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ABSTRACT

FINDING EDEN: HOW BLACK WOMEN USE SPIRITUALITY TO NAVIGATE
ACADEMIA

by Kyra T. Shahid

This narrative inquiry examines the role of spirituality in the professional practices of African American women in academia. Specifically, I conceptualize the tensions between intellectualism and spirituality as African American female faculty working in predominately-White universities negotiate them. Although there has been an increase in scholarship concerning spirituality and education in recent years, rarely have scholars looked at the ways in which African American faculty might use spirituality to address epistemic violence in the academy. The topic brings to bear a worthy discussion of the historical relationship between spirituality and intellectualism in the lives of African Americans as well as the intellectual warfare waged upon Black epistemologies in American educational institutions. African American women in particular, face a perpetuation of negative racial constructions through curricular, pedagogical, and administrative practices that has led many to believe that they had to choose between culture and intellectualism (Crane, 1994; Burrell, 2010). The narratives of the women in this study provide insights on how certain women navigate such choices.

The purpose of this study is to explore how African American women faculty use spirituality to negotiate their relationship to knowledge in ways that transcend the negative effects of racism. The research question that guides this study is how do African American women use spirituality to navigate academia? This study is significant because it examines and analyzes a form of resistance that is important to educational struggles about what constitutes knowledge and how particular knowledge is used in oppressive ways. The narratives of these scholars substantiate the importance of spirituality in the lives of women and provide insights on how African American spirituality affects the intellectual strivings of Black women educators.

FINDING EDEN: HOW BLACK WOMEN USE SPIRITUALITY TO NAVIGATE

ACADEMIA

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Table of Contents

Dedication

To my first natural born daughter, Eden Fahari. Your name means perfect splendor and you are indeed a beautiful reflection of the faultless grace of God. May this work help catapult you beyond known barriers and into your destiny.

To my God-sent daughter, Melanie Elaine. May you always know that you are a beautiful Black queen. No matter where this life leads you, know that you are purposed by God.

To all of the beautiful Black women that have been present along my journey both in flesh and in spirit. It is on your shoulders and your backs that my legacy stands. This work is evidence of the realization of your wisdom and passion nurtured within me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Preface

This chapter sets the context for the rest of this dissertation. This is a project brought on and led by inspiration; therefore, I must begin by acknowledging what brought me to this point. Writing my dissertation is a project that has occupied my thought life for quite some time. I did not know it, but the framing of this study began with my arrival to academia. In my first year of graduate study, I recall equating the academy to the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil discussed in Genesis Chapters 2 and 3. When I began to form the questions for this study, this thought re-entered my mind. I began to mull over what the Tree of life represented and how this metaphorical relationship could speak to the dilemma I, and other Black women have faced in navigating academic spaces. My passion stemmed from a desire to find a way to encourage myself and others to realize fully the intended purpose for our lives and to (re)develop the relationship with our spiritual center that equips us to fight against malicious attacks intended for our demise.

I witnessed many people attempt to coerce Black women and other people of color into believing that (1) our way of strategizing, theorizing, investigating, and understanding knowledge was not applicable to serious academic work and, (2) a spiritual approach was inappropriate and/or non-inclusive and offensive to others present that may not share our spiritual beliefs. Although I knew that a sense of spirituality was a decreed lifeline of the African American community, it seemed that one had to conceal working from a spiritual center when navigating academic circles. It took me a few years to come to an understanding of what this meant for my personal journey as a Black woman scholar. Finally, it came to me in a class as I wrote this statement:

> *Hope consumed me and devoured the rage so inherent in my soul. Passion overwhelmed me and sifted the pieces of manmade ideology to expose what could be used for Godly deeds. The Spirit made provision for my creativity in a space where standardization attempted to stockpile my gifts. Rage led me to the revolution, the revolution returned me to my original self… and that pleased God* (2011).

This passage captures the essence of this project and the motivations that led to it. Throughout the study, there may be various uses of imagery and biblical references from a Christian perspective. This is not to say all participants are Christian, but it is the language I

know and it is very familiar to many Black women, regardless of their religious affiliation. This language also captures a contextualized experience within spirituality that is particular to most Black women. For example, when I refer to "Eden" in the title, I adopt this biblical location to speak metaphorically about a space of being centered in one's thinking; walking in a holistic state in which one's mind, body, and spirit are well-watered and fruitful, like the garden of Eden. Eden represents a state of epistemological, ideological, and axiological harmony.

The tri-fold, holistic Eden is where I found the "hope" that consumed me in the passage above. This hope helped me to deal with the "rage" embodied by those forced to the margins of society because of the social constructions of race and gender. Scholars of color (hooks, 1995; Daniels, 2004; Baszile, 2006) have used the term rage often to describe the feelings that accompany oppressive, discriminatory behaviors. The element of rage that has brought on this study comes from facing acts of racism and sexism that are nonphysical and that can be understood as being *epistemologically* violent. These offenses are often not against the law and are deeply ingrained in the institutional culture of academe. Therefore, resistance to such violence might look different and require more than institutionally designed judicial practices can offer. When I use the term epistemic violence in this study, it refers to behaviors that bring harm to one's understanding of knowledge or knowledge-making processes. The definition of this term will be expanded on later in the study.

My process of theorizing begins with the examination of the use of spirituality in Black women's lives as they negotiate the metaphysical dilemma of being Black and female in predominately-White male academe. African American Spirituality is inherently diverse, passionately creative, and historically political (Harvey, 2011). Although the concept of spirituality is too vast to define, for the purposes of this study spirituality can be understood as acknowledgement of an interconnectivity with others and a connection to a divine power. In this study, spirituality is examined from an African American Christian perspective. While Christianity is a religion, it is not religious affiliation or doctrine that is in focus in this study. It is the sense of spirituality that causes one to identify as Christian or participate in the Black church that I want to bring attention to. This distinction between spirituality and religion is very important here because it causes the reader to consider the presence of divine and sacred relationships distinct from institutional structures and practices. For Black people, and Black

women specifically, religious institutions, including the Black church, have often participated in practices that enforced racist and sexist policies. Moreover, the sense of spirituality that is in focus here is one that also reflects an African cosmology and understanding of interconnectivity that predates Christian religion (Hayes, 2012).   This study draws upon the elements of African American spirituality that makes it suitable as a strategy for cultural survival and for maintenance of a faith-based conviction to live life according to principles of love and justice. Ultimately, I will define African American spirituality as a personal commitment and belief in a higher power that allows one to gain an understanding of a purpose greater than one's self and of an obligation to live by and express moral values based upon biblical precepts of love and justice. I believe that the ways that Black women academics call on and bring spirituality into the de-spiritualized academy demonstrates a form of resistance that is important to educational struggles about what constitutes knowledge and how particular knowledge is used. This study examines this declaration more closely.

I once used to the phrase "I know in my mind" incessantly but I don't anymore. I've learned that it is not always safe for me to know *there*. For my mind has been trained and colonized and forced to use Eurocentric patterns of logic that my soul cannot understand. I have to know in my *spirit*. For in my spirit the essence of who I am is revealed and my connection to humanity is no longer severed on the basis of "other."

My soul looks out and wonders, how my body signifies that the brilliance in me isn't brilliance at all. I wake up every day to a world that labels me marginal, oppressed, different, deficient. Every day I show this world that I am central, prosperous, unique, and adequate. I *(re) member* myself.

I remember the exact moment that it all came crashing down. I was a master's student studying student affairs in higher education when I had my "spiritual crisis." I was sitting in a class participating in an intergroup dialogue on race. The practice of intergroup dialogue that I experienced asked for students of color to be rational concerning the irrational experiences that we were having and to be understanding of those who lacked the capacity to dismantle the cognitive dissonance that plagued them. The process used in my graduate class was one that promoted conversations free of judgment and void of contentions. However well intentioned, this dialogue reinforced feelings of being dismissed and sustained the *epistemologies of ignorance* that protected many of my white and male counterparts from acknowledging my reality. The more I talked, the less they could hear me. It was as if their minds had been coopted into perceiving everything that I said as "other"—as something distant and disconnected from their realities and therefore not as valid, important, or real as their own perceptions. I remember them saying things like, "Oh, that can't be true because," "Well, maybe you just misunderstood," and "I think you just took it the wrong way." For them, my assertions challenged theirs and thus, mine had to be wrong or miscalculated. There were even moments when a white woman would say the same thing that I had said previously, but her words would go unchallenged. In other moments, the few Black men in my course could also effectively make claims that I had unsuccessfully made before. It was as if the fact that I was Black and female automatically signaled that I was confused and that my system of judgment (and intelligence) was flawed. While some of this appeared unintentional, there was part of me that realized that the challenge I faced was much more calculated that I first considered.

Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (2007) explain that an epistemology of ignorance to issues of race and racism is not always an accidental oversight or gap in knowledge. Sullivan and Tuana write, "Especially in the case of racial oppression, a lack of knowledge or an unlearning of something previously known is often actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation" (2007, p.1). As I sat in this dialogue, I witnessed the ways that this sort of ignorance protected the delusion of white racial superiority (and gender superiority). It seemed as if it was perfectly rational for a white person to have no knowledge about the worlds of people of color. I, a Black woman, was not supposed to be upset by this strategic amnesia and cognitive dissonance. I remember that one of the white female students in the classroom began to cry as another Black student explained what racial micro-aggressions were and how she had been personally impacted by them. The white woman's tears successfully seduced the conversation away from a critical turning point and held in place the dissonance of those who refused to believe that there was any validity to what was being said. Consequently, the Black female student, who was 'responsible' for the white student's tears was silenced. That day was not the first time this happened.

As these encounters continued, I began to think of it as the "white woman crying syndrome." This white woman crying syndrome was exactly what the name implies-a pattern reserved for white women. When women of color became emotional about something that was being said or something they themselves were sharing, their emotions were seen as bouts of rage and anger. Tears down black and brown cheeks meant that we were "taking things too seriously" or "taking it the wrong way." The presence of this dichotomy in the classroom reinforced the very dynamics that the course facilitators were trying to escape. Thus, students of color, including myself became enraged with the idea that the dialogues we engaged in were indeed anti-oppressive. I was trying very hard to make myself appear non-threatening, to speak in an acceptable dialect, but none of this was working. It was in this moment that I realized that my voice was being silenced partly because I was attempting to speak through their voice. I had been convinced that my way of strategizing, theorizing, investigating, and understanding knowledge was not applicable in that space, therefore I divorced my spiritual and intellectual self for the sake of appearing "smart."

The academy was so hostile to my spiritual self, my gendered self, my raced self. I entered that classroom not knowing that the experiences of confusion and uncertainty I was having were deliberately created. Although I knew that a sense of spirituality was a decreed lifeline of the African American community, it seemed that one had to conceal working from a spiritual center in order to be an academic. Sitting in that classroom, I heard God say to me "It is not so. Your souls knows right well. Remember who you are." I was not completely sure what that meant for me as an emerging scholar. A few weeks later, a professor handed me a book entitled, *On Spiritual Strivings: Transforming an African American Woman's Academic Life* by Cynthia B. Dillard. It was in reading this book that I began the process of what Dillard describes in her second book, *Learning To (Re) Member The Things We've Learned To Forget* (2012). I understood that God was not asking me to simply remember as in recall my memory, but to (re) member by putting back together those things that had been severed and compartmentalized. This dissertation is an extension of my personal journey towards recognizing and embracing my endarkened feminist epistemology as spiritual, intellectual, and political strategy. I explore the academic lives of a purposive sample of Black women faculty in order to examine their use of spirituality in academe. I use both personal and academic voice in this study in order to demonstrate the plurality of the space from which my voice and that of my participants arises.

Epistemic Warfare

When I use the term epistemic violence, I am referring to behaviors that bring harm to one's understanding of knowledge or knowledge-making processes. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) first used this term to identify numerous projects in history, philosophy, and literature that indorsed claims to knowledge that identified colonized communities as "other." Thomas Teo (2008) builds on Spivak's use of the term by describing epistemic violence as a dangerous hermeneutic process that has negative consequences for the "other." According to Teo (2008), this negative impact "can range from misrepresentations and distortions, to a neglect of the voices of the 'Other,' to statements of inferiority, and to the recommendations of adverse practices or infringements concerning the 'Other'" (p.58). Denise Taliaferro Baszile (2006) adapted the term epistemic violence to describe activities in the academy in which one professes a commitment to critical thinking and social justice but continues to prescribe to standards, traditions, and ways of knowing that maintain hegemony. For me, epistemic violence

encompasses all of these things. Epistemic violence is the forceful displacement of knowledge and ways of knowing in order to maintain dominance over oppressed communities.

As a graduate student, I encountered this violence on a daily basis. It was committed through language, when words like "spirit" and "faith" were labeled unacceptable explanations within serious academic inquiries. Epistemic violence was waged through omission of scholars of color from the curricula of major classes and through the positioning of such work as "raced" and "gendered" work to be explored in ethnic and women's studies programs only, or by professors who represented these identities. I experienced this violence when I encountered the epistemologies of ignorance that labeled me as the marginalized, *oppressed* other but did not label my white and male counterparts as *oppressors*. I experienced this violence when my classmates refused to hear my thoughts for the sake of maintaining their own dispositions. Epistemic violence placed implicit and explicit lacerations on my way of knowing, causing me to metaphorically bleed rage and frustration. It was in a radical return to myself during a "spiritual crisis" that I came to fully understand the necessity of Dillard's plea that we "cut to heal not to bleed" (2006). In those moments I recognized that my purpose in academe was not to arm myself with the same weapons that were intended for my demise. Audre Lorde (1984) had already cautioned that "… the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (p.3).

With this in mind, I intentionally spent the remainder of my graduate school years reexamining the complexities of this violence and the countless attacks one encounters as a Black female navigating Western academic space. I did this not as an attempt to claim victimhood, but to build a testament to the inherent wisdom I found in my spirit. My understanding was that all things work together for my good, therefore, the testimony that results from encountering said violence could become a tool to do something that I could not have done before. Testimony, I argue, is not only epistemic but also transcendent; allowing one to escape the perils of present conditions in order to envision a curative and creative future. I also believe that the testimonies that arise from spaces of Black womanhood are globally impactful, attending to an interconnectivity that expands many cultures. The foundation of this study is built upon the belief that examining the narratives of Black women as they face and overcome problems under

the umbrella of the term epistemic violence will aid in conceptualizing and proposing new practices in academe. Black women are not the only people that face epistemic violence, however our narratives provide an intriguing entry point into a conversation about Western academe and the challenges inherent within it.   The next section of this chapter describes these challenges in greater detail.

Statement of the problem

The peculiar history of black/white race relations, coupled with the dominance of Western-centered epistemologies, often engages African American scholars in a kind of intellectual warfare. Regardless of one's research agenda, many African American scholars have had to resist narratives that would lead them to believe that their way of knowing and understanding was subpar and unsuited for serious educational inquiry and leadership roles. For African American women in particular, the perpetuation of negative racial constructions--such as the incompetent, less-qualified, over emotional Black female stereotypes--through curricular, pedagogical, and administrative practices have led many to believe they had to choose between culture and intellectualism (Crane, 1994; Burrell, 2010). Likewise, many Black women scholars have felt torn between following the guides of traditional academic life and pursuing the "path" of a spiritually-led life (hooks, 1993).

Being in these unresolved positions can hinder and convolute knowledge and the conditions for acquiring it. It can also complicate the development of a strong African American identity (Helms, 1990). For example, most African American women have realized that our names, work, education, and even our lives, do not hold the same value in the minds of our white counterparts (Lerner, 1973; Tarpley, 1995), in the traditions of the institutions we serve (Benjamin, 1997; Mabokela & Green, 2001), or in the eyes of the law (Crenshaw, 1995; Coryell, 2000). Therefore, in our roles as teachers, researchers, and administrators, we have to launch counter-hegemonic agendas that allow us to (re)claim who we are as educators and repurpose the function of education for our own emancipatory aims.

These problems are not new for Black women working in academia. Although the Black Liberation Movements of the 1950s and 1960s successfully ended the acceptance of public, blatant, and violent racism (Wright, 1997), resistance to the idea of Black intellectualism

remains. Even though African American women are present in academia, our presence and work is continually questioned and devalued among our peers (McDonald & Ford-Ahmed, 1999). Furthermore, the power dynamics in academia privilege Western epistemologies, pushing Black women's ways of knowing to the margins. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) uses critical theory to discuss how these dynamics have affected Black women's perspectives on what constitutes knowledge. She writes, "Like other subordinate groups, African American women not only have developed a distinctive Black women's standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge"(Collins, 2000, p. 252). In a related perspective, bell hooks (1991) contends that, " It is the sexist/racist Western conception of who and what an intellectual is that rules out the possibility that Black women will come to mind as representatives of intellectual vocation" (p.153). Consequently, Black women often find themselves adopting and developing alternative methods for navigating academic terrain.

