increase the study's trustworthiness, I employed two strategies: member checking and peer debriefing. First, I sent all 21 students a copy of our transcribed conversation with my Code Book. Students were given the opportunity to edit any of their responses via Track Changes in Microsoft Word and challenge any code they felt I applied to their interview inappropriately. Several students used this opportunity to ask me not to use certain parts of their stories. Also, students were asked to select a pseudonym of their choosing. A total of 11 students participated in the member checking process.

Second, I assembled two peer-debriefing teams of colleagues who have expertise in student development, spirituality, or qualitative research. Each peer debriefing team consisted of two members. I sent three different transcripts (n = 6) to each team with a list of my research questions. The team members read each transcript

with the research questions in mind, jotting down their sensemaking of the data. To facilitate feedback, I had each team member email me their notes and then organized a virtual meeting via Google Hangout to discuss what they believed the data was telling them.

Limitations

Despite my efforts described above to maximize and ensure trustworthiness, there were several methodological limitations to the study. First, though the study was open to all students who identified as a spiritual person, the overwhelming majority of students who participated either identified as Christian or was raised in a Christian home. Only one student identified as Muslim and one additional student was raised in what can be described as a secular home with Christian undertones. The second limitation is selection bias. There are very likely other students for whom their spiritual identities are not as salient in comparison to many of the participants, whose narratives are not reflected in the study. Lastly, interviewing the majority of students (n = 18) only one time limited the ability to probe deeper into students' narratives. Additional interviews would have likely provided deeper insights into the phenomenon under study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present findings from the 25 individual interviews conducted with 21 Black undergraduate students. This chapter is organized around three research questions, whereby each section includes salient themes and findings pertinent to each query. In the first section, *The Telling,* I discuss the various ways in which students constructed their narratives paying particular attention to the story's narrative arch (where does the student position herself at the end of her story?), students' narrative selves (how do students situate themselves in relation to others, how do they experience agency, and do they experience disempowerment?) as well as the story's emotional character (what are the range of emotions students experience?). In the second section, *Spaces that Teach, People that Shape,* I address the following research question: what factors influence students' spiritual identity development? In this section, I discuss recurring characters, places, and (dominant) discourses that are reflected across students' multiple stories. Ultimately, in this section I am concerned with pedagogy. That is, when it comes to students' spiritual development, I explore the *who, what, and how* students learn what it means to be a spiritual, religious, or spiritual-and-religious person. I conclude Chapter Four with a third section, *When and Where Identities Collide,* wherein I engage an intersectional analysis to understand how students gender, sexual orientation, sexual, and racial identities inform their spiritual identity developmental processes.

THE TELLING

At the beginning of each interview, I asked students to define in their own terms what it meant for someone to be a spiritual and religious person and how those terms related to the way they viewed themselves (e.g., spiritual-and-religious, spiritual-not-religious). The next question immediately following was, "Where would you like to begin the story of your spiritual and religious journey?" I purposefully phrased the question as such in an attempt to give students an opportunity to choose their own point of departure for constructing their narratives. Most students would begin at the *beginning*. Often students would start by saying something similar to "I guess I will start from the beginning" after which they would talk about the households they were raised in and people and places that influenced them, such as parents, grandparents, schools and religious institutions. In these stories students talked about their earliest memories of first being introduced to spirituality and religion. In many ways, some stories fit within the faith and spiritual identity developmental stage-based models presented in Chapter Two. The narratives often flowed chronologically and revolved around the role of authority figures. Too, students' offered certain experiences as defining moments that highlighted substantive shifts in how they understood their relationship to the concepts of spirituality and religion. In the next section, I unpack those aspects of students' narratives with specific attention to the people and places that *mattered* along students' developmental journeys. In this particular section, however, I examine how students constructed their narrative selves as subjects throughout their stories; especially as it related to issues of agency and (dis)empowerment. As well, I flesh out two elements

that were consistent across most students' narrative accounts of their developmental

process: (1) personalizing their spiritual identities and (2) defining moments and turning

points.

Personalizing Identities

Along the developmental journeys of the majority of students in the present

study there came a point when they had to decide whether or not the spiritual and

religious beliefs and practices of their guardians would be their own; particularly those

students who were raised in households where religion was important (i.e., guardians

expected students to attend religious services on a regular basis). Many narratives

pivoted on this point where students confronted (or was confronted by others) whether

or not they actually believed what they were raised to believe. I discuss in the next

section how guardians' parenting practices informed this process as well as college as a

particular pedagogical space for students to engage this question through their day-to-

day lived experiences. Here, I want to share several stories that occurred outside of the

context of college or guardians' direct probing.

Several of these narratives emerged as a result of religious teachings. Spiritual

leaders expected students to differentiate between what their guardians raised them to

value and what they, through critical reflection, decided to value for themselves. Sam

argued that distinguishing between his parent's beliefs and his own was one of the

toughest challenges along his developmental journey:

> [My Sunday School teacher and I] were having this whole discussion about [me
> being] baptized as a baby. I was really christened. So she was saying, "You
> weren't baptized, you were christened. So you need to say yourself that you

were baptized." I said, "But at this church you can be christened and then be confirmed and you are a full member." She was probably right, I don't know. I just remember me feeling like…"Oh my God, I'm not actually baptized," but also, "I'm going to have to actually speak up and say that…I want to be [baptized]. It was daunting for me to have to say it myself."

Though he had always grown up in the church, this was the first time Sam was required to publicly and openly declare his belief, in part through baptismal, in the Christian faith. Others assumed and thus never questioned, that if his parents were both actively involved in the church and he had attended since he was born then certainly he would have no issue being baptized again now that he was an older adolescent (re: middle school student). His defensive response betrayed one of his inner most fears: that maybe he was not willing to wholeheartedly commit to what he understood at the time it meant to be a Christian.

Adichie recounted a similar experience she faced as a high schooler while attending a Christian summer camp. The church that hosted the summer camp was predominantly Black and camp attendees were overwhelmingly Black youth. The conversations and spiritual teachings were broad, covering a range of issues from abstinence to being a worthy example of Christ for non-Christians to see. One theme that ran through the retreat focused on making a personal commitment to Christian teachings and principles now, rather than waiting to do so later in life. Attendees were asked to honestly examine their lives to see if they enacted their espoused and professed Christian values. Spiritual leaders argued that Adichie and her peers, too, had to consider how most of society prejudicially stereotyped Black youth as thugs and gang members:

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It was just a lot of discussion about [whether we are] already done because we made one decision?...No...you always have the opportunity to go back to Christ. Go back to God...[But] how are you doing it? How are [you] getting mentored to keep you on that track? How are you keeping the right type of people around you?

At this point, many attendees would begin to cry, feeling overwhelmed by the possibility that their actions condemned them to a life separated from God. However, as Adichie explained, they were offered a reprieve, which was contingent on selecting the right peer groups and receiving spiritual mentorship. Adichie and her peers were admonished to not wait until they were older, but instead make a personal commitment to their spiritual-and-religious development as youth.

What is interesting about these two examples, which are illustrative of others' developmental processes, is that inherit to their spiritual-and-religious socialization was a requirement that each person become intentional about their spiritual growth. Also, these experiences occurred within the context of youth targeted religious gatherings. Another student mentioned how she too began to take more ownership of her spiritual-and-religious identity after attending Teen Church. This is especially noteworthy because most faith and spiritual identity development models do not acknowledge how students' are instructed and encouraged to understand what role they play in their own development. Most theories and scholars focus on the role of parents, institutions, and environment in the production of adolescents into spiritual-and-religious persons. This is appropriate and I too address this in the next section. Yet, in only addressing those aspects of development, lost are the ways students both experience and are taught to understand the idea of agency itself.

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To be certain, the agency discussed above has it limits. That is to say, students were encouraged to take ownership over their spiritual-and-religious identities in very specific ways that were sanctioned by their spiritual leaders' interpretations of Biblical scriptures. Magolda and Gross (2009) captured this phenomenon within the context of campus Bible Studies in *It's All About Jesus*. Miller (2013), in part, implored scholars to take up Bourdieu's work on habitus as a critique of religious studies scholarship that situates religious subjectivities *within* the individual rather than the sociocultural landscape that *makes* people. These critiques are important to remember when interpreting students' narratives. Yet, as I discuss in the concluding chapter, in the context of supporting student development it helps to understand how they experience agency rather than assume that students have not engaged in critical reflection (and sometimes critique) of power and authority in their developmental journeys. In fact, Adichie spoke candidly about resisting advice just because someone in authority told her she must.

This process of personalizing one's spiritual identity also occurred outside of the contexts of religious institutions. In fact, for some, this process involved students critiquing what they believed to be shortcomings of the spiritual and religious teachings and socialization they received growing up. I discuss this as it relates to students' gender, race, and sexual orientation identities in the third section. Specifically, how students used their personal experiences to push against teachings they disagreed with. For example, many students, whether heterosexual or queer, who identified as Christian shared how meeting and developing substantive relationships with non-heterosexual

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peers made them rethink their positions on whether or not one could be queer and

Christian. Those narratives are more about an attempt to redefine what is allowable as a

Christian; or critique as a way to expand possibilities that were initially foreclosed.

There were other critiques, however, that led students to personalize their

identities in search for a greater level of sincerity. That is, some students were critical of

what they perceived to be hollowed religious practices lacking depth. Instead they

sought a more genuine connection with God. This usually occurred through personal

devotions. After Zadie first was saved (re: accepted Jesus Christ as her personal savior)

she felt there was so much she did not know about the person she presumably had a

personal relationship with:

> When I first got saved I realized I had this big book that a lot of people [knew] a lot about. I really wanted to understand what the truths [were] and what the wrongs are for myself instead of having someone always constantly telling me this is what is right and this is what's wrong. So I decided to read the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Ask me if I ever did it, but I tried. So it was just me trying to really tune into God's Word because it's supposed to be God's Word. I would just read on my own and pray for like revelation and understanding to be able to understand what I was reading and things like that. So that was more of a personal venture that I took upon myself.

Zadie did not want to become the type of Christian who professed belief in a theology

that she knew little about. Having these personal Bible Studies became a way for her to

establish a deeper connection to her Christian faith.

Equally committed to learning more about Christianity through close

examination of the Bible, Mary took it upon herself to achieve two goals with one

exercise. She knew she needed to improve her typing skills, so she set out to type as

much of the Bible as possible:

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Towards the end of middle school, early high school, was when I really started trying to develop this relationship for myself. I mean I had my parents and my grandparents…But I really started trying to plug in and say "Okay. I got to do this for me"…I started doing prayer journals every day. I actually started typing up the Bible. It was my way of practicing typing anyway, so I would type up the Bible. I was definitely spending a lot of personal time with God, so that was definitely a spiritual time.

She was purposeful in establishing a connection with God that was distinct from and not reliant upon her parents and grandparents' relationships to their faith. Though Mary valued religious rituals and traditions, to her it was null and void if she did not spend personal time reading and reflecting on the Bible. She argued her spiritual-and-religious development depended more on what she did outside of her faith-based institution.

For these two students, personalizing their spiritual-and-religious identities in a way that was extra-institutional came from critiques of individuals whose spiritual identities were mostly based on adherence to traditions and rituals *within* the context of religious organizations. Mary and Zadie achieved this through two practices promoted by their churches in particular and many Christian congregations more generally: studying the Bible and spending one-on-one time with God (e.g., prayer, meditation). In other students' quest towards personalization, they relied on resources from outside the sanctioned canon so to speak.

Emily recalled a vivid memory when she was a high school student sitting in a Georgia church. Someone announced that the church would offer a seminar where people could not only learn more about the Christian faith, but also why other religions such as Islam and Buddhism were wrong:

> I got infuriated. I really did. And after that I didn't hear anything else about the sermon. I was angry and I told my mom and she just kind of dismissed it…"How dare you tell these people that these other religions are wrong, where you could very well be wrong?"…And that was one pivotal moment that just made me more spiritual than ever because I'm like, I have no right to tell people that they're wrong.

She points to this moment as the beginning of a rift between her and organized religion.

One result of this distancing was her disengagement with the Bible – a text that she already identified as sexist, patriarchal and misogynistic. It was *The Shack* (2007), a Christian novel that engages, head-on, questions of ultimacy (i.e., death), which provided Emily an alternative access point to God:

> [The Shack] is about a man who had a daughter who was brutally murdered by a serial killer and he gets a letter inviting him to the shack. But he always knows in the shack he meets God who personified himself as a Black woman, Jesus who was an Arab looking man and the Holy Spirit, which was an Asian woman. And it was basically breaking the boundaries that people have with God because I was like, "Whoa! God personified himself as Black woman."

> Not saying he was, but he can take any shape or form. And it basically answered the questions that people just couldn't answer. Like, why is there suffering in the world? Why did [God] allow this to happen? And the answer was so solid. I loved it

Though Emily referred to God as he (a habit she openly self-critiqued), what struck me about this particular story is how the literary embodiment of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit purposefully diverges from the typical racialized and gendered identity often produced and consumed en masse throughout many Christian communities. This figuration provided Emily a route to a version of Christianity more germane to her understanding of God's usefulness – a way to deal with suffering in the world. My own stated investments in the intersections of race, gender and spirituality made me focus

more on Emily's astonishment with this refashioning of God – "Whoa! God personified himself as Black woman." So much so, that I did not probe to understand what were these solid answers provided in the novel and how did those propositions differ from what she had been taught growing up. What captured me as a researcher-listener then (and now) was Emily's "*Whoa"* moment and what it demonstrates concerning the ways race and gender are always already present in developmental processes.

Defining Moments, Turning Points

In analyzing the narrative arch of students' stories I paid close attention to what many narrative scholars identify as turning points: moments on which a story or narrative pivots. A place where the plot, so to speak, takes a decisive departure from the story line in a particular direction. I was sensitive to both the 180-degree change, to use common parlance, and the slight surface adjustments that hinted at more fundamental developmental shifts. Many spiritual and faith developmental models used to make sense of college students' identities often identify college enrollment as the space and place where these moments and points occur. For many students in the present study, this was true. In the next section, *Spaces that Teach, People that Shape,* I discuss those stories. Too, in the third section I address how college offered students space to take up their race, gender and sexual orientation identities outside of the socializing parameters of guardians and religious institutions. Here, I want to offer several stories that illustrate how defining moments and turning points *functioned* in students' narrative arch.

One story that resonated with me long after our conversation was Renee's discussion of becoming a Christian. Being raised in a Christian church myself, I was very aware of stories – typically shared during a portion of Sunday Services that was allotted for parishioners to share testimonies – were people told how they became Christians. Hundreds of individuals told stories of being raised in church and leaving the Christian community and then finding their way back to God. In the Bible Belt South it was rare that one would stand up and state that they never had any substantive exposure to Christian values and institutionalized religion. Yet, this was Renee's story.

Renee's summer before arriving at the University of Pennsylvania was a difficult few months, the details of which she asked me not to share. Suffice it to say it was a painful and traumatic set of experiences that caused her to question fundamental assumptions she carried about people and the world. This compounded challenges that are typical of students' transitions to college and Renee found herself extremely isolated. Struggling with depression, she followed the advice of her therapist to join a student organization as a way to get out of her residence hall and develop a support group among peers:

> A set of circumstances led me to just try out the Gospel Choir because I didn't have to tryout to get into Gospel Choir. It was like, just come if you like to sing, or whatever. So that's when I started to go to [New Spirit of Penn Gospel Choir]. And at first it was just like, "Oh these people are really cool." I really liked their positive vibe or whatever, but it's not like I was looking for God or anything. At that point, I was just looking for an extracurricular [activity] to keep me out of my room. I didn't want to be by myself. But then, as the semester went on...I had to reconsider Jesus and who He is. And then, towards the end of the semester, I also was invited to go to a Bible Study with someone.

And that's when I think it turned from a curiosity about Christ into a thirst to know Him more and to understand. Because it seemed like everything that I had come to a conclusion about people, that it was true, but that there was hope elsewhere. That there was hope in Christ and to me that really resonated with me because I had just seen it played out in my life.

This curiosity led Renee to read the Bible for the first time in her life. One Bible story really resonated with her:

I had come home from my second semester of freshman year and I had bought a Bible at that point. And I was just reading the story of Joseph and how even after he [was] sold by his brothers he rose to power. And then one day he finally confronts the people who betrayed him and [he] says, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for the saving of lives." And I think that's when I had realized that all the things that had gone on…was to open me to the gospel. To show me what true light is. And I started to understand that it's not just about people, in general, but that God was coming into my life personally. And that's when I accepted Christ.

Renee continued participation in the Gospel Choir throughout her four years at Penn. It became home and in more ways than one *saved* her life. This was the moment – or better, set of moments – on which her narrative arch pivots. From this crossroad, Renee found a route out of her depression towards meaning as Joseph's story mirrored her own.

Another student, Christina, shared how reading *The Purpose Driven Life* (Warren, 2002) gave her the language to frame her moment of transition she was experiencing. Though it was a best seller, it was a fortuitous encounter that brought her to this book. She grew up attending church off and on, though by high school she began to attend less frequently and when she did it was more out of a sense of obligation:

My mom really likes starting churches for some reason. And she was going to these starter churches in the West Side of Chicago where they screamed and had tambourines. Like, people fell out all the time.

And so that's when I sort of felt like I was just going there because my mom made me go. I didn't want to go. I didn't get anything out of it. You were forced to give your testimony…it's uncomfortable. I really just didn't like it. And that was pretty much all of high school.

Entering college, Christina found herself becoming more and more disinterested in participating in being a part of any formal Christian organization or institution. So much so that she did not attend church at all the first semester of her first year. Yet, the high school to college transition occurring in a region that was culturally distinct from where she was raised proved difficult. Also, her peer group was another catalyst towards this reflective space. As she described it, Christina was surrounded by wealthy Jewish students. Beyond her peers having different religious upbringing as well as coming from a socioeconomic status that was unlike her own, even their understandings of family seemed foreign. Not having very close friends growing up, Christina did not have access to ways in which other families operated – one aspect being how close her college peers seemed to be to their parents. She was trying to make sense of all of these changes that seemed to be occurring simultaneously and it was at this moment she came across *The Purpose Driven Life*, after her mom left it laying around the house:

I think that's the book that taught me the difference of religion versus spirituality…I didn't have to have grown up in the church and [had] gone to Bible study and know everything about the Bible to have a relationship.

And so it taught me how to have a relationship and be connected, versus feeling guilty for not…writing [Facebook] statuses, "Oh, thank God for this," or whatever because I wasn't comfortable doing that…it really helped me open up and feel more comfortable about being unsure when everyone else, who I felt like were bred Christians, were sure.

Warren's (2002) text allowed Christina to find space for her spiritual identity within the context of Christianity and affirmed her uncertainty. After finishing the book, Christina was more convinced that her spirituality could be a tool to find purpose and direction.

For Christina, this particular moment and similar experiences could not be written off as coincidences. Rather they continued to strengthen her belief in God. Whether it was the random Korean man who approached her in Houston Hall during her second year and asked her "What did she know about Jesus?" and then met with her one-on-one for six weeks to share his understanding of Christ. Or the woman who approached her in Starbucks and asked her to attend a Bible study during her second semester of her first year – a bible study she went to several times throughout the semester. All of these experiences happened at a time when she was facing tough situations that led her to question her purpose for being at the University of Pennsylvania and her particular peer group. Each experience, strung together, were confirmatory evidence that she was on the right path.

These two students' stories stand out as illustrative of the ways other students' discussed defining moments. Moreover, some of the stories shared in the previous section as well as those that are shared in the sections to come functioned in narratives as definitive moments and even turning points. This is especially true for students' stories about their college tenures as well as those men who had to negotiate being gay though they were taught that all non-heterosexual identifies were antithetical to being Christian. Too, other stories that will not be shared in great depth; such as students' transformative experiences engaging in volunteer work outside of the United States;

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students who had to deal with their family members becoming really sick or witness

their parents struggle financially; as well as students whose lived experiences pivoted

them away from the spiritual-and-religious teachings they were raised to believe. Each

defining moment and turning point represented (retrospectively) a set of crossroads in

students' developmental processes. Further, it was a moment or set of moments where

the materiality of their lived experiences pushed up against their ideological beliefs: a

dance between what they held as *truth* – outside of time and space – and what they

were *living* – within time and space. Meaning, these turning points served as an anchor

for students' to explain their trajectory both leading up to that moment, but also where

they traveled since. In Chapter 5 I say more about how this fits with student

development theorizing, but now I turn to the pedagogical mechanisms that influenced

students' spiritual identity development.

SPACES THAT TEACH, PEOPLE THAT SHAPE

Guardians

"People are not born Christian. They're born to Christian parents". That was

Ernie's response when I asked, "How would you like to begin the story of your spiritual

journey?" According to Ernie, his life was separated into two discrete halves: pre- and

post-16 years of age. Or, as he put it:

> I guess, looking at myself from 16 to where I am now, half of it was taught to me, and the other half was learned. [During the first half of my life] I followed things based off of a lack of [knowing] and it just being told to me.

The truth that rings through this statement and numerous students' remarks

throughout my interviews was an acknowledgment of the critical role guardians played

in shaping students' spiritual identities. While some interpreted this as intuitive and matter of fact, others were more critical. Audre saw religious teachings as a form of restrictive socialization, regardless of good intentions, as her guardians approached child rearing by filtering religious values and principles through their own experiences and what worked best for them. In and of itself, Audre does not view this as strange. However, when guardians' beliefs translated into non-negotiable rules that left little, if any, space for her to take ownership she developed a disdain towards her parents' religion.

While many students' shared stories of being required to attend weekly religious services or to identify with a particular faith-tradition, characterizations of their guardians differed in important ways. Guardians varied in how strict they were in enforcing expectations. Anne recalled the moment in high school when she decided she was no longer going to attend church on Sundays with her mother, who was an Elder, and her stepfather who was a Pastor. In large part, Anne attributed this to her "rebellious teenage stage" as well as the influence of her cousins who, when she asked how they were able to reconcile believing in God, yet not attending church pushed her to "find a Bible verse where God [said] you need to be in a physical church with people". Already in the process of reflecting on whether or not she was attending church for herself or simply because her parents expected her to and not enjoying the current church of which she was a member, Anne found her cousins' position valid and decided she would no longer attend church:

I was just like I don't wanna go…I don't see the point in going and I just told my stepfather that I didn't wanna go. He was like "are you sure? Go tell your mom. Are you sure?"…"you know how she's gonna react."…He told her. She came, yelled, screamed all she wanted, I wasn't going and that's when it started. After that, it became a series of Sundays. I was like you know what? I'm not going this morning. I'll just go watch TV.

Although her guardians did not "make" her attend church initially, her stepdad did intervene eventually as he viewed her absence from church as problematic:

[My stepfather was] like "Okay. So I see this as you trying to rebel from us, but I need you to really think…do you honestly believe that there's not a God? And why were you going to church? And did you ever find comfort in church?" He started making me ask all these questions and I think had it not been for that [I would have said] that's it, I'm done. But because…he was a really eloquent speaker, he got to me. And I started thinking about stuff and eventually started going back on my own.

Anne's presentation of how she ended up deciding to attend church again offers insight both into her guardians approach to enforcing their expectations as well as the agency she allows for herself throughout the process. Clearly aware of her stepfathers' persuasiveness and how, absent his engaging her with thought-provoking questions, she probably would not have returned to church, Anne still ends the story by stating, "eventually [I] started going back on my own". This particular construction of self-agency, while cognizant of her guardian's external influences, allows Anne to take ownership over her spiritual-and-religious identity.

Some may perceive Anne's interpretation as simply a false sense of empowerment, as the impact of her stepfather's conversation is undeniable. Yet, it is Anne's conceptualization of what it means to "be forced" or "made" to do something that allows for her to experience agency. As Anne sees it, she learned a valuable lesson

the day she decided not to attend church – "Nobody's really like forcing me and now that I know they can't really force me because I sat home and they didn't do anything, like it's cool". Though she knew her parents were far from comfortable with her decision, because she was not physically removed from her home Anne saw this as a clear sign that she had a choice. As discussed in section one, this is yet another example of how students' construct narratives (or narrative selves) of taking ownership and personalizing their spiritual identities.

For the purpose of the present section, Anne's story illustrates one approach guardians took in shaping students' spiritual-and-religious identities. That is, after making their expectations known, students were given space to act on their will. However, after a period of time guardians would re-engage students with not-so-subtle strategies making their positions clear as well as definitively marking limitations on how students could express their wills. Even Anne's mother made it clear that there would be limits on what church denomination she frequented and when Anne found a Pentecostal church that offered more to youth, her mom would not let her attend. Anne realized her mom was very particular about where and how her daughter worshipped. For another student who was a Pastor's Kid (PK), although she could decide how involved she would be in church activities, her parents were clear that not attending church was not an option.

Not all guardians drew such definitive lines around religious practices or theological beliefs. Sam relayed this story as an example of the "middle space" his parents modeled for him; namely, concerning interpretations of the Bible:

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Well there was one instance I can remember…I asked my Sunday school teacher what does she think about evolution because I think we had talked about it in [school]…and her response, which I thought was really interesting…[was] "Do you think that we came from apes and all these things?" And she [said] "You know well…I'm not really sure, but I think like who created like these organisms? Like who actually created the first thing?" And I remember saying [this to my parents]…and I remember my sister saying, "Well I didn't come from a monkey. I came from Adam and Eve." And I remember them not mediating the situation. So I know it was like an argument. She's older than me. So she kinda said it and trumped it and that was it…I think that's what kinda creates this like middle space. They weren't super definitive or like, "This is what you're supposed to believe." I feel like I had a lot of space, which is good.

His parents also exhibited this "middle space" in the ways they practiced and expressed their religious beliefs. Growing up, Sam would compare his parents' participation in church to his peers' parents. Although they were very involved – his mom was a Sunday School teacher and his dad a church steward – he never experienced them as "super-religious". It was not uncommon, for instance, for his family to stay home from church on a Sunday, whereas many of his peers and their parents were in church on Sundays for weekly services, Wednesdays for Bible Studies and maybe an additional day for choir rehearsal. In addition to not weighing in on theological discussions, Sam parents' were very open in their critiques of various church matters (i.e., the lack of youth in the church). Ultimately, Sam was unable to place his parents in a box – they were neither "really lax [nor]…really religious".

Julie, too, shared how her guardians' embodiment of their religious values had a lasting impact on how she conceptualized and expressed her spiritual-and-religious identity. Like Anne, Julie was a PK. As her father was asked to lead several congregations across the southern United States while growing up, Julie and her family moved quite a

bit. According to Julie, many of her dad's pastoral assignments were in lower-income, crime-ridden communities and his philosophy was focused on "bringing the church into the community, not so much bringing the community into the church". Overall, it was both of her guardians commitment to live-out the Christian value of service to others that has come to define her own spiritual-and-religious identity:

> Growing up Jesus was in the house as…Lord. He is this miracle worker. But it wasn't so much emphasized him creating miracles as it was him taking the time out to meet with all these people and heal whatever it is that they're going through. So my parents really focused a lot on the servant aspect of Jesus…He wasn't walking around telling people "Look. I've got all this power. I'm a G." No. He was going around and healing people and anyone. It wasn't just kings and people who were going to pay him for it. It was anybody who needed to be healed.

> So for me growing up it…in my house if somebody [needed] a dollar you [gave] them a dollar. Even if you have a dollar and five cents…you give of yourself because it's what's right and it's what we believe in. And so I guess growing up in that aspect is a huge part of why I am the way that I am today.

Throughout our interview, Julie shared multiple stories and examples of her parents' commitment to service. Whether it was going with her mom to knock on doors in the community to see if families were in need of something the church could provide or her parents agreeing to raise a young male family member who was going through a tough time. Julie credits her parents' with being a huge influence on what she prioritizes about her Christian identity, which is the importance of serving humanity by giving back.

While quite a few students' guardians were as involved in faith-based institutions as those discussed so far, not all students grew up in households with guardians very engaged in religious organizations. In those instances, the home was the primary space for spiritual or religious socialization. After emigrating from Saudi Arabia

to the United States at 10 years of age, Bianca's social world underwent a drastic shit.

Leaving an environment where much of her schooling centered on memorization of the

Koran to a cultural landscape where her religious minoritized identity as a Muslim was

feared, placed Bianca, in her words, "[in the] middle of a desert storm". Coming of age

during the rise and intensification of Islamophobia – a central tenet of and justification

for the United States' post-9/11 aggressive policing tactics (i.e., Patriot Act) and military

invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan – meant that for Bianca, assimilation often equaled a

"process of forgetting". Her family, then, served as her only anchor to her religious

identity, but even they were not "very religious" according to Bianca. As a working-class

family, her parents were often very busy, which did not allow much time for doing

religious activities together. In fact, it was Bianca who would "force everybody in the

family to pray together because there was just no alternative [place to connect with her

religion]...this was [her] only safe space to be a Muslim." Thus, those times her family as

a whole participated in religious activities were memorable and formative. Bianca

shared how important it was to celebrate Ramadan as a family after living in the United

States for one year:

> So the first time that we fasted for the full month, it was really a full month of
> replenishing and remembering where I had come from. I had spent a whole year
> [in the United States], and I completely was in that process of forgetting it. And I
> will never forget every day at night after we ate and broke the fast we would just
> sit and read from the Koran and just pray together. And I had barely even seen
> my family for that whole year because everyone was so busy. And so religion not
> only served to bring us together, but really put me in tune with where I had
> come from.

Observing Ramadan, as evidenced through Bianca's story, served as both an opportunity for family bonding as well as affirmation of her cultural heritage and identity. Absent praying with her family five times a day, as was routine in Saudi Arabia, Bianca found tremendous value in such religious rituals.

Although they did not "[force] religion down her throat", Bianca's parents expected her to be Muslim. However, it was not uncommon for Bianca to hear her parents openly question certain foundational elements of Islam: such as, "whether or not [Islam] was something that was made up by a man that was in the desert one day". Similar to the middle space Sam parents created, Bianca's parents' pedagogical approach allowed her space to imagine a variety of possibilities of what it could mean to be Muslim:

> So the fact that they gave me that space to think and question was really powerful because I started realizing that maybe this is something that's really fluid and not something that I could categorize and understand and have all the answers to. And that's fine.

The idea of a fluid Muslim identity provided a foundation whereby Bianca, especially in college, could take ownership over her spiritual-and-religious identity that at times required redefining. Empowering in many ways, Bianca is cautious that she does not reinvent her religious identity so much that it is no longer identifiable as Islam.

Missing thus far from the present discussion of guardians' roles in shaping students' spiritual identity development, are narratives of those who raised students in essentially secular homes. Renee, who was the child of Ghanaian immigrants, described her father's disparaging stereotypes of Black Americans and their religious

commitments. Despite being raised in a Christian household himself, growing up Renee remembers her father saying, "If African-Americans would put as much energy into entrepreneurship and business as they do into their church…they would really be able to uplift themselves a little." It was only by mistake that she learned her mother was once very involved in church and even sang in the choir. By and large, growing up, she had the impression that religion was for weak people. Not being exposed significantly to a religious-based upbringing, Renee struggled to understand the role of religious traditions and rules – that did not seem to be based strictly on Biblical texts – she encountered after becoming a Christian as a first-year college student.

One last example of guardians who did not promote a particular faith-tradition in their home is Derrick's parents. Derrick, who identifies as spiritual-but-not-religious, credits his spiritual pluralism in large part to the way his parents raised him. While his dad would use the term Spirit instead of God, his mother tried with limited success to get the family to attend church at least on Sundays. It was his dad, however, who Jared identified as the only person he has met who really thinks like him. It was his dad who would "show [him] a sermon from a church and then at the same time show [him] a conspiracy theory" to make sure he was exposed to a variety of ways to consume knowledge and make sense of the world.

These stories are evidence of a well-established and intuitive, small "t" truth: guardians are critical in adolescents' spiritual identity development. This ranges from what limitations are placed on students' expressions of their religious or spiritual beliefs, how much guardians allowed or promoted questioning and critiques of religious ideas,

and the ways guardians embodied their own religious and spiritual beliefs. For some students, their guardians' impact on their identity development left an indelible stamp on how they identify spiritually and religiously today. This was best captured in one students' statement when she said, "it's been hammered into me so much that even if I wanted to try to leave my Christianity I couldn't". Still other students found that college provided them the space, away from guardians, to redefine their spiritual identities in a way more consistent with their personal convictions. Regardless, guardians substantively influenced students' spiritual identity developmental journeys, particularly before students enrolled in college.

Schooling and Peer Groups

While the home was a primary religious and spiritual socialization space, students' experiences in secondary schools, especially as it exposed them to diverse religious perspectives, were also factors in students' spiritual identity development. In several instances students' told stories of how meeting peers of different religious beliefs offered a counter narrative to what they learned at home. Bianca described a powerful learning moment when she first started attending school in the United States. Anxious because she potentially would have to (physically) interact with non-Muslims – a group of individuals she was taught not to hold hands with in Saudi Arabia – Bianca was nervous as she arrived to her first day of class:

> So when I came to school, I thought, "Oh my God. I have to now interact with these people and potentially touch them"…that first day of class, I will never forget. I walked in. I knew no English but hi, bye, [and] a few alphabet letters. And my teacher asked if there was anyone that wanted to help me. And half the class raised their hand. They were just really excited. They wanted to meet me.

And I thought, "wow, these are the same people that I was supposed to hate"…very quickly, I started forming these really, really strong friendships and relationships with people.

For Bianca, this moment made her rethink the ways in which religion could (mis)characterize or flatten out important distinctions among groups of individuals. It is worth noting that despite this demonstration of openness from her peers and their enthusiastic welcome, as I will discuss later, Bianca was often the target of intense questioning and scrutiny from her peers because of her religious identification. This point is of particular importance as not to romanticize the United States as a religiously progressive and inclusive society vis-a-via Muslim nation states – another central tenet of and justification for post-9/11 Islamophobia. Another student discussed how going on field trips with students gave him an opportunity to know them on a more personal level and shattered some of the stereotypes he constructed about those who did not share his Christian faith.