For Black women in academia, the struggle to be understood and appreciated as legitimate scholars is ever-present. The belief that Black women are fundamentally less capable than our white or male counterparts leads to conditions and behaviors that warrant feelings of being unwelcomed (Hamlet, 1999) and perpetuates a cycle of academicians that do not consider Black women colleagues to be credible witnesses of our own experiences (Collins, 2000) and therefore insignificant contributors to the relevant field of study. Therefore, negotiating our relationships with knowledge in ways that transcend the negative effects of racism and sexism becomes part of our agenda even if we did not intend it to. Recognizing that the bifurcating culture of Western academia and racist ideology would prefer we remain broken, Black women have to counteract the Black/White, male/female, dominant/other, spiritual/intellectual binaries to reconcile strategically a holistic self. The quest to escape the confines of Western thought and express our understanding of knowledge in ways that are more authentic leads many of us on a spiritual journey.

I believe that the surreptitious nature of contemporary racism and sexism brings harm to the understanding and creation of knowledge. As previously stated in this chapter, such actions are what I have come to describe as epistemic violence. I build upon the definitions of previous scholars (Spivak, 1988; Teo, 2008; Baszile, 2006) to describe the epistemologically violent acts that are significant to this study. These acts are specifically examined along the intersections of

race and gender, highlighting racism and sexism as problematic influences on the construction of knowledge. This is not to say that all epistemic violence stems from racism and sexism only, but this study concentrates on the forms of epistemic violence that stem from these prejudices. The intersectionality (Collins, 1998) of race and gender, which will be explored in the literature review, brings about epistemic violence that Black women experience in ways that Black men or White women do not.

In order to elaborate on my use of the term epistemic violence, I describe four epistemologically violent acts that provide clarity on the problem within this study. Language is a powerful epistemic tool that historically and continually contributes to the intellectual and spiritual colonization of African American people (Dillard, 2006). Since language serves as a way of understanding and constructing reality, I argue that the absence/dismissal of certain cultural languages hinders one's ability to 1) express and 2) transform that reality. In this particular study, that language is located in the intersection of race, gender and spirituality. I argue that spirituality is central to the lives of African American women and that the de-spiritualized nature of academia generates violence towards these individuals, albeit indirect and nonphysical. Another form of epistemic violence is the devaluing of Black intellectual work as activism (as opposed to picketing, boycotts, and other forms of public protest) (hooks, 1991). Such violence undermines the scholarship of Black women and often leads them to believe academic work that seeks to address political and social concerns of their community is not important (hooks, 1991).

Racially violent epistemic acts also take place when there is a lack of support and affirmation for work that addresses political and social concerns that challenge the status quo. Denying funding, time, or acknowledgment of such projects are frequent examples of this form of epistemic violence and could also be considered gender-biased epistemic violence. Lastly, epistemic violence takes place when Black-centered epistemologies and scholarship are denied their origins. By denying, reinterpreting, or disregarding culturally indigenous ways of knowing, many African Americans are misguided in thinking that the work of other African Americans is and will always be inferior to that of their counterparts. Using a critical lens, I intend to interrogate and analyze the ways that African American women call upon and bring spirituality into academic spaces in order to resist these forms of epistemic violence.

Examining a spiritual disconnect in academe

History suggests that spirituality has played a vital role in the emergence, persistence, and existence of African American women in academia despite and because of oppression (Watt, 2003). The relationship between spirituality and the ability to resist such oppression in the academy not only affirms this rich history, but it pinpoints the crux of the dilemma that is the focus of this study. Education for most contemporary American colleges is an intellectual pursuit. One might say that the spiritual journey, while significant for some, is not vitally important to the overall educational objective for the masses at most public universities. Furthermore, the United States Constitution forbids public institutions from promoting or prohibiting the practice of religion (Donahoo & Caffey, 2010). Since spirituality has been historically couched in religious practices, the culture in academe reflects a secular, de-spiritualized philosophy. I would argue that the dominance of Western thought also prohibits spirituality from being incorporated in the dominant culture of academia because it does not adhere to the tenants of rationality that this way of thinking privileges. This presents a complicated problem for Black women, since spirituality is central to how we function (Baszile, Personal Communication, 2013). Many Black feminist scholars have taken up the task of attending to the relationship between spirituality and education (Cozart, 2010). Feminist scholar bell hooks (1993) reflects on her experiences as a Black woman in academe:

> The academic environments that were the primary sites of my educational experiences placed little value on spiritual life. Indeed, my peers and colleagues mostly thought of religion as a kind of joke. They ridiculed and mocked the idea that any smart person could sustain belief in God. So it may have been that this atmosphere also led me to take my spiritual beliefs inward. I never thought then that the university was overall a place hostile to religious practice, but in retrospect I can see that it was (p.99).

Like hooks, many Black women working in various areas in academia have attested to the de-spiritual, often anti-spiritual atmosphere of academia. As previously stated, I believe this presents a significant dilemma for Black women whose spirituality is more often than not a fundamental component to their existence. Marimba Ani (1980) captured this problem best when she stated:

> The idea of "spirit" is especially important for an appreciation of the African-American experience. "Spirit" is, of course, not a rationalistic concept. It cannot be quantified, measured, explained by or reduced to neat, rational, conceptual categories as European

11

thought demands. Spirit is ethereal…These characteristics make it ill-suited to the mode of European academia and to written expression (p.3).

Ani's work helps us to understand that the de-spiritualized atmosphere of academia has a significant impact on the African American academic experience. I am not interested, however, in engaging this long-standing dilemma from the standpoint of what the issues are but moreso from the understanding of the transformative practices that are resisting epistemic violence. This study explores how Black women call upon and bring spirituality into de-spiritualized spaces.

Various motives lead Black women to call upon their spirituality. Empowerment (Smith, 2008), coping, resisting, developing identity (Watt, 2003; Davis-Carroll, 2011; Bacchus & Holley, 2004), and overcoming violence (Watlington & Murphy, 2006; Potter, 2007; Paranjape & Kaslow, 2010) are among the most prevalent in current research. While these motives are important and often interrelated, the purpose of this study is to explore how Black women engage or call on spirituality to combat violent epistemic acts in the academy. Plainly stated, this study is about identifying strength and where that strength comes from. By focusing more on the strength and less on the problem (which we know a lot about), I hope to generate transformation. When examining a construct as vast as spirituality, it is imperative to be clear about the scope and breath in which I use the term. I agree with Dillard (2006) who so eloquently informs us that "In many ways, the all-encompassing nature of spirit and spirituality defies definition: *It is all that is*" (p.41). Yet, in an effort to discuss the power of spirituality in the academic experiences of African American women, I must begin to clarify how I make sense of spirit and spirituality. It must be noted that spirituality and the language of "spirit" can serve either as a powerful tool in democratic educational leadership or as a tool of oppression (Carlson, 2005). By providing a cultural and ethical grounding for my use of the term spirituality, I intend to present spirituality as a positive approach to transformative practices.

In this study, I define spirituality from an African American cultural perspective because of the historic importance of resistance to oppression within this community and the significant role that spirituality has played in cultivating this resistance. Accordingly, spirituality is defined as a personal commitment and belief in a higher power that allows one to gain an understanding of a purpose greater than one's self and of an obligation to live by and express moral values based upon biblical precepts of love and justice. This definition is informed by Christian theology and in particular Black theology (Cone, 1986, 1999). I draw from the work of many

Black theologians, philosophers, and womanist scholars to encompass my understanding of African American spirituality. Operating in the belief that knowledge is communal, various theorists are included in the conversation on spirituality in an effort to demonstrate how spirituality entails activity that connects and ties people together, be it intellectual or otherwise.

General review of Methodology

My motivation for completing this study is due in part to my own experiences navigating the academy as a spiritually salient African American woman and scholar. As Baszile (2006) contends, "…all work emerges from deep-seated autobiographical questions, whether those are made explicit or remain strategically or unconsciously implicit" (p.20). As a graduate student, I have taken particular interest in understanding the context and existence of different ways of knowing, especially from marginalized groups. When designing this study, I wanted to use qualitative research tools that would allow me to acknowledge the relationship and role of the researcher and the researched in a way that was open and reflexive. I also wanted to examine and contextualize stories in a way that described lived experiences not as mere reactions to the dominant culture of academia, but exertions of a personal sense of agency *within* academia. Additionally, I wanted to conduct a study that would connect theoretically and methodologically the cultural and political contents of the data collected to everyday struggles for liberty and social justice. For these reasons, conducting a narrative inquiry that would acknowledge "…the words of the participants in ways that represent the experience of the researchers and the researched and allow evidence of the quality of the interaction of relationship to emerge in the research report" was most plausible (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.21).

The use of spirituality among African American women faculty is the object of this study. With narrative inquiry as a methodological approach, I use the stories told to understand my participants' representation of the world and their subsequent actions in it (Gomez, 1997). As Annemarie Gockel (2013) states, "Narrative research is based on the understanding that we create our experiences through language. That is, we story ourselves into being" (p.189). The strengths of narrative research in allowing one to acknowledge the range and complexities of spiritual beliefs (Gockel, 2013), as well as the ways that race and racism impact people's lives

(Bell, 2010), makes narrative inquiry a common tool for transformative work. These are my motivations for utilizing this approach.

Narrative inquires in educational research have been greatly influenced by the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) details their method by stating:

> Their unique approach is to story the research process as one of writing texts, beginning with field texts that are close to the experience of the researcher in the field, moving on to the writing of interim texts that gradually take a distance from the specifics of experience, engage more and more with the formulations of relevant theory, and thus progressing in roughly defined phases towards a final research text. All the texts written along the way can be seen to have integrity as texts of a particular kind, written according to the criteria appropriate for the nature of the text and directed to a particular audience (p. 271).

Following the guide of Clandinin and Connelly's approach, (although there is no set method for conducting a narrative inquiry) this study draws on stories that are close to my experiences as a researcher. The narratives produced through interviews with Black women faculty shape this research text. Ultimately, this study is a collaborative text, guided by inspiration and completed with as opposed to about participants. In chapter 3, I discuss my methodological approach in detail.

Methods

In this qualitative study, I conduct semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of six Black women faculty. I recruited participants using a referral method in which I asked women faculty that I knew to recruit additional participants among their acquaintances. This sampling method fit the study best due to the hidden and private nature of the community and the difficulty I would have had identifying members of this community based on public information. Participants completed a consent form that received approval from Miami University's IRB and I contacted all participants to create an interview schedule. Initial interviews were generally 2 hours long. Additional clarifying or supplemental interviews were determined based upon the data analysis. Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed our conversations and conducted a member checking process with each participant. This allowed me to clarify that the data reflected what the participants to share. I began this study with a hope to enable participants to feel a sense of agency and, through their participation in the research process, come to a better

understanding of their experiences in the academy. Utilizing a critical approach, I explored their 'stories' about being Black women in academia through a critical research process.

Theoretical lens

I ground this narrative inquiry in the critical tradition of Black feminist thought because such a theoretical framework values and recognizes the complex, contextualized relationship between the researcher and the researched as well as the shared experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000). In keeping with the critical tradition, Black feminist thought recognizes the ontological belief that "Reality is based on power and identity struggles" (Creswell, 2013, p. 37). Specifically, I turn to the work of Cynthia Dillard (2006, 2012) to establish the epistemic groundings of this study.

According to Dillard (2006), "…an endarkened [Black] feminist epistemology has as its research project the vigilant and consistent desire to 'dig up' the nexus of racial/ethnic, gender, and other identity realities—of how we understand and experience the world as Black women" (p. 26). Dillard (2006) maintains that centering spirituality by critically gazing at one's self can have transformative possibilities within the academy. Dillard (2006) also contends that the life of an academic is a life that serves humanity, is creative and political, and focused on healing mind, body, and spirit through acts of peace and justice. In her published texts, she writes about her own journey through academic life and presents evidence for the ways in which engaging spirituality can transform the epistemology, method, and paradigm one operates from within their academic scholarship. Dillard also offers support for a transparent, autobiographic approach to scholarship, particularly for people of color. What her work outlines is a spiritual process for the formation and conformation of one's sense of identity as a faculty member of color. It is for these reasons that I draw on Dillard's work to shape the methodological and theoretical frameworks of this study. As previously stated, examining the use of spirituality is the main objective of this study. Similar to the work of Dillard and other critical theorists, my study presents spirituality as a positive approach to transformative practices. The following questions guide this narrative inquiry:

I.   What do racially violent epistemic acts look like in academia?

II.   How might African American women use spirituality to negotiate instances of epistemic

violence?

Like other critical studies, this dissertation examines how systems of oppression ultimately influence the work and actions of faculty of color (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Such oppression is constantly at work under the guise of "Reason" (Baszile, 2008). This capital "r" Reason justifies why one way of knowing is superior to another and suppresses spirituality within the academy. For the purposes of this study, I specifically examine oppression through discriminatory acts that bring harm to the understanding of knowledge. Spirituality is examined as a vehicle for overcoming this actions. Spirituality refers to a culturally and ethically grounded approach to transformative practices. In this qualitative study, spirituality is defined from an African American perspective due in part to the historic importance of resistance to oppression within this community and the significant role that spirituality has played in cultivating this resistance. Consequently, I rely on the critical tradition of Black feminist thought to justify my claims for this contextualized understanding of knowledge and approach to research. In keeping with the critical tradition, this study examines assumptions of power and identity and calls for professors to examine the conditions of their existence in academia with the intent to transcend the constraints placed upon them through epistemic violence and/or take an active approach to empowering their colleagues to seek transformation in their institutions (Creswell, 2013). Since the participants of this study are African American women, the use of Black feminist thought is appropriate: however, I believe the implications may be relevant (although not generalizable) to various groups who have been 'othered' for one reason or another.

While there are theoretical perspectives that acknowledge the impact of spirituality on democracy such as Cornel West's notions of prophetic pragmatism (1982), and the impact of spirituality on educational leadership in schools such as Dantley's (2003) critical spirituality, as well as the impact of spirituality on identity in research (Dillard, 2008; Cozart, 2010): there seems to be an absence of research that examines how racism and sexism are epistemologically violent, and how that violence is challenged by a critical understanding and embracing of spirituality. Madyun and Witherspoon (2010) assert, "There is an underdeveloped space in educational research that links spirituality and religion as a process that invites and participates in the schooling of Black youth" (p.199). I believe there is a corresponding gap in educational research that links spirituality to how university professors navigate academia. I believe

spirituality promotes the kind of identity development and self-actualization necessary for the emergence of a holistic mind, body, and spirit equipped for survival in oppressive cultures and there are numerous scholars who agree (Palmer, 1983; Collins, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). Research in addition to personal experiences have informed me of the ways in which spirituality gets implicitly and explicitly withdrawn from practices within academe. Consequently, the academy often becomes a space of isolation and stress for those who operate from a spiritual center (Dantley, 2013).

Significance of Study

I caution the reader to note that this study focuses not on the religious institutions within the African American community but on the "spiritual ethos" that has been a force within this culture (Richards, 1985). The goal of this research inquiry is to look deeply into a different way of knowing; a way of knowing that centers spirituality and expands the constraints of traditional research. By investigating the relationship between the variables in this study, I intend to meet three outcomes. First, I believe the implications of this study will provide insights on ways that professors and administrators can meet the needs of a significant subculture of their university populations. Secondly, I anticipate that partaking in this study will provide participants with opportunity for deep self-reflection, which could lead to a better self-understanding and thus informed actions. Lastly, I believe that this study will be a significant addition to the political projects of critical theorists whose work directly challenges and problematizes the presence of oppressive structures on college campuses.

This study is different, important and relevant even though inquiries into spiritual resistance to racism among African Americans are not new. African Americans have called upon their faith to conquer the oppressions of racism, sexism and classism since the days of slavery. At its core, this study is about how Black women use their beliefs to inform their behavior. Inquiries into beliefs are common in educational research, whether it is from positivists who hold strong beliefs in the scientific method or critical theorists who believe in revolution. For some, research about beliefs crosses a theoretical line between what can be considered scientific knowledge and what can be considered experiential knowledge. This line often translates into what is considered reliable, legitimate knowledge and what is considered anecdotal knowledge. This project disrupts that notion. For that reason, I am sensitive to the ways that my participants

17

apply their beliefs to judge epistemological authenticity and construct knowledge. Narrative inquiry requires that I employ a relational approach to my participants that fosters a mutual collaboration and acknowledges my voice and that of my participants. Eliciting voice is a strength of this approach and has been noted as being particularly useful in developing critical and feminist theory (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

The group in study is a historically marginalized sector of American society and thus American universities. As a member of this group I intend to use my insider/outsider perspective to not only understand how Black women faculty describe their use of spiritualty as resistance in the academy but to also collaboratively construct work that can bring about change. Critical approaches to research must not only record and report the voices of participants, but also be inwardly investigative of the self if the study is to not only understand the present state of academia, but also revolutionize it. Consideration of this notion makes it important for me to consider what a narrative study can reveal that other methodological approaches cannot. Additionally, this notion also makes my moral and ethical approach to research an essential piece of my methodological framework.

I believe that it is very important for emerging scholars to push the traditional confines of academic research and find ways to liberate the voices that are often muffled by traditional conventions of writing and conducting research. The *feminist communitarian ethical model* (Schran, 2003) best encompasses how I will explore the ethical dilemmas within my study. Schran (2003) explains that this model "…assumes personally involved, self-reflexive researchers hold themselves personally responsible for the political and ethical consequences of their actions" (p.54). Furthermore, such researchers "are expected to build collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, and friendly relations with those studied and value the connectedness that forms between them and others" (de Laine as cited in Schran, 2003, p. 54). This ethical model supports the conventions of narrative inquiry as well as the political aims of Black feminist thought. Therefore, I believe that drawing upon ethical values in this manner will be vital to cultivating a study that creates understanding across cultural divides.