Growing up, peers who were raised in religious traditions similar to their own allowed students to see different models for living out their religious or spiritual values. Some students relied on peers to work through ideas they were not necessarily comfortable discussing with their guardians. To briefly revisit Anne's story, it was her same-aged cousins who pushed her to think about the connections between her beliefs and how she would express or practice those beliefs. Although Anne eventually started going back to church while living at home, coming to the realization that attending church was not a mandatory prerequisite to identify as Christian served her well as a college student who simply did not have the time to go to church most Sundays.

Britt told a story of a transformative experience she had when visiting two friends of hers (who were PKs) for one of their 21st birthday celebration. This experience happened during a time when she was vigorously questioning certain religious rules she was taught growing up:

> I went to visit [my friends] and that whole weekend, I was just like, "wow! Wait, pastor's kids? Okay."…They're all on track with Jesus. They're just having fun and living their lives and…this relationship with these people [was] the bulk of what I remember in my childhood and learning about God was with them. So they have this understanding. Their parents have this understanding. My mother has this understanding. Why am I imposing all this on myself? And it's not like God is telling me to do it. It's just me doing it.

Although I probed with a follow up question, she did not want to go into further detail about specifics concerning the events. However, it was clear that whatever she witnessed her friends doing during her visit where things that she would not have expected "pastor's kids" to do.

Not all encounters with peers promoted students spiritual development in such a positive manner. Put differently, not all experiences left students feeling empowered. One common thread weaving several narratives together was the stereotypes students encountered directly or indirectly when it was known that they identified with a faith-tradition. In fact, Zadie talked about how loaded certain terms are when used as markers of one's identity:

> I've had really bad experiences with friends who are not of any faith…just thinking that a big part of Christianity is being a religious fanatic. Someone who has to do these things to be sanctified or do these things to, I guess, be qualified to have a relationship with God or to know God. I think it just has a bad connotation that has followed that word about being religious.

To be religious was often equated with being beyond the realm reason or common

sense. Instead, one was pegged a fanatic and, as the student later shared, to be religious

was to be associated with the likes of cult leaders and murders such as Jim Jones.

Beyond skepticism, students' peers made clear the parameters and limitations to

explicitly infusing one's religious or spiritual beliefs into the public sphere. One tactic

peers would employ to challenge students' religious positions was to pose questions to

them that students' often times felt ill-equipped to answer:

> So in school…I would talk to people about Christ and how great He is…and I
> remember in senior year, it was just bad…I [would] always say grace before I ate
> my lunch. So my friends would kind of harp on me about it saying, "Oh, God
> causes all these wars".

Another student recalled being on a field trip were his peers heralded questions

towards him concerning his position on same-sex marriage:

> I was in eighth grade, maybe. And I went to Costa Rica with a school trip and
> there [were] a couple kids on the trip that were…because I was
> Christian…pressed me on my understanding or my belief on homosexuality or
> gay marriage and connected me to this larger discussion. They were trying to
> force me to have an opinion. At that point, I hadn't really been forced to think
> about it.

As these two previous stories show, peers would often be the first to make students'

confront the images or stereotypes of their faith produced from larger sociopolitical

discourses. It also taught these students that if they were going to identify with a faith-

tradition, there would be many questions they would face from those who stood on the

outside of or in opposition to certain religious tenets; particularly those that were

culturally relevant and controversial. Bianca, the one religious minoritized student in the

present study, articulated the most riveting story reflecting this reality. Peers' curiosity

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about her religious identity sharply turned to prosecutorial examinations after

September 11, 2001:

> Especially post 9/11, there were just questions that I couldn't answer because I didn't know that much about religion. And until this day, I can't say I can answer all of them. But when you're young, and someone is asking you "does it make sense that someone is beating their wife? Does it make sense that it says to go blow yourself [up] and kill people?" And I was getting a lot of that, especially once I started entering my first few years of high school. And it tore me apart because…it's almost as if you're in an abusive relationship with someone. Because you love them so much and so you can't let go of [them]. But this person is causing you a lot of pain and hurt physically. But you can't let go of [them]. And I don't know what the psychology is behind that [is], but I would assume that the psychology is somewhat similar to this because…once I walked outside of my house, I'm just getting bombed by people's questioning. And it almost made me feel like I was sub human because maybe I was illogical in the fact that I was believing in this religion.

Bianca said these painful moments caused her at one point to hate her religion because

it was impossible to escape being the Muslim girl in class. To be certain, her peers were

not being intentionally malicious. However, the result was that it made her feel less

than human. Ultimately these experiences forced Bianca to critically reflect on her

religion to better understand her on position on these issues as well as be able to better

articulate her perspective when bombarded with inquiries.

Students' peers, essentially, offered a "second classroom" where students were

pushed to engage in critical reflection. While, in my opinion, some of these experiences

were not ideal developmental primers (e.g., Bianca's story), one potentially un-intended

benefit is that students were asked to interrogate some ideas that previously they did

not have to fully engage.

Beyond schools serving as brick and mortar spaces that facilitated interactions with peer groups, many students discussed the role school curricula and educators played in shaping their spiritual identities. Namely, students' discussed the ways classroom exercises, assignments, and educators would force them to rethink their religious beliefs by offering counter perspectives. Hannah talked about how, as a young adolescent, an educator posed her with a thought-provoking question she had yet to consider:

> [This] is one of the only times…I started questioning things. And I had an argument in seventh grade in my science class when we were talking about the big bang [theory] versus religion. And [said] "God is real…where do you think all this stuff came from? Who does this? Who does that?" And my teacher pulled me aside afterward and she [said]…"I'm seeing [you discuss your] faith…but…what if someone asks you where God came from?" I'm thirteen years old and I've never thought about that. No one had ever asked me that…I had no way to answer that. So I was like, "I don't know where He came from. I can't tell you that."

Part of what allowed Hannah to speak with such confidence about (the Christian) God's role creation was that a majority of her peers held similar (Christian) beliefs. As such, this question literally existed outside of the realm of possibilities and provided her an opportunity to examine her position. I think it is worth noting that her teacher pulled her aside to capitalize on this teachable moment and to challenge the certitude with which Hannah spoke, rather than confront her during class in front of her peers.

Britt discussed how completing a class assignment introduced her to worldviews and ontologies that never crossed her mind:

> My freshman year towards the end was really hard because I had [a] history project where I had to research this woman who was an existentialist…I didn't know what that was until I started researching her so I was like, "Oh. It's possible

in the world – like there's an idea that exists that God is not real?"…That was the whole summer afterwards. It was just really hard because…my whole life [was] built around God and then to have to confront an idea that God could possibly not exist, that was really hard.

Prior to enrolling in her all-women, predominantly White high school, Britt attended a mixed-gendered, predominantly Black middle school where most of her peers had grown up in Christian households and many of the educators identified as Christian and were members in local congregations. Britt contrasted the congruency between her own spiritual-and-religious identity and her middle school's culture with the aforementioned story. The idea that some people believed that (the Christian) God was not real was a moment of cognitive crisis. This assignment profoundly disrupted a taken-for-granted-ness Britt carried through the world by introducing her to Existentialism as a way of life.

For both Hannah and Britt, these moments were temporary pauses along their journeys as it concerns their own spiritual-and-religious identity development. In fact, Britt points to her family finding a "home church" in the middle of her cognitive crisis as God's direct intervention in not allowing her to ponder on the possibility of His nonexistence too long. Conversely, Jonathan recounted how the curricula at his Catholic high school retreat presented him with a concept of a supreme being that resonated with him as a spiritual-not-religious teenager. By the time he attended the retreat, Jonathan had already taken a course called Scriptures where students were required to read the entire Bible. For Jonathan, Scriptures allowed him an opportunity to really answer the question of whether or not he considered himself a Christian. He ultimately

decided there were certain core and foundational Biblical ideas that he could not

embrace. While there is not a particular label (i.e., Atheist) or religion (i.e., Buddhism)

that fully encapsulates his beliefs, he prides himself on his level of flexibility to borrow

from faith-traditions and be influenced by his day-to-day experiences. This story

demonstrates some of what he borrowed from what he was taught in high school:

> We had this one seminar where they were talking about different types of Gods…I don't remember the exact names, but there was this super loving God that loves you and wants you to be okay and you can pray to when you are having problems. There's the God that will strike you down if you do something bad. This God is more a disciplinarian type of God…There were seven of them. But, the one that stuck out to me most was the Time Keeper God. And the theory behind that was the God that kind of set the clock of time rolling and kind of let it go. Let it tick…that was the big turning point."

As the stories above show, secondary schools were an additional pedagogical

space beyond students' homes. Whether through interaction with peers, educators, or

simply completing assigned tasks, students faced competing notions of what was *true*

and *real*. For some, these experiences were empowering. For others, these moments

were cognitive speed bumps that invoked anxiety and stress. Nonetheless, these range

of narratives show the role peers and schooling played in shaping students' spiritual

identity development.

To be Young and (Relatively) Free: College's Spiritual Rite of Passage

Stereotypically, college is often framed as a time and space for developmental

exploration. Cast as the first time many traditional-aged students are away from home,

students are burdened with this new sense of (relative) freedom. Meaning, no one is

there to make sure they eat, groom, do laundry, or attend class. Students then are

ultimately responsible for themselves and arguably their academic success. Clearly, this narrative relies on normative ideas of family and students' age. However, as the Black undergraduate students who participated in the present study were of traditional age, some of their narrative realities conformed to this idea of college as a development laboratory of sorts.

The geographic as well as ideological distance from their homes allowed some students to (outwardly) become the person they had long been (inwardly). Other students saw college as a testing ground where they were faced with actualizing their spiritual values in an environment they felt was antithetical to their ideals. Similar to students' secondary schooling experiences, exposure to a spiritually and religiously diverse peer group was critical in students' identity development. It is worth noting that during interviews I asked students a direct question pertaining to college and their development: "How has college influenced your spiritual identity development?" This most certainly informed the construction of students' narratives.

For students who saw the religious values of their guardians as regulatory and restrictive, college was an experiment in self-discovery. Those students, whose identities occupied marginalized spaces within their religion, shared how college allowed them increased agency in refashioning themselves. Brad, a gay Black male who was raised by Christian guardians, said that college was the major turning point along his journey:

> I had the chance to just basically be the person I really, really wanted to be. I felt like coming to college, it was like there was no one looking at me, you know? Making sure I say this right or do this. It's more like one of those opportunities where I can be able to mess up and be able to take ownership of the stuff I want to do and say, "This is what I want to do," and if it doesn't work out, it's okay

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because that was the decision I made. Versus having to overthink, "What does this person think? Is she gonna like this? Are they gonna like this? Does this make her happy?"

College allowed him to become a more sincere version of himself. Others' expectations of what he should be as an Academically-Successful-Black-Male often burdened him growing up – particularly as it related to his sexual orientation, an aspect of his identity development that I will engage more thoroughly in the next section.

For Audre growing up, religion represented a regulatory regime with rules that she had long resented. Although she did attend church most of her adolescent and pre-teen years, her parents decided that they would rejoin the congregation where they initially met right as she was entering high school. In contrast to many of her friends who attend religious services on Sundays, her religious community observed Sabbath on Saturday. As she was finally old enough to hang with her friends outside of the house, observing the Sabbath meant she missed out on a lot of activities, such as attending track meets. When asked, "what role did religion play in you life growing up, prior to college?" this was how Audre responded:

> It served its purpose of regulation. [It] wasn't even anything enlightening or whatever. It was just something to keep our family in line. That's how I saw it. My siblings hated it more so than me because I could understand where my parents were coming from. I wanted to be there for my parents and do everything to make my parents happy. I was that kid…My brother has questioned the existence of God so many times. My sister is you know what, forget that, when I'm older my kids are gonna do all the fun stuff that I didn't get to do. Because we didn't have Christmas. We didn't [celebrate] Hanukah. We didn't have all the fun holidays. We had all the horrible holidays in which you have to fast and go away from your home and not eat certain things.

It was really just this measure to kind of confine us and keep us together, although I feel like it just ripped us apart eventually. It's more like enforcing another education measure in order to make sure that we were good kids.

Matriculating to college for Audre was liberating and she took full advantage of educational programs that would allow her to make sense of how she would apply her spiritual values to her life. Namely, participating in a living-learning interfaith residential community as well as taking a course that was purposefully constructed as a space for students to explore interfaith issues. The dialogues facilitated through these educational programs were really beneficial to Audre during her transition:

I realized that people don't all [follow] the same rules that I do. And in fact, the rules that I was instructed to [follow] as a child just stressed me out…Even if I do [follow those roles], the only thing it really shows me is that I have discipline. And I don't know if discipline is necessarily…what God wants.

Contrasting the rules she was taught to follow with rules her peers learned growing up allowed Audre to view her on upbringing from a different perspective. The interfaith dialogue spaces also informed how she identifies now:

Having interfaith dialogue conversations all over Penn is probably what shapes how I feel about religion now because now you get to hear different perspectives and different kinds of angles as to how to be a good person. How to live a good religious versus spiritual, versus not-anything…and how you can still be a good person in that respect and still be valued in society.

The heterogeneity of positions, outlooks, and histories represented in the interfaith dialogue space presented Audre with what actress-activist Laverne Cox calls *possibility models* – a range of possible ways to be in the world and in community with others.

Emily, too, found that peers' diverse and diverging perspectives from her peers helped her to better refine her own spiritual and religious ideas and concepts:

I meet so many different people and so many different backgrounds with so many different opinions and…I kind of mold my opinions based on theirs. Meaning…their beliefs probably strengthen my own…But not like, "Hey. Oh, you believe in this? I'm going to believe in it too." It's like, "No. You believe in this, but I believe in this. Hmm, I'll consider your statement or I'll deny your statement and strengthen my own."

As she exchanged her ideas with others, Audre could borrow or reject positions in order to clarify her own. For Jonathan, these informal conversations with peers allowed him over time to get closer to an accurate articulation of his own beliefs:

I feel like my experiences in college have been more so me articulating what I believe, because it was always really kind of…confusing…So, I feel like [in] conversations about religion I always come out of it like, "Okay. That makes more sense to me about what I'm believing."

Even for students who were firmly situated in their faith traditions, interacting with others of different religious backgrounds was beneficial to their own development. In fact, for several students whose spiritual-and-religious identities were very salient, they believed they gained just as much if not more through interacting with peers who were equally devout to other faith traditions. Bianca, a Muslim identified woman, described the way she benefited from being around Christian believers:

I just knew that I was going to be better friends with a person that's really Jewish versus the person that's like kind of Muslim…in terms of how the other groups were inspiring me to be a better Muslim I think…I [found] myself in circles of people that would read the Bible and would start crying half way through [reading and] with people that were always ready and equipped for some odd reason with the right verses and right songs and right things to say at the right moment. And I thought "Wow! That's so cool."

…I think I've painted myself as someone who is really religious. But there are a lot of moments in life where I wasn't praying at all. And so when I hit those lows, especially in the [United States], I always kind of came back because of the conversations that I had with other Christians who would talk to me about going to church. And I thought "Wow. What am I doing wrong? This person seems to be really into it. Does my religion have an answer to that?" And it just so

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happened that my religion always did. And I think because I was in the circles that were so diverse, I felt as though I really had no choice if I wanted to engage with them but to be a better Muslim.

Seeing other students committed to their faith challenged Bianca to strengthen her own spiritual-and-religious identity.

For other students, empowerment came through seeing their peers express their spiritual-and-religious beliefs more outwardly. It was inspiring for Bell to observe her peers exhibit their faith in public:

> One of the choir directors actually, would just pray on Locust Walk…just stop and pray…Like, "you look like you need some prayer right now." And I'm like "Oh, I do. Speaking over me. Oh wow." Like that type of stuff, I would never do that before…coming to Penn. Before seeing…it's ok or even praying before meals in public."

When Bell said, "speaking over me" she was referring to the choir director affirmatively praying for her. A type of prayer that is less "Dear God, would you grant her peace?" and more "I declare that you have peace." These actions, to Bell, were bold and fearless demonstrations of one's internal commitments and they served as a model for Bell as to how she could occupy social spaces with her spiritual-and-religious identity.

Although college was an empowering opportunity for many students, it was not absent of developmental hurdles for others. Several students experienced college as a space that seemed fundamentally opposed to individuals who were religiously devout:

> I would say that most folks, the majority of folks in college, whether it be students, faculty, whatever, are not very spiritual – or religious for that matter. And so I came back to the debate of how am I going to be a thinker and a more rational, more educated person, but at the same time believe in something that's – what I'm being told is very archaic, and…not with the times…We've moved past that. And I think college is all about making you the type of thinker that's a few steps ahead of everybody else.

From this student's perspective, religion was cast as pre-modern. Religion, then, was at

odds with the articulated and enacted mission of the institution, which is committed to

scientific-truth and *logical* reasoning. Or put differently, the university seemed to be

most concerned with what could be (scientifically) proven in such a way that left little

room for religious convictions. If the university was home to intellectual reason, then

religion was the crucible of the illogical and irrational. This student, then, had to juggle

identities that her environment – implicitly and explicitly – told her could not co-exist.

Eric described the difficulty of using spiritual-and-religious values to guide his

decisions in an environment where he believed many people rejected that way of

thinking:

> People are making decisions not necessarily based off of faith. Maybe they're being based off of money or based off a very different moral standard than I have. Recognizing that those decisions are fine for other people to make but, at the end of the day…I've got to make that eight year old proud…and that's been difficult at times.

Eric felt that the ethos of the college environment did not support him employing his

spiritual-and-religious views to make decisions.

The challenge to remain consistent in one's spiritual-and-religious values in the

college context was described by another student as a testing ground. For students who

arrived to college with a salient religious identity, there were ample opportunities to

contradict one's beliefs and values. Whether it was being faced with freedoms that were

markedly distinct from their socially sheltered upbringings or trying to negotiate a

spiritual and religious pluralistic environment, some Black undergraduates spoke to and

of challenges involving being connected to their faith in an environment that seemed indifferent at best and not accepting at worst of their ways of living.

While in this section I discuss peer groups, schooling, college, and guardians as isolated factors influencing students' spiritual identity development, in the next section I turn to how race, gender, and sexual orientation, too, play significant roles in shaping who students are becoming spiritually and religiously.

WHEN AND WHERE IDENTITIES COLLIDE: RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

An intersectional analysis, which I pursue in this section, provides a more complete idea of students' developmental processes. Much of what has been discussed thus far could be re-written in order to more pointedly attend to issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Here, I am interested in bringing into view those identities and processes that are always present.

In focusing on how race, gender, and sexual orientation informed the developmental journeys of Black undergraduate students' in the present study, I discuss both the sociocultural, institutional and intrapersonal aspects of these specific categories. Regarding the intrapersonal level of analysis, I foreground students' sense making of how the aforementioned identity categories interact with their spiritual identities. Complimenting this level of analysis, I use students' reflections on their socialization processes to understand how issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and sexuality are discursively (i.e., explicit messaging from guardians) and culturally (i.e., stereotypes) constructed in the environments they occupied.

Race

During interviews, students discussed the interplay of their racial and spiritual

identities. For many, to be Black was to be at least somewhat religious. More

specifically, to be Black was to be at least somewhat Christian. Some described the

perceived intuitiveness of this relationship as a natural response to the historical and

present anti-Black racism Black people experienced:

> I don't fault ignorance for some people, but [I understand] why there is a pull in
> my race for religion – good or bad – [and]…a desire to put all of your faith [in]
> religion. Because the people I grew up with and…my family, a lot of them don't
> necessarily trust the system. So it makes sense for them to – literally, every
> single thing they believe in be in the Bible because they don't trust anything else,
> the government or programs…because they have a history of being
> disenfranchised and screwed over. And I think, for better [or] for worse that is
> why they cling to the Bible and faith for everything because I don't think they
> trust anything else.

According to this student, Black communities trust in religion was a direct result of

distrust cultivated through governmental neglect and marginalization, such as the

Tuskegee Experiment. Even one student who identified as spiritual-not-religious

acknowledged how Christianity seemed to be synonymous with the Black experience

and as such many of his peers had a reverence for and found value in religious practices

much more so than he did.

Another student understood the relationship between Christianity and Black

communities to originate during slavery. During her course on media representations of

queer people, she wrote a final essay exploring issues of homophobia among Black

communities. In her estimation, this was in large part due to the broad influence and

centrality of Christian values throughout Black communities:

African Americans that I encountered were very judgmental and very to the book. I always wondered why. And the reason being slavery – the Bible was [reprief]…it said that everything that happened to them did not need to happen. And was not necessary and that their masters were wrong and that these people were doing them wrong. So they took [the Bible] literally and they took it to heart…*from then on I always knew that being Black and being religious were kind of a hand-in-hand type thing.* [Emphasis added]

Through racist institutional policies that created social marginalization and political disenfranchisement, the link between religion and race, in students' estimations, was concretized – at least as far back as the birth of the United States as a nation state.

Students' also associated Blackness with a particular type of religious and spiritual performativity. Or, as one student stated: "the Black religious experience is what it is." That religious experience consisted of a style of music, duration of religious services, as well as a sense of kinship and community affirmation:

Again, some characteristics of [Black churches are] loud music and we have spiritual dancing. You have the choir. You have the loud pastor with all his inflections. You have people falling over the alter, running around, crying, catching the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues. I think that's very characteristic of a Black church.

One student even traced the relationship between Blackness or being Black and religious performativity throughout African Diasporic communities in both religious and non-religious settings:

The way I praise in church…dancing, getting excited. Those are dances that people did in Africa and I saw that in the African Rhythm show…There was a certain dance that someone was doing, which she was bent over and moving her feet and I was like, "This looks like a mother in church, but this also looks like a party on Saturday night."

Similar bodily performances in varying Black cultural contexts was an example of how race, as cultural continuities across space and time, was believed to be refracted in both secular and spiritual communities.

Cultural archetypes of Black spiritual-and-religious experiences for many students were taken for granted. Conversely, other students felt that encountering assumptions surrounding what it means to be Black and spiritual-or-religious was delimiting and frustrating:

> It's just very difficult being a Black Christian because…I felt like I've been put into a place in which this is how Black Christians act…I've been asked, "Do you go to one of those churches where people are flipping in the middle of the aisle? You know, the stereotypical Black Church that is portrayed by [television]." I have been asked on numerous occasions how I perform my religious way, and if it's stereotypically…the same as how people have seen a Black Church and Black religion portrayed in the media. As well as the sense in that I didn't even know that Black Muslims existed.

The impossibility of a Black Muslim existing in the American cultural imagination was something that Bianca experienced first hand:

> In conversations with most of [my peers], they were a little confused as to why I had kind of adopted this Black identity simply because of the fact that I was Muslim. Which I thought was really weird because to me that was a sign that they just really didn't know anything about Black people in America because the picture of Malcolm X that you always have. Hello? And so through those conversations, I became that much more in tuned with my religion and what it means in the American context, but also realized that…there were a lot of people that were confused as to what my identities meant.

Within the context of spiritual-or-religious discourses, media representations, and some students' lived experiences, Blackness contained notions of specific religious performances and seemed inextricably linked to Christianity.

Further, many students who were raised in religious communities and currently are (or want to be) a part of a religious community shared how race informed in what spiritual settings they felt most comfortable. In explaining how comfort within a religious community was a byproduct of race, students pointed back to the idea of what constituted *the Black religious experience* (i.e., the type of music played) as well as the difficulty of feeling at home in predominantly White spiritual-or-religious communities. Bianca, a Muslim identifying student, discussed how the lack of racial diversity among Muslim student organizations impacted her decision to not be a member in that community:

> So if someone were to ask me what I was, I'd say I'm a Black female who also happens to be Muslim. And I think that's how I've carried myself at Penn…I think I ended up being that because of the fact that at the moments where I was the Muslim who also happened to be a Black female, it just back fired in my face…the Muslim community at Penn is just very, very diverse, [but] I was often the only Black person in the room. There were just a lot of microaggressions that didn't make me feel very comfortable. Also, I had grown up at this point in DC, and so I was accustomed to being around other Black people and kind of adopted the Black culture of the US. So where I tried to be in this Muslim sphere, it just was not catering to my needs. So I had to move away.

Rather than experience racial microagressions, Bianca opted out of those spaces. Instead, she chose to be more involved in predominantly Black organizations and found support for her spiritual-and-religious identity development by surrounding herself with peers who, although not Muslim, were attempting to remain devout to their faith-traditions.

For Audre, who attended a predominantly White church throughout high school, racist experiences within her religious community made her rethink the relationship

between Christianity and Black people and her own connection to certain kinds of racial

communities:

> The religion that I practiced was not for my race. But that's my interpretation in
> the sense of the issue of White Jesus…I'm worshiping this guy that did not look
> like me at all and historically has been framed to not look like me. Even though,
> technically, if everyone would do the whole ethnography or whatever about
> Jesus' life and where He was from based off of the Bible, He was of some sort of
> color.

Clearly aware that the construction of Jesus as a White male with blue eyes was not

historically accurate, dissonance was born from the discrepancy between the image she

worshipped and her own skin. The propagation of Whiteness was not exclusively spread

through imagery, but also in the sermons that were taught from religious leaders:

> I remember being in church, and I think it's a verse in the Bible, but it was
> something along the lines that you can't have braids in your hair or whatever.
> And [said], "But I have braids in my hair! I'm doing something wrong!" And my
> parents are [said] "No, no, no. You're fine." But the way they were talking…in
> general you can't have long nappy hair.

According to the pastor's teaching, what constituted a good Christian was not someone

who had hair like Audre.

Not all students experienced such racism within spiritual-and-religious

communities. In contrast, others students discussed how their racial identity was

affirmed within predominantly Black spiritual-and-religious communities. For instance,

one student discussed how growing up she was taught Jesus was Black. Empowered by

the fact that "the savior of [her] life is someone who looked like [her]" she was able to

reject how Jesus was typically depicted throughout broader society.

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Another student, who was raised in an African Methodist Episcopalian (AME) church, talked about her racial identity being affirmed through messages and educational programs:

> We do praise the people who came before us, but at the same time they were able to do what they were able to do because they had God…So especially with like Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. And we [did] learn a lot when we were [young] about Black History Month in the church and all the influences these people made on our lives today. And so that definitely was a big thing. Black History Month when I was [young] was huge…It was kind of like okay we're going to learn about all these people and you're going to know their entire lives. And yes some of them may be Christian, [but] some of them may not be Christian. But they really did pave the way and you should respect that.

Being positively affirmed about one's racial identity was an additional reason students wanted to be in a religious community that had a sizable amount of Black worshipers. Too, other students who had been raised in Black spiritual-and-religious communities just automatically envisioned Black people when they thought about religious spaces.

Students' carried their pre-college racialized, spiritual-and-religious socializations to college. Speaking directly to their college experiences, many students acknowledged that there were limited spaces for Black undergraduates to explicitly engage their spiritual-or-religious identities in an environment that was culturally congruent: meaning, music they heard growing up and religious rituals and traditions they practiced. Or, as one student plainly stated about attending predominantly White Christian student organizations: "I don't feel like I've gone to church." In fact, many students believed there was only one student organization that catered to Black students' spiritual-and-religious needs – New Spirit of Penn Gospel Choir. However, if they were not interested in singing, students did not see much value in joining this

organization. The need for a space that engaged Black students spiritual-and-religious

needs in a culturally appropriate manner was best articulated by Mary:

> I started talking to these Black students and realizing that okay, you're actually a Christian. You were raised in the church. Like what's going on, you know. A lot of it was, "Oh. I don't have the time." But, a lot more of it was I don't fit in there. I go to this worship service and they're sitting up here with this guitar and they're just *na na na* [guitar sound]. You know it's just it's not for me. To be honest I started out at Penn and I sat in on plenty [White Christian student organizations]…It's this analogy I use all the time…It's like being bilingual. You're more comfortable speaking English, but you can speak Spanish if you need to, but you're just so much more comfortable speaking English. That's how it is for many people…They just want to speak English.

Here, Mary's draws on the language and logic of bilingualism to underscore how, for

herself and the Black students she spoke with, they did not fit in when attending

predominantly White Christian student organizations. With an experience that was so

intimate, being comfortable and feeling a sense of belonging within a space was a

priority for many Black students.

Britt, another Christian identified student, referenced a Bible verse when

discussing the need for a spiritual and religious space for Black students. The particular

Biblical verse concerns a younger man, Timothy, who was receiving instruction from his

mentor and author of much of the New Testament, Paul:

> The part where in the Bible where Paul is circumcising Timothy…circumcision wasn't necessary, anyway, with Jesus because your spirit, like the Holy Spirit acts as the circumcision. So you don't need that to happen anymore…but Paul recognized that if Timothy was gonna be teaching Jews who are a different culture, he needed to like become more like that culture in order for them to receive the Word. So like that's the reference I use all the time when talking about this because some people need, to be comfortable in a cultural setting in order to be able to understand God better.

For Britt, absent culturally appropriate settings, students' spiritual identity development could be hindered. Similar to other students' rhetorical strategies, Britt used culture as a stand in for race. Not simply race as an identity marker (i.e., Black bodies or Black people), but as a set of practices, traditions, and *ways* of approaching spirituality.

Although she endorsed the idea of a spiritual-and-religious space that specifically targeted and supported Black undergraduates, Britt wrestled with the idea of exactly what that would look like: "Is it a Black Christian fellowship instead of like just a Christian fellowship?" Was there a need to explicitly articulate and label the group racially? In being inclusive of and welcoming to all students, to what degree would this organization purposefully respond to the lack of space for Black Christian identified students?

Despite these concerns, Britt and a cohort of peers felt a responsibility to create a space for Black Christian undergraduates to unpack what it meant for them to be Christians and take ownership of their spiritual identities. As a result, they started a Christian focused organization in Fall 2013. These students believed that in addition to Black students needing an environment that reflected their cultural identities and histories, Black students specifically struggled to reconcile their spiritual identities with their social lives. Or as Britt poignantly articulated, "I feel like [Black people] more than any other cultural group have an issue reconciling like what we do on Saturday night and what we do on Sunday morning."

Implicit in this statement is the presumed divide between the sacred and the secular (or profane). Although not exclusively a phenomenon that Black people or

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students' experienced, from her perspective, the challenge to cognitively unify one's self across the fissure of sacred and secular was particularly difficult for Black undergraduates. In part, this was a product of a prevailing archetype of Black people that portrayed many to be (at least somewhat) Christian in such a way that was distinct from and in opposition to the archetype of Blacks who were secular. One student shared a story of hearing a minister at a Christian summer camp discuss the pejorative and racist stereotypes surrounding Black urban youth and how Christianity could be a conduit to circumvent those images and refashion oneself in a way that was distinct from those negative representations of Black urban youth as violent, self-harming, and irresponsible.

The sociocultural distinction between the sacred and secular was experienced on the cognitive level for some Black undergraduates:

> And I think so many times, especially in the Black community here…I find in myself that they're two separate identities: like the Black Mary and the Christian Mary. And I was actually talking to somebody because she felt the same way…we can go to the Kappa party and it'd just be the Black Mary [and go to Gospel Choir] and it's the Christian one. It's one the reasons why I did create [God's Property] so we could kind have fused those and say, "Okay. How do we reconcile the two and make it where you don't feel like they're two separate identities?"

Not unlike Du Bois' double-conscious thesis, Mary speaks to the idea of one body housing (ostensibly) contradicting selves. Race, here as a set of cultural assumptions (i.e., Black religiosity and spirituality) concerning how people identify as well as the social spaces people are assumed to occupy, produced this psychological twoness.

Too, institutional realties helped to produce a college landscape where both

spiritual-or-religious and social spaces for Black undergraduates to gather were limited.

That is to say, a predominantly White institution that *felt* in many ways socially foreign

(e.g., school traditions, rituals, musical artists selected to perform at university events)

to students of color meant that students tended to socialize along racial lines. As such,

many Black undergraduates in the present study discussed a sort of inability to avoid

certain activities and programs if they were looking to have fun with their same race

peers.

Yet, the (un)stated question circulating within the air of those social interactions

was to what degree, if any, would the presumed division between the sacred and

secular collapse. Several students believed it was in these social settings that this

question was most pronounced. Eric, a spiritual-and-religious Christian male, spoke to

the difficulty of distinguishing whether others were placing him in a box or was he

placing himself in a box:

> I felt like I boxed myself in. There [were] times where [I] wouldn't go to things
> because I felt like it was maybe not the most conducive to this image that people
> had of me. And I might be fabricating this thing myself, but then there were also
> times were it was like, "Oh, you say you're [Christian], but I saw you dancing at
> this party."

Sam also spoke to the reality that students were almost required to choose identity

categories if they were associated with faith-based student organizations:

> …if you do go to their [New Spirit of Penn Gospel] concert and you know, you see
> this person, "Oh. They're full of [the] spirit" or "They're getting [it] in with God"
> and then I see you at this party, I am gonna look at you crazy…but someone like
> me, I might do that. But at the same time, [I am] like, "Well get down how you

live because…I just don't have the gift of singing. So I could have been there too, if that was like my God-given gift. But it's not. So I'm not in that lime light. So let me not judge you." That's the process I go through.

While he acknowledged this was his thought process, Sam was not confident many of his peers moved beyond initial judgment. And he completely understood how students could *feel* this judgment, even if no one explicitly said anything to them. Again, this story highlights the presumed separation of those spaces and activities considered secular in contrast to those that were understood to be sacred.