I recognize and commit to the fact that this study is not a quest to dig deeper into my own experiences without digging wider into the cultural context that my participants represent. The transformative aims of the proposed study are intended to not only increase participants

understanding of themselves, but also contribute to the understanding (and clarify many misunderstandings) concerning members of the African American community as well as the Christian community. Underlying my motivation for this study is the belief that these educational narratives cannot be fully told or examined save intentional projects that seek to call attention to the voices of those who live these experiences. Since my methodological approach is relatively new in qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman, 1995), it is imperative that I keep the purpose of the study in mind and that I strike a delicate balance between my personal story and that of my participants.

Conclusion

This study explores spirituality in a way that attempts to provide insights about the practicality of its use in the academy, despite and in many ways because of the de-spiritualized nature of traditional Western academia. It is my hope that the narratives presented help not only other Black women faculty, but assist all educators to hone in on an understanding and framework that allows them to incorporate their complete self in their work. As the various chapters of this dissertation unfold, I will examine the contents of this introductory chapter more deeply. Briefly, I must acknowledge the limitations of this study. Beyond the traditional limitations of a qualitative inquiry, this study is limited because of the peculiar nature of spirituality and the attempt to discuss it in a de-spiritualized space by offering our stories in this academic exercise. Moreover, this study is also limited because of the inexistence of a direct translation of the lived experiences of my participants into the traditional confines of academic research. Marimba Ani (1997) explains this best when she writes, "We [members of the Black community] experience it [Spirit] often, but the translation of that experience into an intellectualized language can never be accurate. The attempt results in reductionism" (p.3). Therefore, this study constitutes a starting place from which to begin contemplating the role of spirituality in the lives of African American women academics. Additional research that pushes the limits on what is considered valid educational inquiry will be needed in order to create space for the narratives offered in this study to be offered in more culturally authentic ways and to make the centering of spirituality for African Americans a known norm in academia as opposed a hidden transcript.

To conclude this chapter, I will provide a brief outline of the remaining chapters. Chapter 2 will begin by exploring theoretical literature and empirical studies pertinent to this topic. In chapter 3, I will discuss the theoretical framework of this study as well as the methodology used, how I created the interview questions and how I conducted the interview process. The narratives produced through those interviews will be presented in the following chapters. Lastly, I will explore the themes of these narratives and the implications they offer for faculty and educational leaders in higher education as well as emerging academicians.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Black women's use of spirituality to navigate academia is an underdeveloped area in educational research. This is not because literature is not available, but because the voices of Black women are not integrated into university curricula but compartmentalized under labels for women or ethnic studies (Strother-Jordan, 1999). This practice continues to normalize the idea of Black women as "other" and supports feelings of not belonging (Strother-Jordan, 1999). Black female scholars have written about their experiences and referenced their spirituality, despite the fact that their lives contradict as opposed to fit into academe (James, 1993). For this study, it is particularly important that the reader not only understand the nature of the topic of this study, but also the context and voice from which that topic emerges. In this chapter, I will review literature by researchers who have embraced an endarkened feminist epistemology in order to examine academic life, particularly for Black women. Additional literature that is relevant to understanding what has been written about Black women as it pertains to the presence of epistemic violence in academia is also included. This literature will help set the context for questions guiding this study. Finally, I will review literature that establishes the notion of a spiritual resistance both in the African American community and in academia.

A comprehensive search for research articles was conducted using multiple databases through EBSCO which included Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Alumni Edition, Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Education Research Complete, ERIC, Gender Studies Database, and Humanities Full Text (H.W. Wilson). Key search terms varied and included the following list of identifiers and keywords: Black women, African American women, resistance, spirituality, Black faculty, higher education, epistemic violence, racism, Black feminist thought, and spiritual resistance. Additional studies were obtained from source citations in relevant books. A cursory exploration of the literature available on the experiences of Black women in academia would reveal that there is an echoing of thoughts, emotions, and understandings concerning racist and sexist practices in academe. There is not, however, an abundance of literature that specifically identifies spirituality as a source of strength, and details how Black women call upon that strength in academic spaces. It is my intent to make a contribution, however small, to this particular faction of educational discourse.

Intersectionalities of being Black and Female: A gendered race and a raced gender

Intersectionality (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991; Nash, 2013) is a heuristic device that is used to explore the multiple, connected identities crafted by difference and inequality. It allows for an examination of the complexities of identity because it " provides an interpretative framework for thinking through how the intersections of race and class, or race and gender, or sexuality and class, for example shape group experiences across specific social contexts" (Collins, 1998, p. 208). Kimberlé Crenshaw examines the intersections of race and gender specifically in ways that help bring into focus the discrimination that a Black woman might encounter that neither a Black man, nor a white woman would (1991). Intersectionality recognizes that we all participate in the same institutionalized structures of racism and sexism, but that different groups have different levels of salience as it pertains to different identity markers (Collins, 1998). It also allows us to explore the varying ways that race, class, and gender have historically constructed one another, placing Black women in distinctive but intersecting groups (Collins, 1998).

In the culture of academia, intersectionality highlights the "double whammy" (Andrews, 1993, p.182) of discrimination that race and gender places upon Black female scholars. This "double whammy" often brings about epistemic violence that forces Black women to the margins of fights for racial justice (which is often seen as the fight of Black men) or the fight for gender equality (often portrayed as the fight of White women). Epistemic violence towards Black women faculty can be brought on through the intimidation of men who view a female "doctor" and professor as a woman who does not "need" him financially or as a woman that directly challenges his innate role as leader or provider (Gilchrist, 2011). This becomes damaging to a Black woman's way of knowing because she is sent messages that her intellectual and professional accomplishments adversely affect her ability to find and maintain loving relationships with men (Gilchrist, 2011). Epistemic violence can also be brought on by differing gender norms based upon race. For example, "the cult of true womanhood" helped to solidify (and control) the perception of white women as modest, pure examples of womanhood (Hayes, 2012, Settles, et. al, 2008). Black women are seen in contrast, and as a result are often thought of as hyper-feminine and over-bearing. In academia this often allows concerns expressed by a white woman to be viewed as heart-felt while those same matters, expressed by a Black woman

are seen as "angry." Such epistemic violence continues to place pressure on the Black female to operate within the confines of bifurcating structures, to compartmentalize aspects of her identity in order to conform to the raced and gendered norms placed upon her. In 2008, two professors examined their collective forty year experience working in a research institution and discovered that one author, Juanita Johnson-Bailey, a Black female professor, was viewed by students and colleagues as having a "second-class existence characterized by hostility, isolation, and lack of respect." The second author, Ronald Cervero, a white male professor, was contrastingly viewed as "a respected scholar who disseminates knowledge, understands complexity, and embodies objectivity" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008, p. 311). If to be smart and accomplished in academe is to be non-Black and/or male, then the Black woman scholar is an anomaly. These intersections of race and gender often place Black women scholars in the periphery, ensuring that "Black women are viewed as cosmetic aides to those holding firmly to their place at the center of the mirror" (James, 1993, p.124).

Members of this raced gender and gendered race often site their intersectionality as a nexus of power, however, where the mechanisms of oppression can be transformed into tools for constructive change (Alston, 2005). Williams (2001) provides an example of such work when she takes on her identity as the "angry Black woman scholar" in order to theorize knowledge that is obscured from view from others who do not share her identity. To this end, many Black female scholars have taken on projects that illuminate transformative strategies that are birthed from their Black womanhood. This is the seat of Black feminist theory. Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins are most recognized for taking up this work from spaces of critical black thought. Their work has served as a foundation for many other Black women to find their voice within their respective fields. Barbara Jackson, Linda Tillman, and Denise Baszile among others, are Black women in the field of education administration and curriculum that have provided springboards for me to find mine. Through the work of these scholars, spaces of terror and turmoil transform into incubators of power. It is at this site of transformation that the power within an endarkened feminist epistemology is revealed.

Review of theoretical literature: Endarkened feminist revelations

Use of research paradigms that challenge and/or critique racist and sexist pathologies in traditional, often positivist philosophical orientations is growing in the field of education.

Likewise, many Black female scholars are using an endarkened feminist epistemology to write about the "outsider within" experiences that Collins (1991) attributes to Black women academics. Sheryl Cozart (2010) uses Dillard's work to frame an autoethnographic study on her journey towards spiritual reconciliation within the academy. In her study, Cozart details her struggle to situate herself in academia without divorcing herself from the cultural traditions and spiritual orientation that helped her develop her identity. She admits that she believed that spirituality had no place in the academy. Her admission is evidence of the de-spiritualized atmosphere of academia and perhaps an anti-spiritual assumption of what it means to be an 'academic.' It is also evidence of the all-too-familiar compartmentalization of self Cozart attributes to the "double-consciousness" that W.E.B. DuBois articulated more than a century ago.

Cozart finds herself amidst conflict as a graduate student when her "spirituality begins to dominate her thinking about knowing and becoming" (2010, p. 253). As she adopts each of Dillard's assumptions to explain experiences in her personal life, Cozart outlines the dilemma she faced when deciding to explicitly enact spirituality in her work and everyday practices. When examining assumption 3 which states, "Only within the context of community does the individual appear (Palmer, 1983) and, through dialogue, continue to become," (Dillard, 2006, p.22) Cozart provides a key example of overcoming epistemic violence. Cozart describes a practice in the Black church known as call-and- response dialogue in which the preacher or minister offers cues to the congregation for a response to the message being delivered. According to Cozart, the response of the congregation signals acceptance, understanding, and support for the message being delivered to them. Typical responses I am familiar with are "Amen," "Well," and "So be it." This dialogic practice and the language within it are common in Black churches and Black community organizations generally. Language serves as a way of understanding and constructing reality thus, the absence/dismissal of certain cultural languages hinders one's ability to 1) express and 2) transform that reality. Call and response dialogues and "Amens" are uncharacteristic of academic research, although they are common to those speaking from the intersections of race and spirituality. What Cozart does, however, is bring her spirituality into the de-spiritualized academy, ultimately neutralizing negative effects on her way of knowing. She explains that, "Metaphorically speaking, when I encounter the works of Black scholars, I do so with the understanding that I must respond (through my own research, teaching, or activism) to their calls" (Cozart, 2010, p. 260). In essence, scholarship becomes the messages

24

petitioning a response that signals understanding, acceptance, and support. Such an approach situates scholarship in a space where Cozart feels empowered to transform her reality.

Cozart describes her "spiritual crisis" with the intent to raise consciousness about the importance of engaging in dialogue about spirituality within the confines of the academy and to acknowledge how doing so can influence the researcher, the educator, and the work they do. Her qualitative analysis provides implications that suggest that engaging in a transformative reflection of one's spirituality can lead to better self-understanding and therefore better informed practices as a researcher and educator. As it pertains to overcoming epistemic violence and unraveling the paradigms and traditions that spurred Cozart's crisis, she acknowledges that it is a continual struggle. She writes:

> On the other hand, I know that because of my own miseducation (Cozart, in press), I have not fully undone what being miseducated has done to me. As a researcher/teacher educator, I continue to struggle with the internal push-and-pull between the dominant colonial ways of knowing and those ways of knowing that speak to my position at the margins (Cozart, 2010, p.261).

As Cozart concludes her autoethnographic study, she identifies the use of the words, "faith," "hope," and "social justice" as signifiers of a spiritual connection within scholarship. Like Dillard, Cozart calls for open discourses about our various senses of spirituality and for a centering on spirituality in academic research. Cozart identifies four ways she believes such discourses could inform and serve the academic community. She believes these discourses could prevent future crises like the one she experienced and foster better understandings about the communities in which we teach and serve. Second, Cozart believes that when engaged in cultural discourse, "…those with whom we are engaged may have a spiritual foundation that guides their cultural knowledge. With this recognition comes an opportunity to make a space for their spiritual articulation" (2010, p. 266). Cozart also posits that we have a responsibility to draw out the knowledge imbued in the spiritual traditions of the African American community generally and in the principals of the Black Church specifically. This assertion aligns with my acknowledgement of a contextualized experience within spirituality that is particular to most Black women, as outlined in the preface of this study. I believe Cozart and Dillard would agree that there is a way of knowing that stems from this context that can be insightful, and even transformative for the way we view research. Lastly, Cozart calls for a focus on perspectives

from other marginalized groups concerning the relationship between spirituality and the process of schooling.

Similar to Cozart, Juanita Cleaver Simmons (2007) uses an endarkened feminist epistemology to articulate and examine her experiences in public school administration and professorship in higher education. Simmons, who entered the professorship after 18 years of service in public k-12 schools, shares life notes that describe how race, gender and class impacted her professional experiences. She shares experiences from her years in both professions that demonstrate numerous racially violent epistemic acts and gate-keeping tactics such as student resistance through derogatory evaluations, tenure and promotion politics, and the ever-present task of proving one's credentials as a competent educator. Simmons acknowledges the lack of language and space provided through traditional research paradigms to acknowledge her experiences. To this end, she writes:

> In agreement with Dillard (2003), as an African-American female I find it difficult to transform my experiences of injured passion, conflict, and unresolved emotions into a formalized canon. Given the status quo of these malignant conditions that continue to be perpetuated against women and minorities in America (expressly in the predominantly White academy, and in male-dominated public school administration), my use of endarkened feminist epistemology better articulates my own lived experiences (Simmons, 2007).

Through an endarkened feminist epistemology, Simmons counters assertions that we are living in a "post-racial society" by articulating how her Blackness, coupled with her gender and class, dictated her professional experiences. She offers various examples where asymmetrical power relations based upon race, gender, and class made way for white students, Black men, and white male and female colleagues to challenge, usurp, and disregard her authority as well as her intelligence. Notwithstanding these challenges, Simmons refuses to be silenced and "accepts the challenge to forge new territories." She offers a definition of racism that I believe adds depth to the standpoint of an endarkened feminist epistemology. Simmons (2007) writes:

> Racism is an ever-present shadow that effects generations of families, while leaving its victims constantly functioning in a reactionary mode. Worse, racism creates internal hostility, nervousness, and defensive behavior. But racism is not personal, it is America 's problem. Racism has been institutionalized in the educational system; of this, I am sure. My lived experiences in K-12 education and higher education career affirm this.

In accordance with Dillard's fifth assumption concerning the historical and outward nature of research and knowledge, Simmons (2007) further explains:

> Each racist experience heightens my respect for my elders' efforts to remain hopeful. Their determination to forgive the wrongs of racism is a lesson in love that should be modeled by us all (Simmons, 2007).

Simmons does not speak explicitly about spirituality as it pertains to her experiences or to her process of healing. However, one can interpret the passing on and recognition of wisdom from our ancestors as a spiritual pursuit. Specifically, Simmons sites her mother, who was the first known African American graduate from the predominately-white university that Simmons later graduated from, as a source of wisdom. Overall, Simmons uses her academic work as testimony. Testimony, I argue, is not only epistemic but also transcendent; allowing Simmons to bear witness to the objectivity that influenced her counterparts' concepts of reason. At the root of her analysis lies a hope that her life notes can be stretched apart from traditional theoretical factions and perceived through an epistemic lens that supports the spiritual and political enterprises necessary for shifting racialized paradigms.