As evidenced through students' narratives, race operated on several levels to inform students' spiritual identity developmental trajectories. Students frequently discussed having to interpersonally negotiate tropes of the Black spiritual figure. In addition to being expected to embody and perform a particular racialized spirituality, on the social level there was a heightened sense that the sacred and secular inhabit distinct places *and* people and never shall the twain meet. Lastly, race mattered in determining what environments students felt most comfortable. Whether a result of experiencing anti-Black racism, Whiteness in certain religious settings, or the desire to engage one's spiritual identity with peers who were at least vaguely familiar with religious rituals they valued, students wanted spaces where they could critically reflect on what it meant for them to be a spiritual person. However, pointing to the limited formalized spiritual spaces for Black students on campus, one student stated, "[the gospel choir is] really your only outlet to be Black and spiritual".

Gender and Sexual Orientation

It almost seems nonsensical to deny that race matters in Black undergraduates' spiritual identity developmental journeys. The stories I presented in the previous section are evidence of this truth. Too, it would be counter intuitive to ignore how gender matters and operates in students' developmental processes. Gender emerged throughout students' narratives in several ways: messages received from guardians, cultural representations of acceptable femininities and masculinities in society, and how adults and peers embodied and performed their gendered identities. At times, how students understood their own gendered identities specifically or gender identities more broadly were explicitly refracted through spiritual and religious teachings. Other times, students struggled to reconcile their concepts of gender that were not sanctioned by religion or societal norms. I first present female students' multidirectional relationships between their gendered and spiritual identities and then move onto male students' responses. The overwhelming majority of students in this study (n = 16) were women and the remaining participants (n = 5) were men. No student in the study self-identified as transgender.

Many of the Black women with whom I spoke were very aware of the gendered expectations laid out in their respective spiritual and religious communities, as a majority of students were raised in Christian households. Some women even believed they had to conform their gender identities if they were in conflict with spiritual teachings. One student even stated that her spiritual-and-religious teachings helped her to become more effeminate and "relax the tomboy-ness [she] grew up with in high

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school." Another student, who identified as Christian, despite being raised in a home where religion was disparaged, talked about how she still did not quite understand the connection between being a woman and modesty:

> For me, if I go to the beach, I'm going to wear a bathing suit and…I don't see why I should cover up or something. I mean, we're all in the water and let's just have fun. But, if you go with people who are from a certain church or who are observing, what I agree to be what the Bible states about modesty etc., they will wear full-on clothes to get into the water. It's those types of things that maybe I haven't groomed my sensitivities towards or I don't know what it is. I'm just not too into that right now.

Though this student did not personally see a problem with wearing a bathing suit to the beach, she understood that this was a value that members in some religious communities embraced. She understood the idea of modesty to be specifically directed towards women's bodies and based, in part, on interpretations of certain Bible verses. This was not a spiritual principle she felt convicted to practice, yet she was well aware of these gendered expectations concerning religious performances.

Particularly noteworthy were most women's conscious and critical positioning toward hetero-patriarchal aspects of their respective spiritual-and-religious theologies and practices. When asked *what, if any, relationship exits between your gender and spiritual identities* most women almost immediately referenced their gender in relationship to men as past, current or future romantic partners; namely, the expectations that women were to be submissive to male partners. Britt recalled her initial response to traditional Christian views concerning women and men's disparate relational roles:

At first that was hard…[in] a lot of Christian denominations a woman's role is supposed to be behind [her husband]…I was just like, "I don't understand how that's okay." And I'm too strong headed of a person to be okay with somebody telling me I'm just supposed to sit back and do nothing.

Accepting that women were expected to essentially take a back seat was not easy for Britt as she, like all women in the present study, were not raised to view their gender as liabilities, so to speak. Not only did Britt receive this gender affirmation at home, but also from her all women's high school:

[In] high school, everybody who was in power – the principal, the teachers, everyone – was a woman. And because it was like a Northeastern prep school like I said earlier, you were expected to go to what was considered the best institutions and you were expected to be like captain of the track team and in the plays and getting straight A's. You were expected to do everything and be good at everything so there wasn't a time when I thought at any point "I can't do this because I'm a girl."

Alongside these empowering socializing experiences at home and at school, were religious teachings that asked her to seriously consider how she would co-exist romantically with male partners. Though initially critical, she was able to reconcile what ostensibly seemed to be contesting identity categories:

I've been understanding for me, being a woman and being Christian doesn't mean that you have to ascribe to the cultural things that were very prevalent in the Bible…it doesn't mean that you're less than a man, which is what I was understanding it as for a long time…what I've come to so far is that you are supporting someone else and of course he's supporting you. But also what I learned in the experience that I had this year is that you can be smarter than the person, but it's important that you recognize that for the sake of the relationship [it] is not [necessary] for him to know that you're smarter.

Within the context of an intimate relationship, Britt believed it was necessary to not *show up* her male partner, even though he was not her husband. Natalie similarly

discussed this need to downplay certain aspects of her personality in order to

accommodate the role of female partner:

> I know the Bible is supposed to be like, a woman's supposed to be listening to a man and you're supposed to like care for your home...I mean I have a boyfriend. I do listen to him, but I'm kind of a hard head. So I like doing things myself. I like being independent...I guess [my spirituality] does help me...become more feminine.

Natalie contrasted her increasing femininity, guided by and through her spiritualty, to

her personality as a "roaring" woman. That is to say, the independent, hard headed, and

roaring self was not consistent with the gendered expectations of her as a Christian

woman. Again, as was evidenced in Britt story, though Natalie was well aware of

spiritual dictates concerning her gendered identity and was making attempts to

actualize those gendered expectations within her current intimate relationship, she was

still unsure about the ways that would play out if she were to get married:

> I mean I still have to figure that out. Like how exactly that's gonna work because things are a lot different now...women work now and women lead now. So it's like what do we do? I'm still trying to figure that out, especially if I get married...how am I gonna handle this [and] still make my husband like the top of the house.

> While these women's stories are representative of many participants, it is worth

noting not all students believed it was necessary to adjust who they were in intimate,

romantic partnerships. As long as she could remember, Adichie was taught that women

and men occupied distinct, unequal roles in marriage:

> The verse that comes up all the time is let a wife submit to her husband. That comes up. But also there is one about wives respecting men and husbands loving their wives. Basically [it says] that the woman wants love and the man wants respect...pastors have always told us that...you should love your [wife]. Don't be so over powering of your husband...To get [a husband] you have to be a certain

type of [woman]…Like I said, if authority tells [me I] have to do it then I'm slightly resistant to that. Especially when it comes out like you've got to do something in order to get this man.

Adichie rejected the idea that she should assume a certain gendered way of being in order to attract men as potential romantic partners. Unlike other students, Adichie held these notions of gender expectations at bay.

Prevailing patriarchal ideologies throughout many students' spiritual-and-religious socialization processes produced strong critiques from women in the study, which ranged from the construction of (the Christian) God as male to the literal silencing of women in spiritual communities. Zadie discussed some of her struggles trying to understand the value of women in the Bible:

> Something I was really battling with when I was growing up or when I became a Christian was…a verse in Corinthians or Ephesians or one of the books by Paul. He [said] women shouldn't preach in the church and stuff like that. So I was like, "Wait. Why?"…So my mind started thinking, "If God created Adam. He made Eve from his rib. Eve is just a helpmate. Is she even important? Does God even like women like that? I'm sure He likes men more."

Emily also discussed how she believed the Bible subjugated women in relationship to men despite rhetoric of equality that she was taught from spiritual leaders:

> There were points where I found the bible really [misogynistic], which it is…the Bible puts women as No. 2. [People] always stress that they're equals. When Adam and Eve got their separate punishment, Eve had to suffer through childbirth and Adam had to work for a living. And I'm like, "what kind of punishment was that? What kind of punishment was that? We have to die giving birth to children, but he just has to work the soil of the earth to earn a living?" I'm like that's not fair.

She found it extremely difficult to engage with a text that positioned women in such a secondary role and prescribed an unequal punishment to women in the Christian origin narrative:

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Which is one of the reasons why I kind of don't read the Bible. It's because I'm not prepared to hear all of this misogyny at…thrown at me that people still keep today. Like with birth control issues and, "Oh, you're a woman, you can't have kids [if] you're less of a woman." No, that's not fair. So it does impact me as a woman. I just feel like the Bible is mainly for men. Which it was. Written by men for men, promoting men. I'm like, "what about woman?"

Beyond roles outlined for women in the Bible, students also critiqued how patriarchy operated within the religious institutions of which they were members. As Audre described:

In [my] congregation, women never had any significant roles. So we could not preach, we could not be deacons, we could not be ushers, we could not do anything. Women were supposed to take care of the kids and that's about it. I never understood that. I had huge qualms with that because I felt like it was unnecessary. What if I, hypothetically, wanted to get involved with the church? I couldn't do anything! I have to have kids and then teach them about this religion, that's all you need me to do. So I felt like that was disrespect towards women in the sense of leadership. I always thought that was ridiculous. I did not want to live my life the way people at my church did as the women homeschooling their children and not really having any say [in the church].

Audre's observations of women's restricted roles in her church, seriously frustrated her attempts to gain a sense of belonging in this community, which further compounded the prevalence of Whiteness her and her family experienced in the same congregation. Ultimately, women's formal leadership and influence was regulated to domestic spheres, leaving institution and organizational building to men. This reality had a profound affect on Audre and caused her to feel disempowered. Too, this wedged separation between her and religion and as a result she became a more spiritual person. That is, she distanced herself from her religious community because the place that was supposed to support and empower her actually did the opposite.

While the majority of women in the study, who were raised in Christian homes or currently identified as Christian, directly critiqued patriarchy and sexism as it pertained to their religious upbringing, most did not see this as reason to leave their religious communities or abandon religious teachings. As noted above, some students were still in the process of reconciling their critical stances with attempts to adhere to the gendered roles outlined for them (i.e., roles in intimate relationships with men) and exploring the borders of where their gender and spiritual identities met. However, one students' narrative stood out from the others and demonstrated the benefits of being exposed to possibility models.

At face value, being a PK (Pastor's Kid), one would assume Julie was fully socialized into the patriarchal expectations of what it meant to be a Christian girl, young lady, and woman. Not only could one assume that her parents reared her in patriarchal gender norms, but that these norms were reinforced in the religious communities where she spent a substantive amount of her time. Yet, her mother's purposeful resistance to others expectations of what it meant to be an appropriate and respectable First Lady (re: Pastor's Wife) showed Julie that there were tangible ways to own both her femaleness and spiritual-and-religious identity. Early on, Julie was well aware of what was expected of women in the church. Namely, women were expected to sing in the choir, aide male ministers and if they were married, to "sit next to [their] husband and be there and be that home wife person". In large part, Julie credits her critique of gender norms to her mom's refusal to adhere to these standards:

> [My mom was] like, "No. I'm not going to be in the missionary society." And she was in the choir just because she had a great voice. But it's kind of like, "I'm going to wear pants to church. I'm not going to wear that big hat to church. No."

Saying "no" was a powerful act of resistance that showed Julie she too did not have to conform to normative gender expectations. Her mom also reinforced this to Julie growing up:

> Seeing some of the stereotypical female roles it was interesting for me because I was that tomboy who could not do the Easter dresses and could not wear the frilly stuff. And so growing up in the church it was funny. I was that reckless kid running around with the boys playing football outside after service got out when all these older female women in the church – grandmother figures – were like "you're going to get dirty. Stop, where is your mom?" And my mom would just [say], "All right. She's [doesn't have] bruises? She's good."

Too, Julie discussed how important it was for her to see women's role in the African Methodist Episcopal church change over time:

> There are a lot more female ministers who have first husbands and it's been real interesting seeing that shift. Because I was so used to this air of you marry a minister and you sit in the front pew and you socialize with these older women in the church and have bake sales. But seeing these powerful women come out of this and be like "No, I have a word and I have a voice and I'm going to speak and do a sermon and do whatever and lead a church." It was very powerful for me. It was kind like okay, you know what, Jesus was a man, but he also did not tell women to sit down.

Being able to see more women resist the patriarchal and sexist norms of their religious traditions and institutional structures was, in Julie words, powerful.

The stories of these women provide critical perspectives on how gender norms and expectations, often rooted in patriarchy, shaped their spiritual identity developmental processes. Specifically, the process of working through socializing spaces and experiences that prescribed ways of embodying gender-spiritual identities, which required deference toward men. Too, the men in the study spoke explicitly about their

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struggle, confusion, and (at times) refusal to live up to heteropatriarchal norms of masculinities. Of the five men in the study only three were raised in Christian homes and one male student said he was raised in a secular home with Christian overtones. As such, only those men raised in (explicitly) Christian homes wrestled to carve out space for expressions of masculinities that resisted the worst of patriarchal Christian norms. For the others, because their spiritual-not-religious identities were in constant flux and not substantively grounded in any religious tradition, there was less negotiation required. Moreover, three of the men identified as queer – two of whom were raised in Christian homes. When discussing the relationship between their gendered and spiritual identities, students would often reference their sexual identities and sexual orientations. So much so, that it makes most sense to discuss both together in this section. It is worth noting that one male student, Sam, did not initially identify as queer until the very end of our interview. One implication of this delayed disclosure was that for the majority of our conversation he discursively occupied the space of a heterosexual Black male and thus, at times would discuss versions of his future (or hypothetical) selves, which he had no desire to become. However, this does not in any way compromise his perspectives on connections between gender and spiritualty; particularly as he was often received by the world as a heterosexual Black male.

Similar to their female peers in the study, these men often talked about their gendered identities in relation to women within the context of romantic relationships. Unlike most of their female peers, a couple men also explicitly discussed how their gender-spiritual identities related to their roles as men in sexual encounters. Sam

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recalled a lesson he was taught while attending a Christian summer camp during middle school:

> I don't know what the topic was, but one of the pastors there was saying something about males…I think he's very, not chauvinistic, but his answers were very gendered, now that I think about it. But he was talking about the act of sex and how females are receiving the male; it's like a power dynamic thing. I've never thought of it like that, but I don't know, when he said [it I thought], "That's something interesting. Is this true?" It did kind of frame what I was thinking. I guess I talked about that in an off way. When [me and my male friends] have discussions it's always coming from the fact that we're making decisions so we're controlling the sexual encounter.

Sam was taught that sex was about power and men disproportionally have more. Even at the anatomical level, as the pastor shared, women were in positions of less power than men. With this power came responsibility and Sam and his male peers spent a lot of time processing their roles in romantic encounters with women. Meaning, he and his Christian, heterosexual male friends felt it was ultimately their responsibility to make sure that when interacting intimately with a woman it would not lead to sex.

Eric, also spoke to sexual interactions between women and men and the expectation that in college – particularly for him as a Black male in a Black Greek Letter Organization – sex would be a central aspect of his cross-gender interactions. He was critical of the limited opportunities students had to reflect on their sexual identities, though they lived and breathed hyper-sexuality. Eric argued that sex was a high-stakes spiritual act:

> I think sex is a very spiritual act and I think people are entering into very dangerous territory without having an understanding of what they're doing. But they're still having…consequences both physical as well as spiritual on their lives.

For this reason, coupled with his religious dictate to not enter into sexual intercourse prior to marriage, Eric thought it best to practice abstinence. Clearly, for both of these men, sex was not merely a physical act. These encounters were fraught with issues of power and even produced spiritual consequences.

Several men in this study also expressed the confusion in trying to balance their desire for maintaining equitable intimate relationships with women alongside expectations that they would be spiritual leaders of their nuclear family units. That is to say, these men struggled to understand how they would accomplish the tasks of heteronormative and patriarchal expectations of what it meant to be (Black) men. This proved particularly challenging for the two gay men in the study. Sam spoke directly to the lack of clarity around how one was to actualize these religious expectations and still maintain an equitable relationship with a partner:

> I'm still deciphering about what it really means to not be – chauvinistic is not the word I'm looking for – but…the dichotomy between the spiritual head of the household [and] still being equal with your wife. I'm not really sure what that actually means. When people say that, I'm just like, "Okay, I don't know what it means to be the spiritual head."

Though by the time of our conversation interview ended Sam identified as queer, he was well aware of what others expected of him as a biological male who identified as Christian.

Considering Sam did not invite me into his identity as a gay Black man until the end of our first interview, there were some questions left unanswered. However, as he was one of the students I interviewed multiple times, I had an opportunity to follow up in greater detail to better understand how he thought about the interplay between his

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sexual orientation, gender, and spiritual-and-religious identities. Again, he returned to

the idea of discussing his gender in terms of intimate, partner relationships. As a gay

Black man he knew that his relationship might not mirror guidelines prescribed in the

Bible for women and men, wives and husbands. For instance, he discussed negotiating

the issue of marriage with a future partner and how religion complicated the process:

> So I meet people on two sides of the [fence]. And this is also [hard to] find
> somebody to even begin to have any type of relationship with…So [you] either
> have these gay guys in the church and the ones I meet – I must say – it seems like
> they just heel to everything [in] religion and then…grab onto that's left. For
> instance, [I asked] one guy…"you want to get married?" He was like, "I think
> marriage is between a man and woman. So I want a ceremony, but I don't want
> to call it that."