In 2012, Staples adopted an endarkened feminist epistemology to serve as a framework for women to bear witness to their meaning making process as it pertained to popular culture narratives after 9/11. In this qualitative analysis, an endarkened feminist epistemology created the structure for testimonies to emerge an allowed Staples "to see knowledge building within data" (2012, p.460). She explains that Dillard's framework assisted her in connecting the ways that race, gender, and spirituality intersected to form an epistemological framework for knowing, leadership, and action (Staples, 2012, Dillard, 2000). Her work helps to demonstrate how an endarkened feminist epistemology constructs a specific way of knowing or a "naming" if you will, of a specific reality. Okpalaoka and Dillard (2011) write specifically about the importance of naming one's reality especially as it pertains to the healing process necessary for doing race work. Their use of endarkened feminist epistemology throughout their article allows them to articulate a definition of wisdom that acknowledges "…that we must bring our whole selves—spirit, mind, and body—into the multiple contexts we occupy" (Okpalaoka, Dillard, 2011, p.73). Such actions require an element of love that the authors explain moves us away from fear and helps us to engage in more authentic ways, consequently pushing us towards more authentic understandings of one another. This element of using an endarkened feminist epistemology helps

Black women merge the "two-ness" and welcomes the presence of who we are as we see ourselves into spaces where we are commonly only acknowledged according to who others expect/believe we are or ought to be. Engaging in such a way also allows Black women to see how our experiences are influenced (positively or negatively) by our identity markers. There is a richness and vulnerability in spaces where such engagement is possible. I believe Dillard wants to acknowledge this richness and vulnerability within her framework when she sites Appiah (1992). Dillard sites:

> …I expect that sometimes along the way my history has not only formed my judgment (which I delight in) but been distorted by it (which, or course, I do not); to judge whether it has, you will need to know something of that history and I want you to know, not least because only through the responses of readers will *I* learn of my distortions (Appiah as cited in Dillard, 2003, p.227)

This I believe affirms Dillard's assertion that an endarkened feminist epistemology is not intended to replace other ways of knowing but to provide an alternative methodology and representation that would reveal the distortions in dominant ways of thinking but also in the standpoints from which endarkened feminist epistemologies emerge (2000, 2003, 2013). To this end, an endarkened feminist epistemology provides a deeper learning experience for those who can offer its perspectives as well as those who cannot, allowing for a mutually beneficial experience. Wright (2003) offers a response to Dillard's assertion of an endarkened feminist epistemology. He cautions that such a notion could not "sit alongside the table" with the dominant discourse of educational research. Wright suggests that an endarkened feminist epistemology threatens the maleness of educational research and exposes its whiteness, leaving it vulnerable to change. While Wright believes that an endarkened feminist epistemology is an "intervention" that should be engaged to progressively move educational forward, I think the idea that such a perspective could not be welcome at the table of educational research speaks to the issue of domination and power inherent in the current conditions of knowledge production. I believe when Dillard responded to Wright with the assertion that we "cut to heal not to bleed" (2006) she displaced the idea that the presence of one voice has to mean the absence or silencing of another. So often in race-centered work and social justice work does the fear of annihilation surface. I suppose it is a rational and logical response to believe that that which is dominated will seek to dominate if indeed set free. Dr. Frances Cress Welsing addresses such fear in her work. Nelson Mandela addressed such fear in his negotiations to end apartheid in South Africa. The

28

thread that connects these works together and reveals the healing power of an endarkened feminist epistemology is the spiritual, non-rational consciousness woven throughout. To avoid what Wright suggests, requires a complete paradigm shift. African American womanist scholar and theologian Rosita dean Mathews (1993) suggests that refusing to align oneself with a system that debilitates others requires a posture of resistance that denies the dominant the opportunity to "define our methods of resistance" (p.93). Mathews' "A troubling in my soul" illustrates the non-rational, spiritual response Dillard and many other Black and Black feminist scholars suggest. In Dillard's most recently published book *Learning to (Re) member the Things We've learned to Forget* (2012) she offers insights on how engaging in work through such a lens can help us connect to our individual and collective spiritual consciousness. Dillard further reveals how understanding, acknowledging, and sharing one's cultural identity makes for an incredibly powerful epistemological standpoint. Through this volume, an endarkened feminist epistemology is situated as a research paradigm centered on relationship as opposed to a "recipe to fix a problem" (Dillard, 2012, p. 59.).

Summary

The common elements within current research using an endarkened feminist epistemology demonstrate its difference from mainstream research paradigms (Dillard, 2012). It allows Black women to situate themselves in their research without divorcing the cultural and spiritual underpinnings of their identities. It allows them to critique, counter, and resist Eurocentric claims of knowledge, white claims of feminist thought, and assertions that Western society is now a post-racial society. Researchers over the past ten years have demonstrated how this epistemology has allowed them to discover the knowledge that rests in the intersections of race, class, and gender in the lives of their participants as well as in their lives as educational researchers. The work that results from engaging an endarkened feminist epistemology has welcomed the presence of a more authentic, holistic wisdom that is rooted in love and representative of the minds, bodies, and spirits of those involved. Furthermore, the rebuilding and emergence of research that acknowledges the cultures from which our knowledge arises expands educational research beyond traditional parameters of what knowledge is, where and who it comes from, and how it should be used. These characteristics make an endarkened

feminist epistemology a proper framework for exploring epistemic violence in the lives of Black women and how these women use spirituality to counter, resist, and neutralize such violence.

Review of empirical literature: Exposing epistemological warfare

For as long as I can remember, I have always thought of African Americans as faith walkers. I remember watching awards shows like the UNCF an Evening of Stars award show as a child, listening to announcers commend various "greats" for their triumphs in film, music, and the arts. There were, even on the music award shows, African Americans acknowledged for being the "first" or the "best" or for making a significant difference in their community. I watched those shows and wondered, with all the racism/classism/sexism, what made them believe *they* could make it? Today, when I think about a collective African American history in the United States, I think about the kind of strength it takes to see the 'things that be not as though they were'. To envision freedom while living in shackles, to foresee reading and writing while being told doing so is unlawful, to anticipate togetherness while having your family ripped apart, to forecast liberty in a time of civil unrest, to prophesy of love while physically and emotionally experiencing the pains of pure hate. Only a walk of faith could have motivated a woman to traverse the county in the dark, following a star to "freedom." I have heard it quoted so many times that Harriet Tubman once said, "I freed a thousand slaves. I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves." This quote echoes through my mind as I think about how resistance and triumph emerge in the face of oppression.

It is in Harriet Tubman's words that the problem of what one knows and how one comes to know it become so evidently clear. You see, to walk by faith and "see those things that be not as though they were" requires one to be able to see both in the natural and the spiritual, in the now and the future, in the achieved and the possible. Various accounts of history in the United States support the notion that the enslavement of African people was maintained through psychological enslavement of their minds. Colonizing their ways of knowing and controlling access to knowledge, dictating interpretations of knowledge, and ultimately their actions as a result of that knowledge—upheld white domination. History also informs me that those who cultivated a way of knowing that was grounded in the spiritual as opposed to the rational, who fought for and held on to a different way of knowing, those folks help forge a new reality. What I have learned of my history has convinced me that change, progress, and social justice has to be a

revolution of the mind well before it can become a reality. It has to be radical. To be radical means to return to the center and chose a different route than before. I have read many educational articles that call for educators to examine the history of schooling, education, leadership, excreta and make fundamental changes that might make society more socially just. The literature in this next section serves as the center for understanding the presence of epistemic violence in education so that the reader might fully understand the context of this study. The chapters that follow will serve as my attempt to illuminate alternative routes for navigating academia as Black women scholars through the framework of an endarkened feminist epistemology.

Epistemic violence in the academy

In Chapter 1 of this study I provide a definition of epistemic violence or racially violent epistemic acts as well as four ways I believe such violence is demonstrated in the academy. Epistemic violence is defined as racially-inspired practices that implicitly and explicitly construct Black and Black-centered ways of knowing as illegitimate, problematic or inferior. Four examples of such practices are identified as 1) The use of language, 2) Devaluing Black intellectual work as activism, 3) Lack of support and affirmation for Black faculty and, 4) Denying the cultural origins of certain knowledge and or ways of knowing. There are other acts of epistemic violence and demonstrations of racism as well as sexism that impact the Black female faculty experience in addition to the ways I have chosen to use as exemplars to anchor an understanding of my use of the term. The literature provided demonstrates evidence of epistemic violence and the experiences that bear witness to the presence of practices in academia that implicitly and explicitly construct Black women faculty and their ways of knowing as illegitimate, problematic or inferior. Through a review of relevant studies, I intend to show how one might believe that the knowledge, consciousness, and identity of Black women faculty might be forcefully pushed to the margins of academe.

> My feelings of isolation intensified as I recognized the "discursive violence" (Kellor, 1999) employed by a number of colleagues, Black and White…To me, they attempted to clearly establish that I was in the subordinate position and others were in a "superordinate" one (Paul, 2001, p.20.).

Often the narrative of many Black women academics, Dierdre Glenn Paul's words echo the thoughts of many working in the ivory towers of higher education. Living and working in spaces where we are mostly misunderstood, underappreciated, and expectedly problem-ridden (Tobin, 1980) Black women in academia take on a very difficult pursuit. Black women are not considered intellectual (hooks, 1996) therefore, our very presence is seemingly nonexistent in the minds of our counterparts even when we are physically and mentally present. Alicia Collins (2001) informs us that the early education of Black people, particularly Black women focused on the socialization of people ravaged by slavery. The intent and purpose was to train, refine, and "groom" Black women to become "uplifters" of the race (Collins, 2001, p. 32). The literature available does not confirm that American colleges and universities originally expected Black women to be or become valuable contributors to the intellectual discourse that defines the academy. Even though Black women were hired to teach in these institutions (Collins, 2001) they were more like domesticated servants than organic intellectuals. Furthermore, for scholars that did not seek to become "honorary whites" (Kirk, 2001) but to hold onto the cultural identity and epistemologies that made them who they were, the academy was and still remains a very challenging space. The trials of the academy are evident even more so for Black women who are committed to addressing issues of social justice. As Baszile (2006) explains in her use of the term epistemic violence,

> By epistemic violence I am speaking of the ways in which we [the academy] profess a commitment to critical thinking and social justice, but at the same time continue to prescribe to standards, traditions, and ways of knowing that are meant to maintain the hegemonic order (Baszile, 2006, p.197).

The oxymoronic nature of hegemonic freedom in academia perpetuates the "outsider within" experiences that Lorde describes and keeps Black women scholars in a state of limbo. This understanding of epistemic violence supports my assertion concerning the actions that situate Black women's ways of knowing as illegitimate, problematic, and inferior in the very spaces where we are expected to offer contributions to the intellectual world. Expressions of the Black woman's experience, both individual and collective, seem to be under the same tactics to train, groom, and refine as they were when Black women were first allowed in the academy. To see these tactics as acts of violence means that we must acknowledge the war-like strategies demonstrated through the use of power. Baszile (2006) further explains:

More specifically, I am speaking of the rules and codes of power in academia that determine which ideas are the fashionable ones to have, or which ones are scholarly or not, or how ideas should be presented, or who should raise questions and who should just sit down and listen, or what falls under academic freedom and what does not (Baszile, 2006, p.197).

These rules and codes of power that Baszile writes about foster dialectical dismissals of Blacks and Black women scholars. Specifically, these rules and codes trivialize research for social justice that is critical to the Black community causing said projects to be situated as mere "objects" of study not as valuable, or scholarly as other academic pursuits. This leads some Black scholars to attempt to romanticize their work, to abandon such work, or to consider such work as a hidden agenda they must pursue while contributing to the very traditions that make such work necessary. To complicate this even further, these rules and codes are also why many Black scholars cannot ignore research agendas that focus on racism and/or sexism. I make this argument because the dominance of Western thought in academe has caused cultural languages and ways of knowing to become lost or surrendered, leaving Black scholars and other scholars of color to attempt to describe their culture through the language of another. In many cases, yielding to this kind of epistemic violence is almost an inevitable occurrence. Toni Morrison (1992) captured this dilemma when she wrote,

It becomes easy to confuse the metaphors embedded in the blood language of one's own culture with the objects they stand for and to call patronizing, coddling, undemanding, rescuing, complicitous white racists a lynch mob. Under such circumstances it is not just easy to speak the master's language, it is necessary. One is obliged to cooperate in the misuse of figurative language, in the reinforcement of cliché, the erasure of difference, the jargon of justice, the evasion of logic, the denial of history, the crowning of patriarchy, the inscription of hegemony; to be complicit in the vandalizing, sentimentalizing, and trivialization of the torture black people have suffered (pp. xxiii-xxix).

Toni Morrison helps us to see why Audre Lorde (1984) cautions us that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p.3). It helps us to understand how social justice work, how academic freedom, becomes performative as opposed to enacted. As Morrison explains, the message of one's culture can be lost in translation as it enters academe. Since the very structure is racialised and gendered, Black women and their work are often silenced and co-opted into cyclical patterns that maintain hegemonic order. Understandingly, Black women often express the woes that accompany this dilemma.

Feelings of not belonging are still very familiar among Black women academics and scholars of color generally. These feelings, echoed throughout most Black feminist work in education, reveal practices of silencing. In a recent study by Dotson (2011) the effects of epistemic violence were explored in dialogues within the academy. Dotson offered implications of epistemic violence committed as a result of power dynamics that allow some to intentionally choose to remain ignorant of the "Other" in a ways that dismisses their existence. Dotson proclaims:

> Pernicious ignorance that causes failures in linguistic exchanges constitutes epistemic violence, on my account, not simply because of the harm one suffers as a result, but because epistemic violence institutes a practice of silencing (Dotson, 2011,p. 241).

Practices of silencing are supported in the research of many scholars (Tobin, 1980; Gregory, 1995; Moore et. al, 2010; Berry & Mizelle, 2006; Brooks, 2003; Dotson 2011). Hamlet (1999) reported that comments about Black people being "too sensitive" and "always complaining" silences Black women because of their fear of exemplifying the stereotype and being labeled a troublemaker.   Myers (2002) describes an epistemologically violent practice in which faculty (mostly white male faculty) feel the need to speak for Black women and explain what they believe she is attempting to communicate. Myers further explains how these practices show a desire to dominate and control Black women and send a message that Black women are not "capable of saying what they mean" (Myers, 2002, p.56). These practices are often fueled by perceptions of the racialised and gendered body of the Black female that demonstrate the discursive practices of racism in the form of white patriarchal epistemic violence (Morten-Robinson, 2011). Morten-Robinson (2011) claims that such violence evidences and supports the privileging of certain theories of knowledge as it pertains to aboriginal Australian women specifically, women of color generally, and the existence of imperialism globally. This violence not only attacks the gendered and racialised Black female scholar, but the body of knowledge expressed through these bodies.

Dotson (2011) informs us that "An epistemic side of colonialism is the devastating effect of the ''disappearing'' of knowledge, where local or provincial knowledge is dismissed due to privileging alternative, often Western, epistemic practices" (p.26). This violence is found in the building of curriculum for schools, as well as the accounts of history used to frame education. Dierdre Glenn Paul (2001) explains that she:

…[C]onsciously uses the term "liberatory pedagogy" rather than "critical pedagogy" as a means of protesting the fact that many of the educational concepts and ideas espoused by the late Paulo Freire…had been championed more than forty to fifty years earlier by W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson, respectively, within the United States…" (Paul, p.3).

Paul clarifies her position by stating:

While I do not begrudge nor minimize Freire's impact or influence, I consciously note the way in which White educators in the United States have been much more open to such ideas when they are proposed outside of the United States rather than deal with collective racism, its historic legacy, and the sustained negation of Black intellectuals and Black epistemology that have come to pass within the boarders of the United States (2001, p.4).

Dismissals, denials, and false claims to Black epistemologies cause many Black women faculty to feel a sense of responsibility not only to the academic community but to the Black communities they come from (Gregory, 1995). As a result, some Black women faculty choose to conduct research that will benefit these communities, encountering epistemic violence against their struggles to write the world in order to "right" the world. This is not the case for all Black women faculty, but those who engage in community-focused research find that their research is not valued and that it is judged by the standards of a hegemonic, Western orientation that marginalizes the people that are the focus of their study (Johnsrud and Sadao 1998; Turner and Myers, 2000). According to Griffin et. al (2011), "Institutional policies and decision makers often privilege certain forms of research over others, viewing work that does not fit within their notions of "rigorous scholarship" as unworthy of serious consideration and its authors undeserving of promotion" (pp.499-500). According to Myers (1995), some Black scholars in the 1970s, such as Walker believed that action-research or activist-orientated research towards the Black community and the research demanded by promotion and tenure committees was incompatible. I believe Walker felt this way because of the epistemological warfare ensued by the challenge that such research inevitably brings to the status quo in academia and the lack of support available for scholars choosing to take the road less traveled.

Studies from the 1980s inform us about the lack of support and mentorship for Black women faculty across all college campuses (Gregory, 1995). This disadvantage is significant not only because it contributes to feelings of being unwelcomed, but as many studies show, mentoring and mentorship programs provide "…greater access to resources for research, advice,

and collegial networks, which can often lead to greater academic productivity" (Clark and Concoran as cited in Gregory, 1995, p. 63). Such support is a vehicle for upward mobility as well as social and intellectual stimulation (Gregory, 1995). When you do not have those mentorship networks, you often feel isolated. Additionally, seeing colleagues around you engage in, offer, and receive nurturing mentorship and present those opportunities to you can lead to a kind of self-doubt and internal struggles about your ability to "fit in" in the academy. Oftentimes, when Black women faculty are invited to take part in mentor relationships, the power dynamics and often racially-influenced biases prevent these relationships from being beneficial. In a study by Chambers (2011), some Black women faculty reported feeling that their mentor relationships felt more like "pet" projects as opposed to genuine relationships with their senior colleagues. This research yet again supports the "outsider within" experiences common to Black women and reveals a pattern of violence in the academy. The term violence here describes a forcefulness exerted upon those labeled "other." As O'Hara (1995) suggests, these acts are continually supported by assumptions within dominant disciplines that demand that the center be defined in relation to positions relegated to the margins. In addressing this violence, I agree with Baszile who suggests that "The problem, however is not the [Western] standpoint itself but its tendency to deauthorize itself and claim universality by conflating Whiteness and maleness with reason…"(2006, p.198). This tendency is in itself epistemologically violent.

Spiritual resistance

History suggests that spirituality has played a vital role in the emergence and persistence of African American women in academia despite and because of oppression (Watt, 2003). Cornel West (1991) informs us that a belief in God is a long tradition in the Black community. He explains that any serious attempt to address Black struggle requires that you come to know and understand that "…in many instances you will be stepping out on nothing, hoping to land on something" (West, 1991, pp. 8-9). What has been written about spiritual and religious faith in the Black community suggests that African American spirituality is inherently diverse, passionately creative, and historically political (Harvey, 2011). This spirituality is representative of a collection of people torn away from their countries, cultures, and languages and collected into one single identity as African American. These people "brought with them a shared worldview that, when syncretized with aspects of the Christian faith of their captors,

enabled them to survive" (Hayes, 2012, p.139). In this study the term African American spirituality is used to reference a syncretized African and Christian spirituality that is grounded on biblical precepts and purposed to liberate the African American community. This study draws upon the elements of African American spirituality that qualify it as a strategy for cultural survival and a reflection of a faith-based conviction to live life according to the principles of love and justice. The work of various theorists are highlighted here to provide informed perspectives for this concept and the resistance that results from it. Because this topic is vast, the literature included serves to make broad strokes that outline the focus of this study.

Spirituality in the African American Community

The dense history of the role of spirituality in the African American community is entrenched in the early seventeenth century. The relationship between spirituality and the African American community predates our existence in America, and signifies our African ancestry (Ani, 1997). Diana Hayes describes the origins of African American spirituality in the context of an African cosmology and worldview that became syncretized with Christianity during slavery (2012). African American spirituality expands beyond the confines of religion and is expressed in various ways. As Hayes informs us:

> …Over the centuries of bondage and oppression, even as they were being forged into this new people, there were always those who followed different gods or no gods, those who found different paths for expressing their faith in the one Christian God, and those who completely fell away from institutionalized religion. Nonetheless, they still had deeply embedded within them that Spirit that had sustained and nurtured their ancestors…These alternate spiritualties are all a part of, even while apart from, the fullness of African American spirituality as expressed in the Christian tradition (2012, p.170).

While encountering the most brutal form of slavery in human history, African Americans re-created their cultural heritage by converging their African world-view with their experiences of oppression and their encounters with biblical text (Evans, 1992). Spirituality, thus, became a metaphysical tool of resistance and a physical strategy of liberation. W.E.B. Dubois informs us that espousing Christian spirituality indicated freedom during enslavement, thus, many slave owners were reluctant to allow theirs slaves to receive Christian instruction (1975, p.198). Many have written about the divergent uses of Christian spirituality; as both a tool of liberation and a system of enslavement. To trace the hermeneutic history here seems not only superfluous, but beyond the aims of this study. What is important to note here is that the relationship between

spirituality and freedom is a chief cornerstone in African American history, and arguably the history of humanity. The singularly unique experience of oppression (Evans, 1992) and the fight for freedom that shapes the African American community gave way to liberty in this country and is the key to liberation for all (Cone, 1999). This form of spirituality is radically different from traditional forms of Christian religion; as it directly disrupts the theological justification for oppression that Christianity provided during the African slave trade (Evans, 1992; Cone, 1999). Although Christianity has taken on many forms, Gayraud S. Wilmore (2006) contends:

> But blacks have used Christianity not so much as it was delivered to them by racist white churches, but as its truth was authenticated to them in the experience of suffering and struggle, to reinforce an enculturated religious orientation and to produce an indigenous faith that emphasized dignity, freedom, and human welfare (p.25).

Wilmore's distinction of Christianity for African Americans speaks to the existentially different experience that, again, is unique to the African American community. In an earlier text, Wilmore informs us that the basic theology of African American Christianity is a religion of freedom "shaped by the social, economical, and political realities of African American existence" (2004, p. 19). This kind of theology, based on a conviction of freedom, has fueled uncompromising actions to overcome oppression, particularly in the form of racism. This study draws upon this rich history and utilizes a definition of African American spirituality that encompasses such convictions.

Convictions of freedom: Black Liberation Theology

Spirituality among African Americans has been a lifeline to a connection with God and the world throughout history. This spirituality has manifested itself through music, speech, and physical demonstration and it has also fueled fights for freedom, social justice, and civil rights throughout American History. The work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is one of the most prominent representations of how African American spirituality was purposed for emancipatory aims. King believed that Jesus Christ was present in the African American struggle for civil rights. King professed that God was a God of the poor and downtrodden, and that by following Jesus Christ, African Americans could overcome their oppressive state. King was a Baptist preacher and activist whose views on Christianity offered a nonviolent strategy for overcoming injustice and fostering a radical love demonstrated by the life and love of Jesus Christ. While many believed and supported King's nonviolent call for the "beloved community," there was a

portion of the Black community that thought King's approach was too passive for overcoming the ruthless, strategic oppression and violence that African Americans encountered. The Black Power Movement of the 1960s is an example of an alternative response to addressing violence and oppression towards African Americans. Prominent leaders like Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam considered Christianity a passive approach to the use of "white man's religion" and offered a spiritual approach through an Islamic faith and that supported fighting violence with violence. While many have historically pitted the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. as antithetical to that of Malcolm X, others have professed that their work was complementary. Out of the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movement came the birth of a Black liberation theology lead by men who saw King and Malcolm in this way. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore are two Black ministers and scholars that were critical to this movement.

James H. Cone professed that "The message of Black Power is the message of Christ himself" (1999, p. 9). Cone articulates African American spirituality as a theology of liberation based in Christian belief. Cone's understanding of Christ is that He "is God Himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of destroying all human tentacles of slavery…freeing man from ungodly principalities and powers…"(1999, p. 8). Cone's work identifies the Black struggle for freedom as an example of God himself working to liberate a people. This is significant because it disrupts Christian ideology that distorts the message within the gospel in order to uphold white domination. Cone states that this is often the case for the Church of Christ, arguing that whiteness has caused the church to sponsor and tolerate racism. Cone's work offers an expression of African American spirituality that operates outside of the denominational church and that demonstrates "The real Church of Christ…that identifies with the suffering of the poor by becoming one of them" (1999, p.12). His work posits that Jesus is in full solidarity with all who are oppressed. As a theologian and scholar, Cone has also been critical to the work that converges Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm as the "yin and yang in the Black attack on white supremacy" (1999, p.136) that distinguishes African American spirituality from other forms of Christianity and other religions generally. African American spirituality involves a truly radical race critique that is both politically dangerous and theologically dangerous because it upsets the traditional American way of life and deeply theological asserts that support a distinction between God and man. Cone's work situates African American spirituality as a space where God dwells and an unforgiving call for justice.

Gayraud S. Wilmore echoed Cone's assertion that the life of Christ is inextricably linked to the lives of African Americans and urged for a critical re-reading and reclaiming of scriptures by people of color in order to disrupt the color bias historically present in Christianity. Wilmore also discussed the de-radicalization of the Black church and the de-Christianization of the struggle for Black empowerment with the intent to, like Cone, proffer African American spirituality as a demonstration of the people of God fighting for liberation. In Wilmore's (1989) anthology on African American religious studies, Bennett states, "Though not of canonical status, the story of the Black man in America is a self-validating account of faith that when heard and heeded, helps Black and white respond more creatively to the divine word for our present situation" (p.130). Other Black male clergymen and scholars such as Albert Cleage, J. Deotis Roberts, Dwight N. Hopkins, and Jeremiah Wright also saw the need to take up the work to articulating an African American spirituality that would not only benefit members of the Black community (nationally and globally) but people of all races.

African American Spirituality as a call to freedom

The notion that African American spirituality can be defined as an expression of resistance and cultural resilience is important to this study. The emergence of Black liberation theology as an expression of African American spirituality is significant to understanding the emancipatory aims nestled within this approach to spirituality. These aims often contradict religious practices like Christianity and call for a critical examination of the use of power and perhaps the perversion of the gospel within Christian religion. Michael E. Dantley (2005) has discussed the differences between spirituality and religion and he argues that although religion may inform one's spiritual beliefs, it is not the only way in which individuals engage the spiritual nature of their lives. This argument is important for understanding the emergence and maintenance of African American spirituality in spite of and in conjunction to Christian religion. According to Dantley, religion is concerned with solidarity and control, as it emphasizes conformity and privileges the idea of one monolithic truth. Dantley maintains that spirituality, however, inspires creativity, promotes transformation and is the dwelling place of the authentic self (2005).

This element of African American spirituality is what Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III refers to when he discusses an ability to interpret, adapt, and transform realities (1999). African

American spirituality, according to Stewart, creates a "matrix of freedom" through creative and resistant soul force. Creative soul force, as Stewart defines it "is the spirit of creativity that forges and fosters culture as a means of constructing and transforming reality" (1999, p.2). Resistant soul force completes Stewart's definition of African American spirituality. He defines it as "the power that thwarts the complete domestication of the spirit for purposes of subjugation, domination, and annihilation" (1999, p.2). Combined, the creative and resistant soul force help to establish psychological and spiritual relocation in response to systemic oppression in the form of racism, sexism, and other discriminatory actions. Stewart's work offers an addition to the understanding of African American spirituality because it situates spirituality as a formative component of Black consciousness. While most of the aforementioned approaches to African American spirituality have been articulated through the work of Black male ministers, African American spirituality has also been articulated through the work of non-clergy philosophers and academicians. The work of Cornel West, for example, broadens our understanding of African American spirituality through a philosophical approach. West has written extensively about the need and presence of a prophetic pragmatism rooted in black Christian faith. West explains that Black liberation theology, although cultivated through the work of Cone, Wilmore and others during the 1960s, manifested first during slavery. Diana Hayes (2012) supports this assertion when she claims that African American spirituality was "forged in the fiery furnace" of slavery. According to West, "The prophetic Christian view that the gospel stands unequivocally opposed to slavery led, in some cases, to unsuccessful slave revolts spearheaded by black Christians" (1982, p.102). West argues that the fundamental element of prophetic Christianity is that all people, regardless of race, class or gender, are given the opportunity to fulfill their potentialities (1982). That fight is key to the survival of Western civilization and thus the survival of African Americans. West uses the term prophetic to refer to "the rich, though flawed, traditions of Judaism and Christianity that promote courageous resistance against, and relentless critiques of, injustice and social misery" (1999, p. 186). For West, the prophetic allows African Americans to conceptualize a humanist tradition that sustains Black life by allowing them to engage their presents conditions and simultaneously envision hope for a more just and democratic future. Here we can see elements of Stewart's claim that African American spirituality is a transformative tool for resistance, allowing African Americans to sustain and overcome oppression. West situates the fundamental element of prophetic Christianity as "self-realization

or the individual within the community." This simply means that as one realizes their own potential, that of the community is actualized as well. The values expressed in West's argument reflect the Ubuntu proverb that states "I am because we are." Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) characterizes a person who operates under this conviction as:

> …open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, based from a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed (pp.34-35).

This Ubuntu worldview exemplifies the essence of the liberation hermeneutic derived from the Holy Bible that empowers African Americans to overcome the perils of society (Stewart, 1999). What Tutu describes here is a conviction that is very strong in African American notions of spirituality. Paulo Freire (in Cone, 1986) helps us to understand that this conviction is necessary for liberation. Freire contends, "Any reconciliation between oppressors and oppressed, as social classes, presupposes the liberation of the oppressed, a liberation forged by themselves through their own revolutionary praxis" (1986, p.xi). African American spirituality is the revolutionary praxis of a people forced to the margins of society. It is the notion that spirituality can be revolutionary that undergirds my passion for completing this study.

African American spirituality as revolutionary praxis

African American spirituality as resistance is avant-garde insomuch that it dares to be radical in the face of complacency, liberating in the face of oppression, and spiritual in the face of scientific empiricism. Leadership in the African American community has flourished on account of the effectual nature of spirituality to inspire political projects without regard to the visual reality of current circumstances. Cone, Wilmore, Stewart, West, and the other aforementioned Black male scholars have not been alone in their quest to establish a sense of political agency and cultural responsibility set ablaze by African American spirituality. Black women, such as Delores S. Williams, Flora Wilson Bridges, Kelly Brown Douglas, Emilie Townes, and Diana L. Hayes, among others, entered the public discourse on African American spirituality in the 1980s. Their understanding of African American spirituality was rooted in a womanist spirituality that responded to the absence of Black women's voices in the early work of Black theologians. Many of these women offered their own definitions of spirituality from a

Black female perspective that expanded the conversations about liberation for African Americans beyond racism to issues of sexism and classism in a new way.

Delores S. Williams, Kelly Brown Douglas, and Emilie Townes are considered to be womanist theologians and are among the first generation of Black women to take up such work. Building upon Alice Walker's term "womanist" as the foundation for understanding the lived experiences of Black Women, these women critiqued and expanded previous notions of African American spirituality and the meaning of Jesus Christ in Black life. Williams and Douglas, for example, reflected on spirituality by exploring the dehumanization and defilement of the Black female body. Williams compared such actions to the exploitation of nature and argued that survival, not liberation, was the prominent message of Christ. Williams also challenged notions in Black theology, offered by males, that God was the explicit liberator of oppressed peoples. Williams, through an examination of the Biblical account of the life of Hagar, suggested that God liberates some and leaves others to their own ingenuities. Williams does so while affirming God's liberating power, adding complexity to the understanding of spirituality. Williams situates her understanding of spirituality from the "wilderness" experience of Black women, identifying the intersections of race, class, and gender as an important space of understanding a relationship with God. Williams articulates the struggle that emerges from this space in relationship to demonarchy, a term she uses to define "a demonic governance of black women's lives by white male and white female ruled systems using racism, violence, violation, retardation, and death as instruments of social control" (1986, p.52). Williams proffers her work as a way to examine the "imitation of white male patriarchy" by many Black men in the Black church and to also argue for the acknowledgement of the presence of Black women in the struggle for Black freedom. Womanist theology in this sense, speaks to an African American sense of spirituality that is deeply entrenched in the personhood or the bodies from which that spirit flows.

Emilie Townes states, "The womanist project is to take a fuller measure of the nature of injustice and inequalities of human existence from the perspective of women—Black women" (1995, p.10). She sees spirituality as a "social witness" that compels one to wrestle with the question, "Do you want to be healed?" This question, although it seems simplistic, is weighted with a much compounded understanding that is an important contribution of womanist theology. Toni Cade Bambara sheds light on the complexity of spiritual dimensions of healing in her book

The Salt Eaters published in 1980. In this work, a woman is asked the question, "Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be healed?" (1980, p.3). This question is followed up by the assertion, "Just so' you're sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well" (Bambara, 1980, p.10). Bambara, through this questioning, disrupts thought patterns that would suggest that being healed is an uncomplicated matter that could replace the burden of brokenness without a painful working out of what it means to be whole, equal, and just among one another. To this end, womanist spirituality helps to articulate African American spirituality as a connection to and understanding of the compounded nature of our identity and the immense struggle within our desires to heal ourselves individually, and humanity collectively. Townes writes,

> Womanist spirituality is not grounded in the notion that spirituality is a force, a practice separate from who we are moment by moment. It is a deep kneading of humanity and divinity into one breath, one hope, one vision. Womanist spirituality is not only a way of living, it is a style of witness that seeks to cross the yawning chasm of hatreds and prejudices and oppressions into a deeper and richer love of God as we experience Jesus in our lives (1995, p.11).

The idea that womanist spirituality is a style of witness is reflected in the work of many other womanist theologians such as Kelly Brown Douglas, who identifies African American spirituality as a matter of the body and soul, not a matter of the mind. Douglas, like Williams, centers the Black body as a way of understanding the humanizing and dehumanizing powers of Christianity. Douglas argued "that the body was considered a means by which "divinity" could manifest itself implied that the body had sacral value. In other words, the body was a potential vehicle for divine witness" (2005, p.155). Douglas adds to an understanding of African American spirituality from a womanist perspective by articulating it as a spirituality of resistance fueled by an intimate connection between body and soul.

Flora Wilson Bridges articulated a definition of African American spirituality similar to Stewart in that she also saw spirituality as a "matrix." When defining African American spirituality Bridges (2001) offers:

> African American spirituality can be defined from two key characteristics: (1) its essential nature as cultural resilience or the ability to bounce or spring back into shape or position after being stretched, bent or compressed by cultural oppression; and (2) its "effects" or movement as it defines African-American values and cultural expression in the people's quest for identity and the building of community (Bridges, 2001, p. 165).

Where Bridges uses the word "identity" I would offer the word *purpose*, and when she writes about building community, I would suggest that as a quest for freedom. Ultimately, Bridges identifies African American spirituality as the "sorcerer's stone" upon which Black people built community, culture, love, religion, and dreams in the presence of the terrors of racism (2001). Again, the idea that African American spirituality fosters survival and prosperity all at once is supported. Diana L. Hayes captures this understanding of African American spirituality when she writes, "The African American spiritual story is one of hope in the face of despair, of quiet determination in the face of myriad obstacles, of a quiet yet fierce dignity over against the denial of their humanity" (2012, p.3).