On the other side of the binary were men who believed there was no space for them as

gay men in Christianity:

> And then you have the other side – people just like, well, because of those things
> I'm not religious. And I can't do that either. And I want to raise my family with
> the same principles my parents raised me with, which is we're both in the church
> [and] we both want the same church and all these things. So it becomes really
> hard and I think that gender roles indirectly have a lot to do with how we
> operate within a religious context as gay men.

> Another Black gay male student in the study, Derrick who identified as spiritual-

not-religious, echoed this sentiment of there being no space within Christianity for

queer bodies and identities. Though most of his life he had little, if any, regard for

religion, his grandmother's influence was strong enough to cause him to consider

Christianity during his late-adolescent years:

> When I was twelve or thirteen, I became really, really religious [but] I don't
> believe you can reconcile the two…I feel like in Christianity if you want to make it
> to heaven, you have to follow the rules of Catholicism to a tee. And I feel like

being homosexual, you can't reconcile the two. So, I had to make a decision that I was going to drop Christianity.

Cognizant of religious rhetoric condemning homosexuality, Derrick decided there was no hope for reconciliation. Sam, on the other hand, refused to accept the premise that one could not be both Christian and gay. His sexual orientation did not have to over determine him as a whole person. He would just have to negotiate issues of gender roles on a case-by-case basis with his partner.

These young men's narratives speak to the boundaries constructed in religious communities around masculinities. The presumption that to be Christian and male is also to be heterosexual placed these men's lived experiences on the outside of what it meant to be Christian and male. For Brad, he was exposed to these boundaries through messages he received from member of his community. Prior to leaving for school, family members' expectations that college would provide him the currency to purchase a heteronormative post-graduate lifestyle gave him pause in owning his sexual identity in the way he hoped to:

> The expectation for me was he's gonna go to college, and he's gonna get a girlfriend, and he's gonna get married, gonna have children. At the time, when I was younger, I felt like those were [viable] possibilities, and I was gonna get there. So I set these mental breaks. Like, "I'm not going to be gay until 16." Then 16 [passed], and I'd say, "Oh, when I'm 18." And then 18 [passed].

Surrounded by others' conceptions of what would constitute his progression into manhood, Brad delayed both inviting the world into his identity as a gay man and most importantly being comfortable claiming this identity for himself.

These ideas of what it meant to be a successful Black man were always

contrasted with his brother, who was 10 months younger than him, and who was

"always getting into trouble" and not as engaged in school. This was further

compounded by religious teachings that condemned all non-heterosexual identities. He

was also well aware of the social consequences of being "openly" gay:

> So, for me, given that people saw something in me from my early beginning, I felt like I didn't want to have anything [take away from that] because I saw a lot of kids come out in my time and [I] saw how it just changed. Even if they were really smart, really good, hardworking, it just seemed like, at that point, whatever they did…never was good enough. It was, like, "Oh, but he's gay." But, looking at it now, it annoys me, but back then, it just seemed like…it distracted from what everyone thought of him.

For him, to be openly gay was to risk having everything he worked so hard for

diminished and devalued by family members and broader communities. Brad posited

that being gay, in eyes of many, undermined Black men's masculinities:

> The Black man has literally gotten everything somewhat taken from him – jobs, reputation. In many ways in society, he's been stripped of a lot of things. And so, when it gets down to people saying, "What is one thing about Black men that you can't [take away from them]?"…it becomes a question of masculinity. That's one thing that people technically feel you cannot take from someone, from a Black [man] – from anybody. And the only thing they have left is their manhood, and whatever this masculinity is…that's one thing that Black men have not been [able] to lose through all of this. Whether it's the idea of being disenfranchised of land, property, just socioeconomic status and opportunity in society. How they're just the bottom of the bottom. The one thing that they haven't lost is the level of masculinity and manhood they have. So, in the event that someone is gay, many people in many ways [feel] like that's a question of masculinity and identity. So then the question is, if I am gay, and I vocalize I'm gay, then what am I? What do I have left?...to be a Black gay man is to be at the bottom of the Black man, which is already looked down upon.

Encountering these perspectives and opinions from others made him realize that the

gender privileged he occupied as a Black male was always in tension with and at risk of

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being compromised by his sexual orientation. To be Black *and* gay was, in Brad's words, to be at the "bottom of the bottom."

The one heterosexual male student in the study who also identified as spiritual-and-religious, Eric, believed that his spiritual identity allowed him to redefine and resist patriarchal notions of masculinities. Privileged as a heterosexual man, Eric knew that according to his religion he was expected to *lead* his nuclear family though, similar to Sam, he was unsure how that would play out. What he was clear on was that his spirituality taught him that his masculinity did not have to find its roots in physical domination:

> When I think about what does it mean to be a male or a Christian male there is a lot of understanding of…how do you [relate] to people of…other gender identities, particularly to women. How do you recognize that you have a…role to play…but understanding that strength isn't just…physical strength solely it's like mental strength.

Though he was uncritical of the idea that there were gender-specific roles for women and men according to his religious beliefs, Eric did push back on the idea that his role was predicated solely on physical strength. That is to say, his strength was not merely derived from his corporal being:

> My faith has really showed me that being a man isn't about being, I guess machismo, but being a man is more about being grounded in your faith and allowing that to strengthen who you are as an individual and…underlying [the] way that you relate to other people versus using male norms, um, to govern the way that you're going to relate to other people.

Eric went on to explain how he used larger, global spiritual principles and commandments that persisted throughout the Bible (e.g., love thy neighbor as thyself)

to provide critical distance from male norms that were clearly articulated in the same

sacred text:

> The Bible has a lot of, maybe not contradictions, but a lot of stories that don't
> necessarily line up with each other. So that teaches you that there's – not like
> flexibility – but there's a way that you respond to people in general regardless of
> the male norms that were consistent in the time that the Bible was written. I try
> to live my life off of those consistencies versus the norms.

By confining certain ideas around gender expression to the specificities of *that* time and

that space when the Bible was written, Eric could navigate around what he believed to

be some of the more toxic manifestations of patriarchy in Christianity. Instead, he could

focus on larger principles that he believed grounds his religion (e.g., love).

Each one of these men, from their various positions, were challenged at some

point along their developmental journeys with living out the expectations of Christian

masculinities, which was presumed to be patriarchal and heteronormative. Eric worked

to extract fundamental Biblical principles from the sociocultural context that it was

produced. It is worth noting, he did not have the language to articulate an approach

distinct from patriarchal expectations of gender relations, particularly in intimate

partner relationships. Though he was clearly critical of any attempt to situate women in

inferior positions to men, he struggled to move beyond saying his approach should be

grounded in love. In fact, he admitted that it was difficult for him to really operationalize

his critiques.

For the three queer identifying males, encountering religious individuals and

rhetoric denouncing their sexual identities forced them to seriously consider to what

extent they could merge these (ostensibly) contradicting socially constructed (and

contested) identity categories. Two of the men, Derrick and Brad, felt there was little-to-no-room for them within institutionalized faith-based organizations. Sam, on the other hand, did not believe his being a gay man required him to abandon religion all together. However, he was well aware of the complications and challenges that have and would continue to arise around issues such as gender roles in intimate partner relationships and whether future partners would feel comfortable getting married or having kids because of heteronormative religious doctrines that largely delegitimize non-heterosexual identities and relationships.

Before bringing this section to a close, I believe it is worth taking a moment to delve a bit deeper into Sam's narrative. The stories shared thus far certainly highlight the ways in which gender, race, sexual orientation and spirituality intersect in how students' see themselves as well as what is offered as possibilities of being in the social imagination and cultural landscape. However, in Sam's story as shared below, it is evident that when social spaces constitute only certain identities as legitimate the psychic split that is (socially) produced can cause major problems. Especially when those identities that are shut out, not allowed, and delegitimized are done so as a result of oppressive ideological regimes such as homophobia.

Much of the contestation Sam experienced around his sexual orientation in college occurred within the bond of his fraternity. He pledged and became a member of his fraternity during his second year of college. Though he had been teased growing up for "acting gay" Sam stated that he did not seriously question his own sexual orientation until the process of joining his fraternity:

One of my line brothers is actually gay. And I guess around that time I also began to wonder, "Well is this true? About myself, too…should I experiment?" So I guess I could attribute this to…the depression. But then I did do some experimenting and things like that. So, that all plays into it. That prompted me to begin thinking about, "is this actually wrong? And if you have feelings for someone and they are the same sex…are those just null and void because the Bible says that, you know homosexuality is wrong? Does the Bible actually say that?"

As is clear throughout many of the stories presented thus far, students' lived experiences were used to push, challenge and deconstruct the authority of spiritual-and-religious principles they were socialized to hold as self-evident truths. However, these redrawing of lines, so to speak, to include what was once shut out, came at a cost. For Sam, that a portion of that cost was social isolation and depression. The pain and trauma associated with not being able to open up to anyone was only thwarted because of his relationship with the University Chaplain:

I guess Chaz is another link. I had one day I was in the dining hall and I was distraught. I texted Chaz and said, "I just have to tell you this. I don't know what I'm going to do." I knew that if I kept being so silent about it, I was going to self-destruct and I think I've always held on to the belief that I know my life is meant for a higher purpose.

Sharing this information with an individual capable of offering (pastoral) care was a critically defining moment in Sam's developmental journey. He credits much of his ability to successfully manage the distress of trying to understand his sexuality and sexual orientation to the multiple discussions, text message exchanges, and resources Chaplain Howard shared with him.

Part of this social and socially produced isolation that he experienced was a result of the interactions he had in his informal peer groups and formal student-based

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organizations throughout campus. Though his peer group of Black students who were

similarly committed to their spiritual-and-religious identities was an amazing support

system, it was not necessarily the space he felt most comfortable discussing his

experiences experimenting with his sexuality. For sure, the limited awareness of ideas,

conceptions, and theological perspectives that validated queer lives was a barrier to

even begin these conversations. Yet, Sam also believed that discourses about Christian

maleness seemed to sanitize any serious discussion of sexuality:

> I think there's also a level of sexual restraint that Christian males are supposed to
> have. Somehow that thing is almost like repression, especially when you talk
> about things like masturbation...I think the tone is very repressed.

This idea of sexual repression stands alongside teachings of how power is performed

and constituted between women and men during sexual intercourse. While that was a

sanctioned dialogue, notions of self-pleasure were displaced.

In addition, his fraternity was not a space that he felt comfortable enough to

engage in dialogue about this developmental moment in his life. During our third

interview that occurred approximately two weeks after Sam told his parents he was gay,

I revisited a thread that was left dangling in our initial interview (and hinted at above):

how, if at all, his experience of pledging and joining a fraternity informed the

relationship between his race, gender, and spiritual-and-religious identity:

> I'll start out by saying that I just find it really interesting that when you say all
> these things [gender, race, and spirituality]...we put all these things together in
> fraternities. So, we put together being Black, we put together being males and
> we put together being Christian. So everybody will say our organization is built
> on Christian principles. Honestly, I still don't know what exactly that means. So,
> we have a prayer, okay. But we have a hymn, cool...but at the same time I think
> we're doing things that are totally opposite...of Christianity.

As Sam stated so well, the fraternity was an organization with institutionalized commitments to its members' race, gender, and spiritual identities – both as affirmation of legitimacy and investment in development. Yet, Sam believed the way(s) in which these identities were imagined to coalesce did not allow for his full existence. In large part, this was a result of witnessing homophobia within his chapter. One example he shared was watching his line brother become excommunicated after inviting others into the knowledge of his sexual orientation. Too, according to Sam, there was an ethos of hypersexuality within the organization. To be clear, the homophobia he witnessed and the hypersexuality he experienced were not inherent to the fraternity itself, but rather to some individual members. Being socialized at an early age to believe that one could not be gay and Christian, seeing the consequences his line brother endured once he shared his identity as a gay man, and encountering the hypersexual culture within his fraternity, led Sam to participate in behavior he would not have otherwise (e.g., sexual encounters with women).

Reflecting on whether or not there were people or places other than the Office of the Chaplain where he could discuss the identity negotiations he experienced as a Black man, Sam stated the following:

> If I didn't have that relationship [with the Chaplain], I don't know where I would be. Are there spaces to discuss it? Absolutely not…I hated freshman year, but I went [to a Black male support group]. It was the guys that have sex a lot…just talking about women. I [did not] want that and…it was a room of hyper-masculinity. And then you had my class, the other freshman, looking up to [upperclassman] like they're God.

According to Sam, power and representation worked to silence certain voices within this all Black, all male space. Dominant notions and expressions of hyper-masculinity seemed to literally and discursively take up the most room in dialogues around gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Above all, this strand of Sam narrative exemplifies what could happen when a student does not have access to educational spaces to process and discuss extremely difficulty identity negotiations. Literally, students could be squeezed out of these spaces into social isolation. To be clear, these spaces did serve important supportive functions in his life as well as add value to his college experience. Regardless, Sam story begs that we pay attention to the margins within the margins, so to speak – a phenomenon Intersectionality and Black Feminist scholars have long drawn our attention to.

Stories and narratives in this particular section help to demonstrate the necessity of intersectional analysis. Even those aspects of students' identities that may seem indirectly related to their spiritual developmental journeys are intertwined. Further, students' stories help us to understand the sociocultural and relational dimensions of identity development. Relationally, students' voices affirm the wealth of research that acknowledges the role socializing agents (e.g., guardians, mentors) play in identity development. Including, explicit and implicit messaging as well as modeling (in)appropriate ways of being. Further, interactions with peers are often a tug-and-pull as lines are drawn to delimit the figurative and literal movement of students' identities and bodies, respectively. Too, we are able to see the ways in which claiming one's identity – racial, gender, sexual orientation, and spiritual – is contested at the

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sociocultural level. Culturally, there are limited representations in the public sphere and imagination of how one is to be (fe)male, Black, and spiritual-or-religious, which often equates to heterosexual, Christian and attending a church with long services, gospel music, and people running through the aisles. Socially (re: sociologically), organizations, institutions, and the people who populate them work to legitimize, affirm, and validate identities (or ways of being) through discourses, rules, and official roles and functions assigned to individuals differently.

In the next section, I place findings from the present study in conversation with current literature focused on spiritual identity development in higher education, which was covered in Chapter Two. Also, I discuss what implications for practice and research these findings hold.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, I set out to understand the spiritual developmental processes of Black undergraduate students attending the University of Pennsylvania. Too, I explored how their race, gender, and sexual orientation identities informed their developmental journeys. A total of 25 semi-structured, individual interviews with 21 Black undergraduate students comprised the data source for this study. To qualify for participation in the study, students had to self-identify as Black and consider themselves to be a spiritual person. In order to recruit students, I visited the general body meetings of five student organizations that were explicitly targeted toward Black undergraduates or included a sizable number of Black undergraduate students in its membership; sent an email to one student group for students of color that did not hold a general body meeting that semester; and attended an undergraduate course focused on Black history at the University of Pennsylvania. While the study was open to students from any or no faith tradition, the overwhelming majority of students in the sample either identified as Christian or was raised in a Christian household.

In this summary chapter, I provide a brief overview of the purpose of the study, the research method I employed, as well as key findings that emerged from the investigation. Following the summary I offer a discussion wherein I place the findings from the present study in conversation with published research on students' spiritual identity development. I conclude this chapter with a series of implications for practice and future research.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black undergraduate students enrolled at PWIs develop spiritual identities prior to and during college. The primary research question guiding this study was how do Black undergraduate students describe their spiritual identity developmental processes before and during college? Three additional sub-questions were also explored: (a) what are Black students' conceptualizations of spirituality; (b) what factors influence students' spiritual identity development; and (c) what is the relationship between students' gender, sexual orientation, and racial identities and their spiritual identity development.

This study offers much needed insights concerning an under-theorized and under-conceptualized area of student development theory: how Black undergraduate students develop spiritual identities prior to and during college. While greater scholarly attention is being paid to college students' spirituality, fewer energies and intellectual labor is invested in understanding the spiritual realities of Black undergraduates. With particular attention to socializing environments and agents, this study sheds light on how some Black undergraduate students came to understand themselves in relation to terms such as spirituality and religion. Further, findings from this study provide educators with a more comprehensive perspective on how spirituality interacts and co-exist with students' racial, gender, and sexual orientation identities throughout developmental processes. As such, educators on college and university campuses could look to these findings in order to offer programmatic initiatives and craft effective counseling approaches that better support Black students' spiritual needs.