The various definitions of African American spirituality offered by Black male and female theologians and scholars, bear witness to understandings of Christ as a Black man, as a Black woman, as a present being identifying with the lives of the oppressed. African American spirituality is a spirituality that acknowledges the individual as inextricably connected to the community and to God. This connection, if severed, leaves one bereft of hope, prosperity, love, and healing. African American spirituality has been a consistent source of hope, prosperity, love, and healing that has provided the creativity needed for birthing new realities. Here the words found in John 15:4-5 take up significant meaning:

> [4]Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [5]I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Understanding African American spirituality through the metaphor of a tree offers powerful insights to this passage and to the definitions of spirituality offered above. If one thinks of a fruit-bearing tree, one should consider why this tree bears fruit. It is my understanding that one of the reasons that trees produce fruit is to protect and nourish the seeds. Fruits contains the building blocks of nutrients the seeds need to grow. If eaten, the fruit nourishes the body and is carried away (and eventually fertilized) in new spaces. This process allows the tree to spread its seeds in a broader range by being carried in humans and animals. If the fruit is not eaten, it falls to the ground and fertilizes the soil from which the seed will grow. If Jesus is the vine and African Americans are the branches, the fruition of their understandings serve to protect and nourish the message of love and justice professed through Christ. By taking in the Word of God, one has the

45

ability to offer growth in future as well as growth within their present condition. This captures the meaning of African American spirituality as a spirituality of liberation and survival, as a sustaining and creative force, and as a divine link to God, humanity, and nature. In the very beginning of this dissertation I reflected on the understanding that might come from envisioning the academy as the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If African American spirituality represents a connection to the "true vine" and perhaps a quest to partake from the tree of life, what might this look like for African American women in academia? Here I continue this reflection by examining what the literature reveals about spirituality in the academy.

Spirituality in the academy

African American spirituality is a sacred practice, and it has traversed and transgressed beyond accepted epistemologies and ideologies in academia. The notion of spirit in academia is a very complicated one because of the nature of 'spirit' alone. As Marimba Ani contends (1997):

> The idea of "spirit" is especially important for an appreciation of the African-American experience. "Spirit" is, of course, not a rationalistic concept. It cannot be quantified, measured, explained by or reduced to neat, rational, conceptual categories as European thought demands. Spirit is ethereal. It is neither "touched" nor "moved," "seen" nor "felt" in the way that physical entities are touched, moved, seed and felt. These characteristics make it ill-suited to the mode of European academia and to written expression (p.3).

The literature on this topic and the experiences of Black women academics published within the last 20 years suggests that the academy has no place for African American spirituality. However, as revolutionary praxis, African American spirituality can help reconstruct the academy and the oppressive rituals that are embedded in the foundations of our American universities (hooks, 1991; Baszile, 2007; McDonald & Ford-Ahmed, 1999). In 1985 Cornel West argued that the academy presented more obstacles for the emergence of the black intellectual than decades past. Nearly 30 years after he published these words, the struggle to navigate the "managerial ethos" (West, 1985) of traditional academia still continues. West (1985) stated that Black intellectual activity has evolved out of Black Christian traditions and I believe he might agree that a "spiritual ethos" (Ani, 1997) is imperative for effective revolutionary praxis on behalf of Black women faculty.

Spirituality has been proven to equip members of the African American community to employ resistance strategies that are survival-oriented, empowering, and liberating (Robinson &

Ward, 1991). Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) offered a theory of resistance using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) that directly challenged ideologies that present resistance as self-defeating and reproductive of domination. They extend the concept of resistance to focus on its transformative potential and its internal and external dimensions. Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) describe transformational resistance as a behavior that demonstrates "…a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice…" (p.319). They argue that "With a deeper level of understanding and a social justice orientation, transformational resistance offers the greatest possibility for social change (2001, p. 319). This notion of transformational resistance is expanded by the work of Brayboy (2005) who argues that "Rather than reinscribing their places in society as marginalized people, individuals [who employ transformational resistance] work to move themselves and their communities away from sites of oppression" (p.194). Similar to the quest that West (1985) described, transformational resistance demands that individuals engage in both resistance for survival and resistance for liberation. While transformational resistance has been typically used to describe ways of negotiating power and hegemony in response to racism, it can be useful for inquiry into the spiritual practices of those in educational institutions.

Transforming institutions of higher education to meet the evolving educational needs for a diverse population continues to be a hot topic in educational journals. Among the top issues in higher education today, spirituality is considered to be one of the most intriguing subjects of the twenty-first century (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006). Students around the country have shown a renewed interest in a sense of spirituality that escapes the norms and regulations of traditional, organized religion (Overstreet, 2010). This renewed interest in spirituality makes it imperative for those in the academy to be cognizant of the role of spirituality in the lives of the members of their campus communities. As discussed previously, spirituality has been historically couched in religious practices. The United States Constitution forbids public institutions from promoting or prohibiting the practice of religion (Donahoo & Caffey, 2010) therefore, curricula in most public postsecondary institutions reflect very little formal attempts to provide spiritual guidance for college students. A review of recent studies informs me that spirituality has been found to have a significant influence on the formation of identity and self-confidence, the development of coping mechanisms, and the academic performance of African Americans in higher education.

The few studies available suggest that Black women's use of spirituality in academia is a powerful form of resistance. Cozart (2010) examines spirituality through an autoethnographic study of her journey as an African American woman academic in higher education. She explains the dilemma she faced when deciding to explicitly enact spirituality in her work and everyday practices. Cozart describes her "spiritual crisis" with the intent to raise consciousness about the importance of engaging in dialogue about spirituality within the confines of the academy and to acknowledge how doing so can influence the researcher, the educator, and the work they do. The implications of her study suggest that engaging in a transformative reflection of one's spirituality can lead to better self-understanding and therefore better informed practices as a researcher and educator.

In a different study, Generett and Cozart (2011, 2012) identify spirituality as a critical aspect of their work as Black professors and suggest that it is the only way they can find their truth. Dillard (2006) has maintained this point as well. In fact, she argues that centering spirituality by critically gazing at one's self can have transformative possibilities within the academy. Dillard (2006) contends that the life of an academic is a life that serves humanity, is creative and political, and focused on healing mind, body, and spirit through acts of peace and justice. She writes about her own journey through academic life and presents evidence for the ways in which engaging spirituality can transform the epistemology, method, and paradigm one operates from within their academic scholarship. Twotrees (1993) details her experiences as an African American-Lakota woman teaching in liberal arts. She explains that she has faced many challenges with the "antispiritualism" present in academe and writes about her conscious decision to bring spiritual teachings into the classroom. Twotrees (1993) describes her turn to the use of spiritual wisdom as a turn to self.

These studies describe spirituality as a way to find one's center, to connect multiple (often conflicting) identities, and a mechanism for speaking truth to power. While most studies available are relatively new, such practices are not new among Black women. Gayle (2011) informs us that spirituality has always been at the root of Black women's resistance. According to Gayle (2011) Black women often feel a deep connection between their sense of spirituality and their desires to advocate for others. The supports the ways in which Palmer (1998) describes

48

teaching as a spiritual calling and purpose. Gayle identifies as a Black woman academic and through her research proclaims that:

> Spirituality as an anti-colonial discourse is needed in the Western academy to bring to surface the experiences of Black women and disrupt our ways of knowing about the meaning of life and our own identity. It is through this quest for meaning we come to view the world through different lenses and open up our thoughts to what it means to be compassionate, cooperative and giving (Gayle, 2011, p.117).

She argues that the marginalization of spirituality has political consequences that benefit those who devalue other ways of knowing. At the same time, Gayle maintains that spirituality empowers Black women acts as "… the glue which connects them [Black women] to the past and the present, and has been a source of survival" (2011, p.113). Black scholars (both men and women) such as Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. DuBois, Patricia Hill Collins, James Cone, Cornel West, Toni Morrison, Parker Palmer, bell hooks, Gloria Landson-Billings, Maya Angelou and others have all written numerous works that support Gayle's arguments. In the field of educational leadership specifically, the work of many Black scholars identifies spirituality as the necessary mechanism for achieving social justice. According to Dantley:

> African American spirituality is an amalgam of creativity, reflection, resistance, and reconstruction that has guarded people of color against the potential bondage of embracing feelings of self- degradation, hopelessness, and bitterness (Dantley, 2005, p.655).

Dantley believes that the use of African American spirituality to restructure educational leadership has transformative possibilities. He writes at length about the creative power of African American spirituality and the critical reflective ability to envision life beyond the limitations of racism, sexism, and classism (Dantley, 2003, 2004, 2005). Watt (2003) extends this argument to the field of Student Affairs and proposes that a critical understanding of spirituality for African American women in academe could improve student affairs practitioners' ability to serve and work with their college population. Given the nature of epistemic violence as established in the literature, the use of spirituality to combat such violence seems plausible. The literature available about and produced by Black women educators who actively recognize and use spirituality to navigate academic spaces demonstrates that spirituality infuses hope, empowers creativity, and disrupts Western ways of knowing (hooks and West, 1991; Gayle, 2011; Ani, 1998; Collins, 2000).

Conclusion

As a spiritually salient African American scholar, my understanding of African American spirituality is informed by my personal journey. My life experiences form a tapestry that I believe is purposed with great meaning, guided by God, and reflective of the grace of God. I personally understand African American spirituality to be a metaphysical and physical commitment to understanding and fulfilling the intent God has for one's life. Because of this commitment to purpose; one's actions are passionately creative and undoubtedly devoted to demonstrating love and cultivating freedom. This review of the literature provides evidence of gatekeeping strategies that support the use of hegemonic power in academe. These tactics place stress upon Black women scholars and continually combat activist-orientated research (Myers, 2002; Pierce, 1995). The literature also suggests that epistemic violence as a result of racism and sexism has catastrophic consequences for Black women because it defies our very existence. The struggle to be, to become, to be made visible, and to experience freedom is a familiar struggle shared by Black women globally, as evidenced by current literature. Efforts to do as Lorde suggests and not use "the master's tools to destroy the master's house", require a resistance strategy that defies the confines of Western epistemology.

African American spirituality is a vital source of this resistance. Rooted in Afrocentic cosmology, this spirituality was cultivated during slavery as enslaved Africans fought to make sense of their preset conditions and fight for freedom. This since of spirituality continued within and without the Black church, always maintaining its characterization as a sustaining and present help. As the Black community continually fought for freedom through various social movements, this spirituality manifested through Black liberation theology as well as womanist theology. African American spirituality encompasses a deep moral conviction towards freedom, and though racism, sexism, and classism present different challenges, complete liberation for all is a chief cornerstone within this spirituality. This is the case mainly because African American spirituality represents an unbreakable linkage between the individual and the community, between human and divine. Those men and women who have chosen to "bear the fruit" that results from this understanding, have committed themselves to a fight for the radical manifestation of love and justice at all costs. This dissertation gathers narratives of Black

women in academia in an effort to explore how their sense of spirituality might serve as the lifeline of such commitments. In the words of bell hooks (1993), this is a commitment to:

> … a profound unshaken belief in the spiritual power of black people to transform our world and live with integrity and oneness despite oppressive social realities. In that world, black folks collectively [believe] in 'higher powers', [know] that forces stronger than the will and intellect of humankind shaped and determined our existence, the way we lived…They [know] joy, that feeling that comes from using one's powers to the fullest (hooks, 1993, p.10).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how Black women faculty use spirituality to negotiate their relationship to knowledge in ways that transcend the negative effects of racism. Through an endarkened feminist epistemology, I explore the narratives of 6 Black women working in various universities across the country. I set out to discover how Black women use spirituality to combat racially violent epistemic acts in academia. Beyond the purview of a dissertation, I also set out to reconcile my own experiential knowledge with academia as I have come to know it. Research states that there are numerous barriers for Black women faculty. This study allows me to weigh the research in the lived experiences of a sample of Black women educators. As a qualitative study, this dissertation is designed to explore the experiences behind the empirical data within the field. In this chapter, I will discuss the purposes of narrative inquiry, the methods of participant data collection, and the reasons for selecting the chosen methods for the analysis of data gathered in this dissertation. The final section of this chapter will focus on issues of validity, trustworthiness, and limitations.

Preface to the theoretical framework

> Being alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical dilemma / i haven't conquered yet / do you see the point my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of soul & gender / my love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face (p.45)

Ntozake Shange captures well the predicament that African American women face in the United States. The contradictions of living in a society as an outsider, of being naturally born and socially executed because of identity markers that determine how one ought to relate to the world. To think of being Black and female as a metaphysical dilemma can be interpreted as a struggle of a woman to understand who she was purposed and destined to be by her Creator and who she is as defined by the social constructs of society. I'd like to think that Shange might also be suggesting that being Black and female is a theoretical and philosophical battle spurred by the Eurocentric ideologies that purport that being such is irrational, less than, and problematic. Black feminist thought has been historically purposed to bring forth the content of Black thought, from a Black woman's standpoint. This epistemological standpoint has challenged knowledge claims made by elite white men, and consequently been denied complete validation in traditional academic disciplines (Collins, 2000). Despite and because of the oppressions brought on by living in a system that invalidates Black women's experiences (Collins, 2000)

Black women intellectuals have continued to share their voices in essays, poems, songs, plays, novels, and academic research. From Big mamas' sharing wisdom across kitchen tables, to Grammy award winning sistahs singing love into the hearts of people across the world, Black women have traversed and transgressed social ills and in many ways transcended self in order to love and give love to the world.

Before exploring the theoretical framework afforded by an endarkened feminist epistemology, I want to briefly acknowledge the roots from which such a perspective germinates. The historical roots of Black feminist thought in America can be traced back to the early 19th century to women such as Sojourner Truth and Maria Stewart, who openly critiqued dominant perspectives and proclaimed a distinctive way of knowing from a Black woman's standpoint. The work of women such as Frances E.W. Harper, Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, Mary Church Terrell, and Anna Julia Cooper significantly impacted the aims of Black feminist thought because it "…illustrate[d] a tradition of joining scholarship and activism," a tradition crucial to the survival and advancement of African American people (Collins, 2000, p.35). Producers of Black feminist thought have critiqued white feminism, patriarchy, economics, sexism, racism, and many "isms" that plague our existence. As it pertains to educational research in academia, Black feminist thought is often used to critique and offer counter narratives to the Eurocentric paradigms traditionally privileged in academic inquiries. Black feminist thought provides Black women with a voice that is both individual and collective, personal and political, allowing us to (de) construct the intersections of our various identity markers (Collins, 2000). The primary goal of Black feminist thought, as suggested by Patricia Hill Collins, is to theorize about the ways in which the knowledge of African American women can foster empowerment. I like to think that Black feminist thought also provides a bridge in academia for scholars to be able to readily recognize the possibilities of theory as activism, since the aim of Black feminist thought is a transformative one that necessitates a response.

While a complete historic review of Black feminist thought is beyond the scope of this study, it is important that one understands generally the foundations that made way for an endarkened feminist epistemology to emerge. This epistemology provides a direct response to Shange's assertion that the Black woman's spirit is "too ancient" to understand the separation of soul and gender. Cynthia Dillard, who conceptualized an endarkened feminist epistemology,

professes that research is both a spiritual and intellectual pursuit. Much of her work demonstrates an inseparable tie between her spiritual calling and the work she feels purposed to do. I will use Dillard's work to provide the theoretical framework for situating the experiences of African American women whose spirit, mind, and body are inseparable. I also want to acknowledge that our struggle as Black women is a global struggle, and our experiences transcend national boundaries. The context of the experiences of the women in this study, however, takes place in the United States and in the lives of Black women born in the United States. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains that Black women have a standpoint that is particular to our experiences, although we share commonalities with Black women throughout the diaspora. Collins also says that the US Black feminist fight for social justice is part of a global struggle for social justice. I agree with her, therefore, I ask that the readers of this study consider the experiences shared by the women in this study as a portion of a global quilt, crafted by women using similar threads.

An endarkened feminist epistemology

Cynthia Dillard (2006) conceptualized an endarkened feminist epistemology as a means to critique the violence perpetuated in the universal generalization of White male knowledge constructions of reality as the basis for describing everyone's realities, particularly Black women. She argues that there is a specialized knowledge positioned within the cultural, political, and historical identities of Black women that reveals a different reality, a different epistemology, than what is traditionally recognized in academic research. Recognizing that non-white, non-male people think differently as opposed to deficiently flies in the face of positivistic and oppressive thinking that leads us to believe that one way of knowing is superior to others. Dillard acknowledges that her desire in positing this epistemology is not to substitute a dominating while male epistemology with a Black female one, but to reclaim and resituate research in the cultural origins from which they began. I share Dillard's desire and intend to use the framework she has conceptualized to identify the epistemic violence committed against Black women in academe. Their narratives will shed light on how they respond, overcome, resist, avoid, and ultimately neutralize this violence.

An endarkened feminist epistemology carries with it six assumptions. These assumptions directly challenge ideologies that profess one unitary way of knowing. I will present these

54

assumptions here briefly, then examine them more closely as they are revealed in the narratives of my research participants. Dillard's (2006) first assumption states that self-definition form's one participation and responsibility to one's community. Dillard explains in so many ways that knowing who you are, guides your interactions with the world you live in. This may be why there has been an increase in identity studies within various academic divisions. Identity and self-definition has most certainly been a lucrative commodity of hegemony and domination of the African American community, (i.e. the Willie Lynch letter). To have the ability to define one's self for yourself and to be received and perceived as you see your self is not a privilege afforded to marginalized communities, like the Black women in this study. I agree with Dillard that educational researchers express a viewpoint that is personally and culturally rooted; this makes research a medium for expressing one's self-definition within a space that marginalizes that ability. Researchers, thus, have a responsibility to the communities from which those definitions arise. I believe this is what Denise Baszile means when she advises scholars of color to fight in, for, and against the system at the same time (Personal communication, 2011). If we as Black women scholars do not take on this responsibility and choose to deny the cultural and personal communities from which our knowledge originates, we commit epistemic violence and trade our positions as queens to become pawns protecting the bishop.