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The integrated framework that guided the study's design and execution drew

from multiple disciplinary and professional fields: religious studies, psychology,

sociology, and higher education literature. Miller's (2012) contribution proves critical for

several reasons. First, by emptying the category of religion, there is less emphasis on

identifying what is religious about particular phenomena or set of behaviors, but rather

what these social categories accomplish for those who discursively produced (and are

produced by) these concepts. One result of this emptying is the complicating and

uncoupling of the notion that religion and spirituality is primarily about meaning

making. While this may be true of many individuals as well as faith traditions, scholars

should not cast the quest for meaning as an inherently religious or spiritual human

activity. Second, Miller's critique of studies that leave the category of religion un-

interrogated and deploy religion primarily as a tool to buffer transgression – "a process

that employs religion as a moral contraceptive – buffering threats of cultural and social

aggression" (Miller, 2012, p. 21) – calls scholars attention to the aspects of students'

relationship to spiritual and religious discourses, ideology and institutions that may not

promote healthy development. Lastly, Miller's call for the use of social theories such as

Bourdieu's *habitus* displaces the origin of the spiritual and religious self from a

presumed interiority *out* into the social worlds that people are raised in and occupy.

Also, psychologists Mattis and Jagers (2001) advance an appreciation for how

socialization processes create affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes.

Sociologists Bender and Taves (2012), are useful in helping to understand how

students select certain identity categories to not only make sense of who they are in the

world, but also who they are in relation to others. This assisted in my sense making of

students persistent distancing themselves from the category religious-not-spiritual

human beings. Also, in tandem with Miller's (2012) call to focus on what is accomplished

through these demarcations, Bender and Taves open analysis into how these categories

inform how students move throughout spaces on college campuses and the degree to

which students may or may not interact with peers.

Further, employing Black Feminism's Intersectionality (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw,

1989 & 1991; hooks, 1990) this study sheds light on how, as a result of certain spiritual

and religious socializing processes and discourses being deeply patriarchal and

heteronormative, many women as well as gay men in the present study experienced

religion often times to be oppressive of salient aspects of their personhood. Also, it

allowed me to better understand how students were resisting these dominant

narratives of what constituted an authentic religious woman or man.

Lastly, Tisdell (2003) provides at least three noteworthy contributions to the

present study. First, the concept of spiraling back compliments narrative inquiry well in

an effort to understand how students re-member past experiences, extrapolate value

from those moments, and reappropriate those meanings and values to their present day

lived experiences. Also important, Tisdell challenges normative developmental, stage-

based models that inherently exclude many students' experiential realities, particularly

minoritized students. Third, Tisdell's sensitivity to how culture is central, not periphery,

to spiritual developmental processes begs that students' race and ethnic identities are

accounted for rather than ignored. Finally, consistent with and reflective of

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), Tisdell works through the relationships that exist between spiritual identities and other social identities.

Qualitative research methods (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002) were utilized to examine the spiritual developmental journeys of Black undergraduate students, the influences on students' spiritual identity development, and to understand how students racial, gender and sexual orientation identities intersect with their spiritual identities. More specifically, grounded in standpoint epistemology, Narrative Inquiry (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008) guided the selection of a research site and participants as well as data collection and analysis. Narrative Inquiry was particularly useful for capturing students' developmental arches and brought to the surface the meaning people made of their past in such in way as to bring some coherence to their present self as well as important scenes and actors, so to speak, that mattered along the way. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to understand students' developmental journeys as it pertains to their spiritual identity – in relationship to their race, gender, and sexual orientation – as well as what influences were particularly formative in shaping who students were becoming.

In order to recruit students to participate in the study, I emailed leaders of student organizations that were either purposefully established to support Black students or where a sizable amount of Black students were members. In my initial email, I requested five minutes at their upcoming general body meeting to share the purpose of my study with their members and ask if any one present was interested in participating. I then collected the names and email addresses of those students who

were interested or requested more information before making a decision. In total, I visited five student organizations, sent out an email blast to one student organization (as they did not hold a general body meeting that semester), and visited one undergraduate course were at approximately 25 Black students were enrolled.

I followed up via email with each student who expressed any interest in participating to expound on the purpose of the study, confirm their willingness and availability to participate, and field any questions or concerns they had. A total of 21 participants agreed to and ultimately participated in individual, semi-structured interviews. Three students were selected for follow up interviews, as particular aspects of their narratives I believed deserved more probing and could offer insights into students' spiritual developmental processes. Though I intended to interview each student two additional times, only one student was available. The other two were interviewed one additional time.

Upon arriving at the interview, I went over the consent form with each student and we both signed the document after the student had a chance to read the form and ask any questions. After which, students completed a demographic profile form. Each individual interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. I coded and analyzed the transcribed interviews using the qualitative analysis software, Dedoose©.

Data analysis happened formally in three phases. In phase 1, after receiving all transcripts, I read through each transcribed interview in order to gain a sense of what the narratives were saying. During which, I jotted down notes in the margins just to

record initial sensemaking of what I was reading. After reviewing all of the notes, I transferred phrases to an excel sheet that reflected the notes I had taken. In phase 2, I read through all interview transcripts for a second time using the phrases recorded on the excel sheet to code the data for emerging themes. I then edited the excel sheet to drop phrases that were not as salient across the narratives and refined the remaining ones into codes. Lastly, in phase 3, I listened to the audio file of each interview while reading the transcript in order to get a sense of tone and affect in students' telling of their narratives. This was primarily for me to come as close as possible to understanding the student's narrative self.

To increase the study's trustworthiness, I employed two strategies: member checking and peer debriefing. First, I sent all 21 students a copy of our transcribed conversation with my Code Book. Students were given the opportunity to edit any of their responses via Track Changes in Microsoft Word and challenge any code they felt I applied to their interview inappropriately. Several students used this opportunity to ask me not to use certain parts of their stories. Also, students were asked to select a pseudonym of their choosing. A total of 11 students participated in the member checking process.

Second, I assembled two peer-debriefing teams of colleagues who have expertise in student development, spirituality, or qualitative research. Each peer debriefing team consisted of two members. I sent three different transcripts (n = 6) to each team with a list of my research questions. The team members read each transcript with the research questions in mind, jotting down their sensemaking of the data. To

facilitate feedback, I had each team member email me their notes and then organized a virtual meeting via Google Hangout to discuss what they believed the data was telling them.

Despite my efforts described above to maximize and ensure trustworthiness, there were several methodological limitations to the study. First, though the study was open to all students who identified as a spiritual person, the overwhelming majority of students who participated either identified as Christian or was raised in a Christian home. The second limitation is selection bias. There are very likely other students for whom their spiritual identities are not as salient in comparison to many of the participants, whose narratives are not reflected in the study. Lastly, interviewing the majority of students (n = 18) only one time limited the ability to probe deeper into students' narratives. Additional interviews would have likely provided deeper insights into the phenomenon under study.

Though these limitations are present, several key findings emerged from this study. First, as outlined above in the section titled *The Telling*, two central components were consistent across students' narratives: personalizing their identities and defining moment and turning points. The former involved a process whereby students had to answer the question: are my spiritual beliefs truly my own? This allowed students an opportunity to critically reflect on whether or not they were personally invested in their professed spiritual identity or simply reflecting the desires of their guardians and other authority figures. At times, religious leaders who challenged students to take ownership of their spiritual identities prompted this process. Other times this process begun as a

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result of students critiquing their spiritual and religious socialization. In both instances, students were attempting to be more sincere and intentional about their identification as spiritual or religious beings. Concerning *Defining Moments, Turning Points* most students would often tell their narratives in such a way that these moments functioned as pivots and posts to signify a critical shift in how they understood themselves in relation to being spiritual or religious and identify landmarks that they could discursively point to when making sense of how they understood themselves presently. Students often entered these moments through painful, even traumatic experiences. Too, these moments often arose when the materiality of students' lived experiences could not be fully, or adequately, understood through their ideological or theological beliefs.

Second, three pedagogical sources were found to have influenced students' developmental processes: guardians, secondary schooling and peer groups, and college. The quote that opens the section explaining guardians' roles in students' spiritual identity development effectively captures the powerful and pivotal role guardians play: "People are not born Christian. They're born to Christian parents". That is to say, first and foremost guardians' shape how students understand the social categories of spirituality and religion and their relationship to those categories. Equally important to *what* students learned was *how* they learned. This was evident as an overwhelming majority of students were raised in Christian households, yet their socialization experiences differed substantively depending on how guardians' themselves embodied the spiritual, religious, or secular beliefs they professed. Stated differently, though many guardians shared similar expectations of how their students' identified religiously there

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was variation in exactly how students would perform their identities and how involved guardians were in establishing parameters for how students lived out their identities.

Another pedagogical source for students' spiritual development was secondary school and peer groups. While the home served as a primary socializing space and institution, students' interactions with spiritual and religiously diverse peers offered them competing notions of what they were taught to hold as truth, particularly as it related to certain religious beliefs (e.g., belief in a monotheistic God who created the universe). Too, educators through dialogue or class assignments, provided students counter perspectives for how they understood the world and their own spiritual identities. These range of encounters were cognitive and affective hurtles for some, while empowering experiences for others.

The last pedagogical source that emerged as a salient aspect of students' spiritual identity developmental process was college. College for some students allowed them an opportunity to (outwardly) perform their spiritual identities in ways more reflective of how they perceived themselves (internally). Thus, it was less about redefining who they were and more about actualizing the person they had long imagined themselves to be. This was possible because of the geographic and ideological distance between their lives at college and their environments back home. Other students understood college to be a testing ground. Students, who were exploring how to be spiritual in ways that differed from how they were raised, benefitted from being surrounded by spiritually diverse peers. Faced with greater freedoms than they had at home, students who enrolled in college with serious commitments to their spiritual-and-

religious identities talked about college as an opportunity for them to prove to themselves to what extent they were invested in remaining the spiritual or religious person they entered college as. This was especially true of students who experienced college as a place that was antithetical to their spiritual and religious identities.

The third set of findings that emerged from the present study concerned the interacting and multidirectional relationship between students' spiritual, racial, gender, and sexual orientation identities. Admittedly, I begin this study assuming that the Black students I interviewed would talk about the intersections of race and spirituality by discussing how their spirituality was developed in response to (and to respond to) anti-Black racism. In fact, in my dissertation proposal I dedicated a brief section to the racialized experiences of Black undergraduate students at predominantly White institutions. The reason was twofold. First, it was consistent with how other scholars studied religion and spirituality among Black communities within the United States (West, 1987; Pinn, 2003). Second, I argued, it provided context for understanding why most studies on spirituality and religion among Black undergraduates focused on linking spirituality and religion to positive educational outcomes, such as persistence, sense of belonging, and academic achievement (i.e., GPA). However, I have since removed this section, in large part due to students' explication of how they understood the relationship between their racial and spiritual identities. Too, by not situating anti-Black racism at the center of students' raced and spiritual identity interactions, my analysis is more consistent with one of my central arguments: Black students' educational experiences should not be persistently presented as problems. Put differently, my

framework would have predetermined *how* race mattered – with a preoccupation

towards anti-Black racism – rather than simply stating that race does matter and seeking

to understand how it mattered in students' developmental processes. Just as Black

undergraduates educational experiences are more than problems and crises, their racial

realities cannot be reduced to responses to anti-Black racism.

Notwithstanding my shift in approach to exploring the intersection of spirituality

and race, several students told stories of experiencing racism and racial microaggressions

in various religious and spiritual communities. That is, students discussed attending

religious communities where there racial identity was marginalized explicitly through

religious teachings and directly through their interactions with their White peers.

Moreover, many students deployed race as a way to demark the difference between

Black and non-Black worship experiences. Usually, students would point to style of

music, duration of religious services, rituals practiced and expressions of worship as

aspects of Black religious services that were distinct from non-Black religious gatherings.

In addition to presenting these generalities about Black religious experiences, students

told stories of negotiating the tropes of the Black spiritual figure, which was almost

always understood to be Christian. Beyond being expected to perform a certain

racialized spirituality, students believed within the Black community on campus there

was a presumed, yet real, distinction between sacred (i.e., gospel choir) and secular (i.e.,

sorority party) places and the authenticity of students identity claims could be called

into question if they too often traversed between the two. Lastly, race mattered in

determining the type of spiritual communities students felt most comfortable to

worship. Again, relying on what they understood to be the Black religious experience, students discussed having very little formal spaces or resources on campus that catered to Black students' spiritual needs.

Finally, gender and sexual orientation were critical aspects of Black undergraduate women and men spiritual identity developmental journeys. Regardless of gender, all students who were raised in or presently were apart of a religious community pointed out the patriarchal roots and strands within their religious or spiritual communities. That is, women were often positioned deferentially to men. Students explained this in several ways. First, within intimate partner relationships women were expected to "follow" their male partners' lead. This included, not showing them up in any way and not being "strong headed". Second, female students in the study discussed how adult women were structurally marginalized within religious institutions. Though they were integral to the life of the religious institution, limited roles were prescribed for women that were often less prestigious than men and were lower on the leadership hierarchy. Third, several students critiqued the Bible for being patriarchal and sexist. They argued that the sacred text was, in large part, a source and tool of oppression. Though female undergraduates in the present study offered substantive critiques of patriarchy, many did not see this as reason to abandon their spiritual-and-religious identities. For some women, they attempted to regulate their gendered expressions through spiritual dictates (i.e., submissiveness). Other women refused to conform to certain gendered norms expected of them. It is worth noting that many of the women hinted at their sexuality as being a critical factor in how they

understood the relationship between their gendered and spiritual identities. However,

except for one female student, they each stopped short of expounding on this

relationship. This was in contrast to the men who openly shared how their sexuality

informed their gendered and spiritual identities. As I understood this in the moment of

the interview to be a result of my own positionality as a heterosexual male, I did not

probe further when students hesitated.

Similar to their female peers, men in the study were critical of their (in)ability to

actualize the heteropatriarchal religious norms they were expected to follow. In fact,

several men spoke to their own confusion about how one was to simultaneously

promote equality within their romantic partnerships, while occupying the role as "head

of household". Too, several men discussed how their religious socialization taught them

that they were in fact superior to women. With this superiority came responsibility,

especially as it pertained to romantic interactions with female partners. One man

shared how even down to the anatomical level of sexual intercourse, he was taught men

were in the position of power and thus, had to be responsible for not allowing

interactions between women and men to become sexual.

As stated in the previous chapter, three of the five men in the study identified as

gay. While one believed there was no space for him within faith-traditions due to his

sexual orientation, the other two students did not understand the relationship between

their spiritual-and-religious identities and their sexual orientation in the same way.

Through a critique of the heteronormativity of certain religious teachings, they refused

to accept the idea that Christian men were inherently heterosexual. Students relied on

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their personal experiences and narratives to challenge what they believed to be narrow constructions of what constituted a *real* Christian (i.e., heterosexual men). As Sam and Brad's narratives demonstrate, attempting to carve out space as gay men who were firmly committed to their spiritual-and-religious identities was not an easy task. Too, they witnessed individuals use the Bible as tool of oppression, to justify and ground their homophobic views. Though it did not happen at the same rate, both men accepted the task to expand their notions of spirituality and religion to make room for their full selves.

Discussion

Though a growing body of literature from higher education scholars focuses on the spiritual lives and developmental journeys of college undergraduates (Astin, 2004; Astin et al., 2010; Bryant & Schwartz, 2006), comparatively fewer investigations explore Black undergraduates spiritual and religious lived experiences (Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002) and even less focus on their spiritual developmental processes (Tisdell, 2003). While findings from this study are consistent with conclusions drawn from other literature on spiritual identity development among college students, new insights complicate and extend how we understand students' spiritual developmental journeys. It is worth noting, that though I did not investigate educational benefits Black undergraduates accrue as a result of their spiritual worldviews and practices, that does not mean these students did not experience such benefits. As the extant literature shows, spirituality is a resource for many Black undergraduates students (e.g., prayer, meditation, belief in a higher power), promoting positive educational outcomes such as

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persistence, ability to effectively cope with racial and academic stressors, increased

academic performance, and sense of belonging (Herndon, 2003; Constantine et al.,

2006; Patton & McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2010; Strayhorn, 2011; Watt, 2003).

The three theorists whose models are most frequently used to frame and make

sense of college students spiritual development – Fowler (1981), Parks (2000), and

Tisdell (2003) – all agree that socialization processes play a huge role in individuals'

spiritual identity development. For Fowler, the relationship between children and their

caretakers is what establishes their understanding of "God". Parks also argues that

children develop a sense of who they are spiritually from authority figures, but adds that

this authority figure is not typically one individual person. Rather, it is an interlocking

system of sources throughout a child's ethos, such as media, culturally defined roles,

and traditional customs; students are exposed to this from the moment they are born,

not later as Fowler argues. Tisdell extends both Parks and Fowler's argument by paying

attention to the role of culture in individuals' socialization processes.

My findings are markedly consistent with these scholars and affirm the powerful

role of socialization in shaping how students understand themselves as spiritual or

religious persons. A set of people, places, and experiences work to co-produce students'

spiritual identities. In my study, I found the critical people to be guardians and peers and

the critical spaces that informed development to be the home, secondary schools, and

college. Too, as Parks' (2000) points out, students in the present study also gleaned

from their environments what were culturally legitimized ways of being spiritual and

shaped their behaviors accordingly. This was particularly true for students who were

engaged in the work of figuring out how their gender, sexual orientation and spirituality should co-exist. My findings also confirm Tisdell's (2003) thesis that this process is clearly one that, through and through, is a reflection of culture. Specifically, how students' racial identities worked on several levels: as a target of marginalization, a source of empowerment, a discursive stand-in for traditions and customs they learned growing up, in what communities they felt most comfortable to worship, as well as what students understood to be the historical and contemporary role of spirituality and religion in the collective experiences of Black Americans.