Dillard's (2006) second assumption is that research is both an intellectual and spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose. This assumption alone makes an endarkened feminist epistemology a befitting framework because it is the fundamental idea I want my work to express. This assumption builds upon the previous by going beyond the notion of making alternative knowledge claims that challenge dominant ideologies to looking at the very processes that validate those ways of knowing. Dillard makes it plain when she writes:

> An endarkened feminist epist \ emology draws on a spiritual tradition, where the concern is not solely with the production of knowledge (an intellectual pursuit) but also with uncovering and constructing truth as the fabric of everyday life (a spiritual pursuit) (2006, p.20).

Dillard uses Collin's (1990) work to support her ideas and draws upon narratives collected through her own study to demonstrate how an endarkened feminist epistemology is a demonstration of "stepping out on faith" and speaking a truth that is widely expected not to exist. Another way of saying this is perhaps that it is a demonstration of people whose souls are "too

ancient to understand the separation of soul and gender" seeing those things that be not as though there were. Adapting such a perspective allows Black women to consider the work we do as a commitment to something beyond our selves, a commitment to a better human condition. It also allows us to engage in work committed to the tearing down of strongholds on the education of our society. I agree with Zerubavel (2006) that:

> Yet even more critical than the fact that power entails a wider scope of attention is the fact that it also involves the ability to control the scope of others' attention. Through the required readings they assign it is thus teachers, for example, who determine what students regard as noteworthy rather than the other way around (p. 36).

Dillard's second assumption allows for an endarkened feminist epistemology to challenge ways of thinking (not just thoughts) that determine what is currently held as noteworthy and often renders indigenous knowledge and cultural languages (particularly African American) as less than. Zerubavel's words cause me to think about what might be necessary to impact the things that we consider not necessarily noteworthy but more so valid, legitimate knowledge. Collins (1990 as cited in Dillard 2006) believes that "...much more threatening is the challenge that alternative epistemologies offer to the basic process used by the powerful to legitimate their knowledge claims" (p.20). I think the shift in the use and understanding of Christianity within the Black community is a great example of this kind of epistemic revolution. American history informs us that Christianity was a main tool used in colonization and in the breaking of the will of African people enslaved throughout the country and the world (See Mellen, 2011). Despite these efforts, African people responded to Christianity in a way that manifested their African backgrounds (Mellen, 2011). Black people challenged the processes and the fundamental claims used to legitimate their enslavement with alternative ways of knowing God, understanding God, and ultimately being 'Christian.' Such a challenge forced a different understanding of liberty in this country and in many ways demonstrated the threat that Patricia Hill Collins writes about. Knowledge claims, steeped in religious orders, were challenged using alternative ways of knowing that in essence used written text (like the Bible) to articulate a freedom that that same text had been used to justify denying that freedom. Believers, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. also used non-religious text to stage epistemic revolutions, like his use of the U.S. constitution to justify his cause for civil rights for all people. Under different knowledge claims, that same text carried a different meaning. However, King and others had a viewpoint that required the powerful to reconsider their actions based upon their own knowledge claims. This is why it is

important that the context from which this dissertation arises is understood. No, the ideas expressed are not necessarily new, however, they are counter to many powerful ideologies and therefore must be understood from the context that created them. Such a viewpoint might allow the readers to see the narratives expressed from a different lens and consequently lead to the construction of new meanings. It also allows the narrators to speak through an alternative research channel. The next assumption addresses why this point is important.

Assumption three states, "Only within the context of community does the individual appear (Palmer, 1983) and, through dialogue, continue to become" (Dillard, 2006, p.22). Immediately my mind reflects on the Ubuntu proverb, 'I am because we are." What I believe Dillard wants to communicate through this assumption is that the process of dialogue does not begin nor end with an individual; that our existence and understanding of truth is in relationship to others. Therefore, any successful and permanent shift in our understandings of truth comes within our dialogues with one another. She explains that dialogue is a process of talking between two subjects and not one subject and an object. This implies that dialogue would require us to see one another as equally human and not as one person group talking to or at a group of objects. Stated plainly, dialogue rejects domination and requires the presents of two equally existing voices. An endarkened feminist epistemology brings about the evidence of an alternative, yet equally existing voice.

Dillard's (2006) fourth assumption is that "Concrete experience within everyday life form the criterion of meaning, the "matrix of meaning making" (Ephrain-Donker, 1997, p.8)" (p.23). Under this assumption, Dillard explores the fine line between knowledge and wisdom. She explains that the daily experiences of Black women carry within them a learned wisdom, distinctive to those who share those experiences. This wisdom is important for Black women because it aids in understanding and traversing spaces in which our minds and bodies are objectified. This assumption brings forth a level of meaning making that "book learning," as many older African Americans would say, cannot teach. Dillard suggests that as researchers, Black women consequently often seek to not only understand what the experiences of Black women and other people of color are, but also the meanings contained in those experiences. This assumption, Dillard explains, suggests the presence of an endarkened feminist epistemology. It also validates the belief in other standpoint epistemologies by suggesting that the way that

57

various people experience the world carries within it a meaning-making matrix specific to that person and people group. Thus, positionality based on race, gender, class and other identity markers delineates a knowledge base unique to its origins. The activist aims of endarkened feminist epistemology and thus this dissertation are to posit and legitimize this knowledge base within the academy.

The fifth assumption of an endarkened feminist epistemology states that "Knowing and research are both historical (extending backwards in time) and outward to the world: To approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness" (Dillard, 2006, p. 24). This assumption explains why an endarkened feminist epistemology qualifies as intellectual activism (Collins, 2012). It speaks to a tradition that highlights the presence of Black feminist thought throughout time, while also calling for an advancement in the ways that knowledge is currently recognized in academe. As Dillard states:

> …Black feminist thought, while not a part of the original canon of theories, rules, and perspectives that surround what gets perpetuated today as educational research broadly defined, attempts to both highlight what's missing from these definitions as well as to extend these definitions through the inclusion of African women's knowledge (Dillard, 2006, p.24).

Dillard also acknowledges that her argument is about a cultural knowledge, not so much a biological one. This is important because it situates this assumption under the understanding race as a cultural construct as opposed to a biological one; forcing us to consider the experiences that on has because of their race as meaningful.

The final assumption of an endarkened feminist epistemology as articulated by Dillard (2006) takes on the belief that, "Power relations, manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on structure gender, race, and other identity relations within research" (p.26). Power, is a common topic in education research. Under this assumption, Dillard acknowledges her belief that the binaries created through racism, sexism, classism and other "isms" create a standard of who and what is normal and what is abnormal, acceptable and unacceptable. Asymmetrical power relations are in essence the root of disproportionate research and research that continually constitutes the "other" as problematic. Such practices, as mentioned in Chapter 1, are what Teo (2008) refers to as epistemic violence. According to Dillard (2006):

…an endarkened feminist epistemology has as its research project the vigilant and consistent desire to "dig up" the nexus of racial/ethnic, gender, and other identity realities—of how we understand and experience the world as Black women (p.26).

In sum, the theoretical assumptions of an endarkened feminist epistemology provide a lens from which to examine the narratives and experiences of Black women from the perspective of Black women. This framework situates these perspectives in spaces of hope, where the intent of assertion is healing. By using an endarkened feminist epistemology I can contextualize the versions of the Black female faculty experiences shared by the participants in a way that transforms, heals, and allows us to become better researchers, teachers, and members of society. I agree with Dillard that:

> …an academic life is a life that embraces and examines not just the words and the concepts but what is within the words, the ways that the words help us to be with others in mutually beneficial and loving ways (2006, p.106).

It is with this understanding, orientation, and framework that I offer the substance of this study to the educators and educational leaders of academe.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is an interdisciplinary methodology that draws on literary theory, drama, and psychology traditions (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In education, narrative inquiry is often used to describe the life experiences of students, teachers, and various stakeholders. "Narrative inquiry is the storying and restorying of our narratives of educational experience" (Clandinin, 1992, p. 126). In education research that addresses issues of race and gender specifically, narrative inquiry is often used to purport stories that disrupt dominant claims to reality and knowledge. Women of color in education offer their critical race testimonies (Baszile, 2007) and testimonios (Chavez, 2012) to contribute to and problematize existing knowledge in the field. Still, there are minimum studies available of a qualitative or quantitate nature that examine the use of spirituality among African American women. There is an even smaller amount of studies that focus on the use of spirituality to combat issues of racism and sexism in academia. The literature available suggests that spirituality is a power tool for coping, resilience, and resistance (Herndon, 2003; Dancy, 2010). This study explores how Black women faculty use spirituality to negotiate their relationship to knowledge in ways that transcend the negative effects of racism. The very nature of this question compliments the structure of narrative inquiry

because the answer requires that we understand the actions of others and how they make meaning of their reality (Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000). The use of spirituality is not something that can be easily measured. It requires an understanding of a particular context because it is not easily defined. Narrative inquiries in qualitative research allow space for voice, interpretation, and acknowledgement of the particulars. I use this methodology because it allows me to connect the cultural and political contents of the data collected to everyday struggles for liberty and social justice. I have also selected the qualitative process so that the narratives of my participants could be presented in a way that represented their experiences as well as mine as we in many ways demonstrated the resistance explored in this study by our very commitment to the interviews (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Dillard (2006) explains that there are serious implications for researchers that take on work that resonates and acknowledges their spirit. The narrative process provides the space necessary to acknowledge these implications in deep and meaningful ways.

I believe that qualitative research conducted in this manner is important because it grows our understandings of complex areas and expands the knowledge base of academe. Questions concerning the "how" and "why" provide a context that reveals different conceptualizations of reality. The narratives of my participants complicate rigid standards concerning what it means to be an intellectual, what is considered knowledge, and where that knowledge comes from. As Edson (1988) noted over two decades ago, "Qualitative inquiry seeks to make phenomena more complex - not simpler - for complexity, not simplicity, describes life in both the past and present" (p. 45). The narratives in this study are intended to make the invisible visible and to bring that which is marginalized to the center. This fits well with the nature of qualitative research and narrative inquiry specifically.

Participants

Study participants were six Black women who currently hold positions as faculty and/or administrators at Universities across the country. Of the six participants, one worked at a community college, another at a research-one institution, and the remaining were employed by four-year public universities in various states throughout the country. Study participants varied in terms of years of experience working in academia as well as in academic disciplines. For the purposes of this study, their names and institutional affiliations are concealed. Each participant

has been given a pseudonym and a fictitious university name. I selected participants via the use of a sampling method known as snowballing. I began by contacting women I knew and identified as potential participants. Then, I asked those women for contacts who they believed could be beneficial to the study. Of the 11 contacts and referrals I received, 9 agreed to participate and 6 gave full participation to the study. The remaining referrals did not follow up to proceed with interviews or had scheduling conflicts that did not allow them to fully participate. Here are the profiles of the participants:

Dr. Julia Ross

Julia is a full professor in the arts at a four-year, mid-size public university. She has served as a professor for over 15 years. Julia's area of research are gender studies in music and 20th century American music (classical and popular). Julia also has done a significant amount of research on the role of African American women musicians in the development of different music genres including gospel and blues. As a professor in the area of fine and performing arts, Julia is also affiliated with various programs and departments throughout the university.

Dr. Sarah Rouge

Sarah has worked as a university professor for over six years, after teaching and serving in an urban public school system for a number of years. She is currently an assistant professor in educational administration at a mid-size, four- year public university. Sarah conducts research in the areas of educational administration, school and community relations, and organizational theory.

Dr. Mia Clark

Mia has taught mathematics professionally for over 20 years. She recently became academic chair in the STEM area at a university in a southern state. Mia enjoys work as both a mathematician and as an educator, teaching in traditional mathematics departments as well as mathematics education. Her research and passion centers on increasing understanding and providing the proper environment for African American students in STEM.

Dr. Stephanie Ellison

Stephanie is an assistant professor in communications at a nationally recognized, private comprehensive liberal arts college. She has taught in the areas of speech communication and higher education administration. This is Stephanie's first year as an assistant professor following positions as a visiting professor and post-doctoral scholar. Her research and professional passions focus on individual, institutional, and societal influences concerning the impact of race and gender related to issues of access marginalization, participation, matriculation, and completion in postsecondary education and public/mass communication.

Dr. Anita Sheard

Anita is a full professor of English literature at Harrison University, a public university in a northern state. She has been with the university since the early 1990s, following a career in various corporate and academic capacities. Anita's area of research is in contemporary gospel music. She has various published works in this area and is very active in organizations and projects concerning gospel music in her local community and throughout the country.

Dr. Nina Bethune

Nina is an academic administrator and professor of educational leadership at Urban State University, a leading urban institution. Nina has served in various administrative capacities within the university along with serving on the faculty in the school of education. Nina's areas of research are centered on effective leadership in urban schools, full service community schools, adult learning, and African American women administrators' reform efforts in city schools.

Data Collection

After identifying my participants, I contacted each of them to schedule a time for our initial interviews. I requested that participants have at least two hours available and gave them a preference to talk via phone or Skype. Once participants confirmed a date and time for us to speak with one another, I emailed then a copy of a consent form which they signed electronically and returned via email (See Appendix A). Most interviews were completed via phone, with one completed via Skype. At the beginning of each interview, I explained to participants that the interview would be semi-structured and that their participation was valued and respected. Participants were made aware that our conversations were being audio recorded and that as the

consent form outlined, their confidentiality would be protected through the use of pseudonyms. I began each interview with a list of questions (See Appendix B) outlined to structure the conservation. As the participants responded, I asked these questions in no set order, but according to the flow of the conversation. At the close of each interview, I asked each participant if there were additional things they would like to share that we had not discussed. I also informed them that they may be contacted for additional questions and that I also wanted to extend an invitation to them to be involved in the analysis portion of the data. This was done so that I could insure that I transcribed their narrative accurately and more so that we could unpack the substance of our conversations together. The audio recordings were transcribed into text and then re-transcribed into sections for analysis. This process allowed me to connect the threads within the narratives that were shared with me. After transcribing each section, I conducted "member checking" by sending a copy of the transcripts with a draft of the versions for their selected portions of the study to each participant. This process was conducted to insure that my participants believed that their words were accurately interpreted and represented (Glesne, 1999). Following this process, I destroyed all documents and audio material as agreed upon in the IRB consent forms sent to participants before conducting the study.

Data Analysis

There are various ways that educational researchers analyze narratives of participants. In some studies the process is an "analysis of narrative" in which the researcher elicits complete narratives and analyzes them based upon concepts (Schram, 2006). This study involves a "narrative analysis" which contrastingly, "pulls together events…and transforms them into narratives or stories by means of plot or other narrative qualities" (Schram, 2006, p.105). To conduct this narrative analysis, I began by listening to the audio recorded interviews and transcribing them into written text. These texts were then saved in files labeled for each participant. I listened to the audio recordings multiple times, on separate days, to insure that every word was recorded properly. I then listened again for any nuances and re-transcribed participants interviews based upon the probing questions from the semi-structured interviews. Each transcription was then placed into sections according to the assumptions addressed through an Endarkened Feminist Epistemology. Drafts of each participant's section to be included in the study were emailed to each participant for validation and correction to any errors in the

transcripts. Upon receipt of feedback, the data was further analyzed for the thread that permeated all of their narratives.

Trustworthiness and ethics

Asking people to be open and honest about their spiritual beliefs required an intentional consideration of ethics and authentic concern for the sacredness of the information being shared. I began the process of addressing ethical concerns by establishing the guidelines of informed consent and considerations for confidentiality. Since the population of the participants is a very narrow, marginalized population, I took precautions to insure that their identities would be protected. While interviewing participants and analyzing the data that resulted from our interactions, I kept in mind the fact that although I shared and echoed some of their experiences, in this process we were "walking together on separate paths" (Schram, 2006, p. 138). I assumed a feminist communitarian ethical model that allowed me to be self-reflexive and to acknowledge the political and ethical consequences of my actions (Schram, 2006). This ethical standpoint allowed me to acknowledge my moral and intellectual stance as it pertained to the conceptualization of my argument and justifications (Schram, 2006). At the same time, I was able to present participant narratives in a way that avoided misstatements and misinterpretations (Lichtman, 2010). In this study, I used member checks to take results back to participants for their authentication (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glesne, 1999). As a researcher, it was my responsibility to present this study in a way that readers could trust was authentic and find "credibility" in (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The narratives presented in this study represent the unique ways in which Black women faculty believe they use spirituality in academia. To address issues of validation in this study, I adapted Creswell's stance that validation is "…an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings…any report of research is a representation by the author" (Creswell, 2013, pp.249-250). I recognized that "…when we become characters in their stories, we change their stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 422). This led me to be very reflective of my research interests and the stories that participants wanted to tell. I remained cognizant of the importance of active listening, and I documented only what my participants were willing to share.