A couple additional insights that emerge from my findings complicate how we understand the relationship that exists between students and their environments and their socializing agents who occupy those spaces. First, as I explain in *personalizing identities,* students' identification with certain spiritual and religious identities is not always done without some form of critical self-reflection. In some instances, in fact, religious and spiritual leaders engage young and late adolescents in exercises that ask them to think about whether what they believe is truly what they believe, or merely a reflection of their guardian's belief system. To be clear, these leaders did not leave open unlimited possibilities for students and as such, had an intended outcome in mind. Other students' drew from their lived experiences to critically self-reflect on their socialization. In either instance, this finding shows that one would be wrong to assume that individuals are not participating in critical self-reflection about their environments and their role in it during young adolescent years; especially when critical aspects of

students' identities are not validated through their spiritual socialization (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation).

Another insight that complicates Fowler (1981) and Parks' (2000) attention to socialization as it relates to influences beyond the home, is that while it is true multiple people and places work simultaneously to play a substantive role in students' spiritual identity development, they are not necessarily working in tandem. As findings in the present study show, students' experiences in secondary schools and interactions with peers sometimes offered counter perspectives to what they were learning at home. That is to say, that though these socializing people and places sometimes worked to reinforce each other, in other moments they were in contradiction and thus, opened up space and opportunity for students to critically reflect on what they learned at home.

The students' narratives were also consistent with Tisdell's (2003) description of spiraling back. Tisdell argues, in contrast to Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000), developmental processes are not normative pathways that a majority of individuals follow. Instead, students are constantly in the process of re-membering previous experiences to extract value and meaning and re-appropriate what is extracted to their present day understanding of themselves, the world around them and their lived experiences. This was especially true for students who were raised in very religious households, still identified within the faith tradition they were raised in, yet embodied and practiced their spiritual-and-religious identities in ways that would not be deemed appropriate or valid within the religious communities they came from. Though students had substantive critiques of their religious upbringing, many did not see this as a reason

to disavow their religious identity all together, but rather an opportunity to redefine it for themselves. As such, students could still find value in religious and spiritual teachings and traditions they were socialized to appreciate growing up, while continuing to redefine and expand what it meant for them to be spiritual beings.

Further, findings from the present study corroborate Tisdell (2003) and others critiques of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) stage-based, linear model of spiritual identity development. The epistemic violence that is done through the creation of a normative model that presumably most individuals follow renders invisible, illegible and invalid stories that "deviate" from that model. This is particularly true when those models are based on a predominantly White, heterosexual, middle class sample. As findings in this study show, students' socialization experiences, how they make sense of their experiences, and what levers or experiences prompt cognitive, behavioral, and affective shifts along their spiritual developmental journeys are diverse and varied. This does not foreclose the possibility for one to speak about patterns and commonalities in students' spiritual development. But it does mean we must be cautious in how we frame and articulate such commonalities. For instance, it is one thing to say race matters in students' spiritual identity development and another to argue that race *only* or *primarily* matters in a very specific way. The latter approach can create an analytical blind spot for educators to make sense of a variety of ways race may matter in an individual students' spiritual development.

Findings from this study also confirm the necessity for more scholars to employ an intersectional analysis in order to account for relationships between students'

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spiritual identities and other social identities, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. Though both Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) acknowledge that their models are not universally representative, their models are essentially devoid of serious consideration of how race, gender and sexual orientation informed their participants' spiritual development. Conversely, Tisdell (2003) argued that scholars must investigate how students' social identities are interrelated and thus, are critical to understanding spiritual identity development. One insight that emerged from the present study and extends Tisdell's claim is that these interacting processes are always a reflection of power. Though Tisdell offers, through participant stories, how certain identities (i.e., heterosexual) were privileged over others, there is not an explicit articulation that when examining the relationship between students' various social identities and their spiritual identity, we must attend to how power works to marginalize certain ways of being, while normalizing others. To be certain, Tisdell's book length treatment of this topic makes clear that she is very much attuned to how power and privilege works in students' spiritual development. Thus, my findings only serve to further validate her claims and too possibly state her thesis more firmly: we limit our analysis when we do not account for power and privilege when investigating the interactions of multiple social identities.

In addition to the import of these findings for framing spiritual identity development, they also challenge what Miller (2012) referred to as the church decline narrative. Within that discourse, scholars posit that religion is becoming less significant in the day-to-day lived experiences of young adults. Typically this is measured by

observing young adults participation in faith-based and religious institutions. Decreased participation rates, they argue, reflects decrease significance. However, as findings from this study show, though students may not attend religious services as frequently and may not be apart of clearly defined spiritual or religious communities this does not mean religion does not matter in their lives. In fact, when students were raised in households were religious socialization was substantial the imprint of those experiences did not disappear once they become young adults and entered college. A huge part of students' spiritual development involved negotiating the influence of how they were raised in order to carve out different possibilities for themselves as young adults.

Lastly, findings from the present study demonstrate what we can find when we follow Miller's (2012) call to empty the category of religion in order to ask how individuals take up religion and spirituality to accomplish certain human activities and Bender and Taves (2012) claim that these categories allow individuals to make sense of themselves in relation to others. In many of the studies on religion and spirituality among college students reviewed in Chapter Two, the categories of religion and spirituality were left un-interrogated and scholars often started from an a priori definition of what these terms meant in students lived experiences (a notable exception being Patton and McClure, 2009). However, when the category is emptied, instead of searching to understand what is religious about a phenomena or set of activities, scholars can see what individuals are accomplishing with the category of religion itself. For instance, in the present study religion and spiritual identity markers were used at times to designate which group of people could occupy which spaces on college

campuses. Moreover, by interrogating the categories of religion and spirituality, these findings show how both were deployed to regulate identity expressions through legitimizing and delegitimizing certain ways of being. Further, as discussed when describing the participants demographic profiles in Chapter Three and reflective of Bender and Taves' argument, students used these terms to identify who they were, while simultaneously marking distinctions with others. For instance, the majority of students in the present study either identified as spiritual-and-religious or spiritual-not-religious. The former category signified students attempt to redefine what was possible within certain faith traditions, while the latter signified students attempt to establish their identifies beyond religious traditions. Yet, despite identifying with different identity categories, all students describe themselves in opposition to the category of religious-not-spiritual. This allowed them to critique the perceived shallowness among those who simply exhibited certain behaviors that were understood to be religious (i.e., attending religious services), while establishing the sincerity of their own identities.

Conclusions

The findings of this study support five conclusions about spiritual identity development about Black undergraduates:

1. Socializing agents and spaces play a powerful role in co-producing how students understand themselves as spiritual and religious persons.

2. Students' engage in (critical) self-reflection about their socialization experiences prior to college.

3. There are no normative developmental pathways. Rather, students are constantly in the process of re-making previous experiences to extract value and meaning and re-appropriate what is extracted to their present day understanding of themselves, the world around them and their lived experiences.

4. Students' spiritual developmental journeys are Intersectional (e.g., raced, gendered).

5. Though students may not attend religious services and may not be apart of clearly defined spiritual or religious communities, this does not mean religion does not matter in their lives.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Findings from this study led to several implications for both practice and future research, specifically for those interested in supporting Black undergraduates' spiritual needs on college and university campuses. Thus, recommendations for postsecondary administrators, faculty as well as researchers are offered in this section.

Postsecondary Educators and Administrators

Several implications for practice for postsecondary educators and administrators working at highly selective, predominantly White universities can be drawn from the present study. First, educators should work to ensure that Black undergraduate students have access to spaces and opportunities to critically reflect on, make sense of, and explore their spiritual identities. Put differently, campus administrators must

purposefully attend to this aspect of students' identities, intentionally inviting and

students into spaces that acknowledge and engage students' spiritual identities. Certain

pedagogical assumptions should guide educators approach in designing such spaces.

Foremost, assumptions about students' relationships to the categories of spirituality

and religion should not be decided on a priori. Rather, educators should assist students

reflect upon their personal histories to better understand how they have arrived at

certain notions of religion and spirituality and how they situate themselves in this

diverse and broad constellation of social categories.

Moreover, administrators should take seriously and capitalize on the previous

work and energies students committed to their processes of critical reflection and

interrogation of their spiritual identities. That is to say, educators should not take for

granted the idea that students arrive on campus without ever having their positions

challenged around these issues. While this may hold true for some undergraduates, as

the findings presented above show, some students are cognizant of the ideological

limitations of their socialization and have even confronted the question of why it is they

believe what the believe. As such, educators would be better served in understanding

what epistemological resources students rely upon in answering these questions in

order to better support them in their journeys.

Further, educators should embrace and promote the value of liminality – a

developmental reality for many students – in their own approach to reaching out to

students. As a majority of participants in the present study were in substantive ways

encountered religious socialization across a variety of institutional domains (e.g., home,

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school, peer networks, faith-based organizations), the residual affect of those

experiences did not disappear simply because students no longer participated in similar

activities or organizations once they were in college. Occurring in formative years of

students' developmental journeys, the cartography of these experiences remained

visible on the cognitive, affective, and interpersonal aspects of students' lives. Thus,

many students arrived and persisted through college without abandoning these social

markers as self-identifiers. Instead, students continually (re)negotiated their

relationship to the social categories of religion and spirituality. Educators should

embrace this small-t truth of students' lived experiences. That is, while the grammar

students' employ for understanding themselves, the world, and their position in it may

exist through formal religious rhetoric and traditions, educators should encourage

students to continue to (re)make their spiritual and religious identities their own.

Emphasis should be placed on challenging the idea that there exist definitive ways to be

in general and to be religious or spiritual in particular. Or, as Chaplin Charles Howard

puts it, educators must learn how engage students around the "*but"* of their identities:

"I'm Buddhist, *but*…" or "I'm Christian, *but*…" for instance.

Last, and arguably most important, college educators and administrators

pedagogical approach should prioritize exposing students to, as referred to previously,

Laverne Cox's notion of possibility models. As findings from the present study suggests,

students could benefit tremendously from being made aware of the intra- and inter-

diversity that exists among those who identify as spiritual and religious. An intended

learning outcome of educational initiatives and programs focused on meeting

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undergraduates' spiritual needs should be to expose students to inter- and intra-religious and spiritual diversity. Anticipating the ways students other identities interplay with their spiritual identities, educators should offer specific resources that help student think through the role spirituality and religion may play in their gender, racial, sexual and sexual orientation identity development. In particular, educators and administrators should curate and organize resources (e.g., books, articles, YouTube videos) that students can utilize and engage.

Being that institutional contexts are so diverse, the form such programmatic efforts take are difficult to predict. Nonetheless, several college offices or university units that could facilitate such experiences include office of multicultural affairs, office of the chaplain, residential services (i.e., living-learning communities) or first year student experience programs. Whether a series of events or a regularly offered activity, educators should launch initiatives that target Black undergraduate students and offer engaging experiences that allow them to think about how they want to define their spiritual identities.

Notwithstanding these recommendations, it is extremely important that efforts to support Black undergraduate students' spiritual development are grounded in the realities of specific ecological contexts. Educators should explore the spiritual needs of Black students on their campuses. At least one way this could be achieved is by hosting a series of focus groups or administering surveys.

As it relates to implications for future research, I make several recommendations for scholars interested in studying spiritual development among Black undergraduates. These recommendations concern both how and what researches should consider when exploring these phenomena among Black undergraduate students. First, as this study was conducted in a highly selective, research intensive, predominantly White university, additional studies should seek to explore Black undergraduate spiritual developmental journeys in different institutional contexts, such as Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Community Colleges, and Liberal Arts Colleges. These varying institutional contexts are sure to yield different insights as histories, traditions, and norms are not identical. Beyond institutional policies and organizational cultures, the makeup of the student body at varying institutions, too, will inform students' developmental experiences. For instance, what, if any, influence would a student body that consisted of more Black students have on Black undergraduates spiritual development? What influence, if any, would having a large percentage of students from the Bible Belt South in a college's student body have on Black undergraduate students' development? These questions, as well as others, deserve our attention.

Second, further studies should pay particular attention to the spiritual developmental experiences of "non-traditional" college students: those who are not between the ages of 18 and 24, those who do not live on campus or attend residential colleges, and those who are not full-time students. My own study, in some implicit yet critical ways, suffers from this blind spot and participates in the problematic trend

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among student development theory that prioritizes the experiences of "traditional"

college students. Future studies should focus on the lived realities and personal

narratives of these students.

Third, more research should attempt to explore the intersection of spirituality

with other social identities not considered in this study, such as sexuality, class, and

ability, and geography to name a few. Exploring such intersections is sure to provide rich

insights that have yet to be considered. In doing so, scholars should remain attentive to

how power, through representation and authorizing agents and discourses,

simultaneously legitimize certain ways of how these identities should interact while

invalidating and consequently marginalizing others. Further, researchers should

continue to find innovative ways to present intersectional narratives that appropriately

maintain students wholeness. For instance, though the present study employs an

intersectional analysis, some may argue the data is presented in a segmented fashion

(i.e., spirituality and race) rather than a fully integrated manner.

Lastly, more studies of spirituality and religion among Black undergraduates

should purposefully investigate the experiences of non-Christian students. This could

include students who either identify with another faith-tradition or simply was not

raised and socialized into Christian traditions. This would undoubtedly broaden how we

understand spirituality among Black undergraduates. To be certain, the tendency to

privilege Christian religious thought in the study of religion and spirituality among Blacks

in general and Black undergraduates in particular is likely a function of Christianity being

the faith tradition most represented among Black Americans. Further, exploring the

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spiritual lives of religiously unaffiliated students require the use of different social

theories to understand as well as different methods to ask questions. While Miller

(2012) points toward postmodern social theories as a viable response to this challenge,

their may yet be additional interpretive models that help us see more clearly how

students are using spirituality as a category to make and re-make themselves and the

world around them.

Appendix A: Consent Form

Title: The Stories We Tell: Narratives of Spiritual Development Among Black Undergraduates

Principal Investigator (PI): Shaun R. Harper, University of Pennsylvania **Co- Principal**

Investigator (Co-PI): Keon M. McGuire , University of Pennsylvania

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand how Black undergraduate students enrolled at predominantly white institutions develop spiritual identities prior to and during college. Participation will require you to complete a pre- interview participant questionnaire and participate in at least two face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews, lasting about 90 minutes each.

Procedures: If you sign this document, you agree to have at least two face-to- face interviews. The interviews will take place on convenient times and places for the researcher and participant. This study is a voluntary research study, so you will incur any and all costs traveling to the interview site. All interviews will be audio-taped. The tapes will be used to transcribe the interviews. Your name will not appear on the written record of the interview. You grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a research study, including a dissertation and any other future publications. You understand that a brief synopsis of each participant will be used and will include the following information: gender, family socioeconomic background, race/ethnicity, year in school, discipline, enrollment status, and any other pertinent information that will help the reader come to know and recall each participant. You grant permission for the above personal information to be used.

Risks and Benefits: The risks involved in the study may include possible loss of your confidentiality. Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. However, no other foreseeable risks are associated with this study. The researcher hopes to gain insights into Black undergraduate students' spiritual lives that will assist educators in their efforts to support students' spiritual development.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to not participate in the study. In the circumstance that you decide to participate and later change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at anytime. You understand that you may skip questions on the questionnaire and during the interview at any time.

Confidentiality: Ensuring your anonymity is a primary concern of the study team. The Co-PI will keep you records private to the extent allowed by the law. You will be able to choose a pseudonym of your preference to use as your name in the study so that your

name and identity will not be disclosed. Only Dr. Shaun R. Harper, PI, and Mr. Keon M. McGuire, the Co-PI, will have access to the information you provide. This information will be stored in a locked cabinet on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. Your name will not appear in the presentation of the study or published results.

Contact person: Please contact Keon M. McGuire at (336) 671-8897 or via email at keon@gse.upenn.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you should contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania at (215) 898-2614.

_____   _____

Research Participant   Date

_____   _____

Keon M. McGuire, Co-Principal Investigator   Date
University of Pennsylvania

Appendix B: Participant Demographic Film

Name

*(first and last name)

Email Address

*I will only use this information to contact you and will not share it with others

Telephone Number

I will only use this information to contact you and will not share it with others

What is your status in school?

*(e.g., Junior, Senior)

What is your major?

*

Age

*

Gender

*

What part of the United States did you spend most of your time growing up? If there are multiple regions, list all that apply.

(e.g., South, Midwest, Northeast)

If you were raised in a faith tradition, what was it?

*(e.g., Judaism)

If you had to describe yourself based on the options below, how would you identify?

*

       Spiritual and Religious
       Spiritual, but not Religious
       Religious, but not Spiritual
       Other:

Please share the name of any faith/spiritually based student organization of which you are a member

*

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