Limitations

As articulated in Chapter 1, this study has limitations beyond the traditional limitations of a qualitative inquiry because of the peculiar nature of spirituality and the attempt to discuss it in a de-spiritualized space through this academic exercise (Ani, 1997). Although this study recognizes the multifaceted nature of spirituality, the term is defined from an African American and Christian perspective. Additional studies could investigate spirituality in the lives of African American women from non-Christian perspectives. The results of this study are not generalizable to all Back women faculty as their experiences are not monolithic. This population of six Black female faculty, although small, provides insight to a theoretical perspective not common in academe and to lived experiences of persons from the margins. Although a larger sample would offer greater statistical power in a quantitative, this smaller samples allowed me to optimize understanding of the topic at hand (Stake, 1998). Generalizability was not an objective of the study, therefore any similarities to this population that are echoed in the general population will make the findings more meaningful to readers (Ifedi, 2008). Moreover, the objective of this study is about transforming (Dillard, 2006), as opposed to generalizing. This study is a contribution to work that demands a paradigmatic shift in which the role of spirituality in the lives of African American women academics can be authentically proclaimed.

Chapter 4: Participant Narratives

The presentation, synthesis, and analysis of the findings in this study are framed using narrative inquiry. The narratives of the study participants are presented in this chapter so that their individual voices can be identified. The synthesis of the findings will include a presentation of a collective voice, constructed though the collection of these individual stories based upon five themes. In the analysis, I will offer an interpretation of the participant narratives using an endarkened feminist epistemology. Understanding the varying perspectives of each woman as well as the collective voice that echoes throughout their individual experiences is critical in order to answer the question guiding this study. Therefore, it is recommended that the reader consider each narrative as a metaphoric solo within a large jazz composition: Each woman offers her own personal melody through improvisational conversations and these melodies come together to create a song. Like the jazz music genre, these narratives reflect the influences of many cultural knowledges and practices (i.e. spiritual, physical, and mental). Since the use of spirituality is the focus of this study, this particular "theme" is amplified to answer the question, how might Black women faculty use spirituality to navigate academia?

Nina's song: Working in the "thicket"

Nina works in higher education as a faculty member and an administrator in her university's school of education. For her, the work she does is not something she chose, but more so an assignment designed by a greater power. In her research and service to the university, Nina focuses on aspects of leadership, particularly urban educational leadership and ways that the university can be actively involved in the everyday practices of urban school leaders seeking to do equity and social justice work. Her experiences as a faculty member have modified her earlier perceptions of work in academe and as her narrative will demonstrate -- caused her to purposefully traverse the dense, in-between spaces she refers to as the "thicket" in higher education. Nina reflects,

> I didn't' choose initially to work in academia it kind of um… fell into my lap. I do think of
> that as a way that, perhaps God was giving me a mission, I don't know yet I'm still trying
> to make sure of that (laughs). But when it comes down to being in higher ed, what I
> realized is that I did enjoy doing faculty work. I started as a faculty member during my

dissertation, and I was given the opportunity to apply for a position at [current institution] because two faulty members knew each other... So I went ahead and applied. My whole intention was to go back into k-12 education but when this opportunity came up I said "Let me see if I really do like doing this stuff." So it came to me more than my looking for it.

Two things have grown and developed in the professoriate role, one is that sometimes we stay in our fields as professors long before we have our feet in the world of everyday practice. What I mean by that is um… more and more schools need to have leadership but they also need for the university to be very much having a foot in the ground of day to day work. And so, when, um, as a professor I realized early on that it had been some time that I'd been out of the work of being in a school administrative role and things were rapidly changing, and I think in the professoriate we have to realize that as much as we think things are analyzed deeply by our research that we're really involved in what's happening each day. It is a shifting terrain and that shifting terrain means that in the professoriate, we have got to form very close, strong linkages with everyday people who are in leadership roles. If we're not doing that then we can't even begin to touch their realities in the classes that we're teaching as professors. I'm finding that issues of social justice and the equity work that we love dearly, for many of the professors-- that we are walking ten steps behind what everyday people are facing with issues of social justice and equity work. We call it out, but do we really understand the challenges of an urban principal who has to do this work and do it in a way that brings about equity when the school is getting ready to be taken over?

Nina's research as a faculty member in the school of education highlights issues of equity and social justice all along the educational pipeline. She has done work examining the experiences of Black women in urban educational leadership, higher education and community engagement, and various leadership models. As she reflects on her on experiences in leadership when she first began as an administrative in higher education, Nina states:

I think there was a certain level of naiveté about what I could control and have administrative responsibility over. Here I want to make a difference about leadership and responsibility. No amount of preparation did I get for that challenge that I wanted to put

into place in the administrative role. It took the leadership for me then to take the risks
that I needed to take and um…um… figuring out how to get around barriers (laughs). I
think there is no blueprint to follow for that. There is no blueprint, especially not for
African American women. I think we have to create our own. I think we have to
recognize the fact that we are relying on a source that is not always so clear and in front
of us to guide us. So as an administrator I felt like ok, follow these policies and
procedures and you get things done. As a leader I had to try to carve out some different
ways of getting this done and so my terrain looks different because of that, because there
was no blueprint. It is usually carved out for white males to do what they've got to do.
They usually have, you know this person, you golf with this person, you have a certain
amount of capital that you have or influence but for me that blueprint was not there so I
have to rely more on leadership and my spiritual anchor of leadership to go ahead and
carve some ways for me to go around things.

Navigating academia as a Black woman professor and administrator has presented some
challenges for Nina. While she has not met resistance to her research agenda and often receives
reviews stating that her work is "fascinating" and has not "been adequately explored," Nina finds
that the lack of a blueprint explored in some of her work and actualized in her everyday
experiences, requires her to approach her work in different ways. Nina tells me that a spiritual
anchor keeps her grounded and helps her to continue her work. I asked Nina to tell me how this
spiritual anchor was significant to the work she does. To this question, she replied,

I think that when I began to realize that we are--and this is how I see part or our
relationships and why I am studying relationships and leadership--When I begin to see
how we are all connected, as humans connected to a larger um… aspect of life, I begin to
see it as each person affecting another person. Each relationship affecting another
relationship…and that connectivity, um… was anchored in part to what I began in my
African consciousness many years ago. We used to say, and in fact they talk about it with
Nelson Mandela now, "Ubuntu, I am because we are." That African origin in my
thinking was predated by Christian belief--and as I continue to grow into adulthood, I
begin thinking more and more in terms of an African-centered perspective, which was
rooted in belief in the spiritual, in the non-seen realm. Those relationships of each person

*affecting another person as affected by the existence of animals, as affected by the existence of plants and nourishment, all of these things tied together made me continue to grow in belief and understanding of our very existence as part of a creation that was interdependent. How do I look at that in terms of my own leadership work and writing? I think it is so very important to look at how these relationships affect each other and if we are living in a way that is not one that recognizes that spiritual connectivity then what do we do about it? What kind of action, what steps do we take? What do we actually begin to try to change? Because if we are (*emphasis*) related to each other, and if we are (*emphasis*) connected by forces much more powerful than any other, then what kind of purpose are we living if in fact we are not trying to make it better in this interconnected way of being on this world? That to me is just a way of recognizing the spiritual connectivity of us all. It's a way of saying that from that time that I was raised as a Christian to that time I became even more conscious of African roots of spirituality to this time where I am seeing it now not just in African roots but in a purpose that's great-- that speaks to our purpose for living on this earth and our connectivity, our relationships, our purpose for being in communion with each other--then that allows me to say, okay, I've got to look at leadership in a different way, I got to look at my research in a different way but I have to look at what I am doing, what is my activist role for social justice and equity? Because there's something wrong when we don't treat each other, in the ways that we live, in a way that honors that connectivity. That spiritual force, that connectedness that exists, that calls us to be even better to each other, to even use the word love.*

Nina talks about an African-centered as well as a Christian influence to explain her spiritual anchor. For her, the concept of spirituality is not easily defined nor singular. Nina explains,

I don't think it's just one or two simple phrases that will capture a meaning of spirituality. I think it would be unfair to try to capture something really quick and say this is what spirituality is or this is spirituality verses religion or anything like that. I would rather send you something that I've written and taken time with, not just a simple definition. In fact I do think that there are spiritualties actually… I think my strongest sense comes from things that happen beyond my ability to make them happen or anybody

69

else's. I think about it in terms of pertaining to the approach I have when I didn't determine what I thought the outcome was going to be. Lots of times we think we are in control. I think I'm in control, and then when things happen I often think about how I didn't make that happen. Simple things and then complex things. Simple things like um… tasks being done or people offering support that I had not expected to happen. And then the big things like something living that I thought was going to die--and then the things that are distinguished from physical nature--and when I think of it that way I see many aspects of the spirituality, I see spiritualties. It allows me in many ways to make sense of the things that are profound and hard to explain, so that the complicated things become much more uncomplicated because there is a power and greatness beyond me, beyond you, beyond humans.

Nina's understanding and approach to spirituality seemed to have a great focus on relationship. I wanted to know how this understanding influenced her relationships with students and colleagues. When Nina discusses spirituality and her use of spirituality in the workplace, she explains,

First I always, I always test the waters, if you will. If its turbulent waters and people are wanting to get into arguments and debates and stuff like that-I'm not interested. I'm not interested in that. I'm not interested in arguing. People love to say "I want to argue that da-da-da." You know, we've created an arguing culture in higher ed. "I want to argue… I want to make the point that… da-da-da-da-da." The arguing culture to me is a way of determining right and wrong through debate. Well, there is a place for that but I'm not interested so I test the water. If people want to, you know, and I'll sometimes say I'm coming from a God-consciousness with my colleagues that I'm responsible for in terms of my own leadership and administration. Within this specific unit I have colleagues, colleagues that I've met with and said ok I am responsible for the administration of this unit, I provide leadership and working with all of us we will create our vision--but I gotta tell you folks, this is where I see myself coming from--and for everybody, for everybody in the unit, I want to honor and respect their sense of what it is that brings us all together. If it's a God-force, a God-consciousness, I'll be respectful of it. If it's from my sense of a God-force, God-consciousness, our context of what it is that connects us as humans

70

connected to an environment-- if that's the level that they're at, that's where I want to connect. So, it's a testing of that water. And if some people clearly don't want to go there, that's fine I have to respect that as well.

Now with my other colleagues who are administrators across the campus, I windup saying as a Black (emphasis) woman, I've got to tell you I don't see this as an equity issue, I see this as being very discriminatory. So I call out the inequities, not based upon my sense of spirituality in this conversation to them, but in the work that we have to do-- and I find that when I call out what the work is, I'm satisfying my sense of a commitment to doing what is spiritual warfare. Because you got to work against what is socially unjust, you've got to work against what is an on-going, long-term racist, sexist, gender-biased environment-- and so within my own unit—okay, here's the leadership that I am providing, you know where I'm coming from. It's a God-consciousness it's a connectivity, it's a relationship, and it's all about what we do as we move forward. In this other context where people are reluctant to say anything or promote consciousness at all, then I talk about the work that we have to do and how we might change-- and so that's in part talking about the kind of ethical issues that are inherent that I mentioned earlier.

As we talked, Nina reflected about what gives her strength to continue in her work. She also offered her understanding of the strength that is needed to navigate academia as a Black woman. Nina informs me,

I would say God. I would say God without a doubt. Prayer really does anchor me. Quiet meditation, thoughtfulness and the opportunity to learn from mistakes. Umm…when I see something that is successful it gives me the strength to keep on going. When I'm administrating something that's successful, providing leadership for something that's creative and taps into my smarts… uh… it's something that as an adult I'm looking around and seeing that I contributed to that. My crew--we got together and we made that happen- those are the kinds of things that keep me going.

I have seen some scholars, who are African American women who have taken it [scholarship] up and have done a tremendous job—and their work clearly is respected and regarded. So, yes, there might be times when there is bias or prejudice because you're presenting a particular lens…and yet, I believe that there are plenty of herstories

that arise from African American women who clearly have demonstrated that you can do excellent work that reflects a commitment to who we are-- and it become valued.

I think for Black women and our sense of spirituality and leadership we have to think about steadfastness and perseverance because we can get taken off our path to foster and develop change…and improved conditions for ourselves but mostly for our people-- if we aren't steadfast in it. I don't mean remain on the same course if things are not working right but I mean persevering when things get hectic. We've talked a little bit about that, like that "thicket" I was referring to—and part of that to me is that, if you are clear about what you're trying to do in terms of social justice and equity…if you're clear about that—then you don't waiver off of that (emphasis). So it might take a root in looking at adult education, for me. Or, it might take a root in look at principalship. Or it might take a root in looking at what happens with pre-natal care, but I'm clear about being steadfast and persevering on what's happening with the lives of those who are under-privileged and don't have the resources. For example, I'm clear that the orphans that are experiencing life in a horrific way because their mothers and fathers have died from AIDS—I'm clear that I want to be in support of them and figure out ways to raise money, to provide education—and even if it's for ten children—I'm going to persevere in that. I'm clear that there are ways that we can foster more creativity in the Black community, I'm clear about that--and yet I see our arts cut from our schools. So what happens when you're clear about that, steadfast on it, so that the vision is not just for bringing arts into the school or taking care of the orphan, it is about equity? It is about opportunity. It is about leading a life that is full, and making sure that others lead a life that is full, that is rich—and that they are able to fulfill themselves. That's to me what windzup being unsaid when we talk about Black women and leadership—that that spirituality—and I'm bringing it back around to where I started off with—it's not a simple notion of, okay, I believe that there is a distinction between religion and spirituality. No, there are spiritualities--Spiritualities that foster what you're going to do with your purpose, with your goal, with your belief, how you act, your epistemologies, your way of being and knowing in the world—and that to me is connected, its relational, steadfast, fighting for change, bringing about differences that others may ignore. Bringing about change that others may ignore, that may not seem as important to them.

Before our conversations ended, I asked each participant about their legacies. The understanding of the word legacy used here is something handed down or passed on inter-generationally. I asked this question because I believed inherent in each response would be the guiding, spiritual principle in each woman's life, and to a certain extent, a vital component of their identity. Nina responded to my question by stating:

> *I'm a mother of a big family and in my prayers I pray for them to be believers and that they will be people who will fight for justice in whatever way they see it-- whether it's as parents, as activists in the community, on small scales and big scales. That legacy of family and civic engagement would be powerful. That I made a difference in the Black community, not alone but in the larger context as well. It reminds me of Mary McLeod Bethune's legacy…have you ever read that? Let me see if I can put it up. I often read over it but I never memorized it. Let's see...Mary McLeod Bethune legacy (searches on computer) yes that's the one I like. She says, "Sometimes as I sit communing in my study I feel that death is not far off. I am aware that it will overtake me before the greatest of my dreams – full equality for the Negro in our time – is realized. Yet, I face that reality without fear or regrets. The knowledge that my work has been helpful to many fills me with joy and great satisfaction." She then says, "I leave you love, love builds…" and she talks about that. "…I leave you hope…" and she talks about that. "…I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another…" which is one of my favorites! "…I leave you a thirst for education, I leave you respectfully uses of power…" That's why I am writing and hopefully I'll get this book done. "…I leave you faith, racial dignity, the desire to live harmoniously, and finally a responsibility to our young people…" I love that!--and she says, "If I have a legacy to leave my people it is my philosophy of living and serving." So, I resonate with that and she said it much more powerfully and thoughtfully than I could ever--but every now and then, it fact I do it quite frequently, I'll just read over it and say "I wish I could be like that." So I will try so that my knowledge will be useful to others and that I used it.*

Stephanie's song: "I don't know how to be spiritual, because the book learning is kicking in"

Stephanie began her career in academia after pursuing a passion for sharing information in the television news industry. At the time of the interview, Stephanie was experiencing her very first semester as an assistant professor. This is her first full-time role in academia, as she has worked as an adjunct, a visiting professor, and a post-doctoral fellow over the past ten years. She described a love and passion for information and being the first to know. Her work in academia fell into place because of her love for learning and equipping people with information that helps them to make better decisions. Stephanie serves as a professor of communication, teaching many of the general courses in the discipline as well as courses she structured to examine speech from an African American perspective. Her scholarly research examines faculty life, particularly African American faculty. She explores student and faculty experiences through a Critical Race theoretical lens. Stephanie also examines critical communication pedagogies and how communication functions in the classroom for people of color.

At the time of the study, Stephanie was beginning to conduct research to explore the experiences of students of color on predominately white campuses. The campus she works on is a small, private institution with a predominately white student and faculty population. In addition to teaching, Stephanie uses her research to make informed recommendations to the university as a member of various committees for diversity initiatives. As she began to reflect on her experiences as a professor, she notes that she is finding herself in more meetings. She is also finding that her visibility on campus as a faculty of color leads to her being invited to sit on more committees and have input to various institutional programs geared towards communities of color. Through this work, Stephanie is beginning to recognize resistance to her research in different ways.

> *I think institutions find [my] research agenda appealing in terms of them wanting to*
> *demonstrate that they are conscious of such issues but when it comes to actually*
> *addressing the issues that I explore and bring up during my research, that's where the*
> *resistance comes in. As I've mentioned the meetings before…so at my institution I'm on*
> *two diversity committees and I'm seeing how my research is informing my contributions*
> *to those committees but also calling out the inconsistencies and neglect—institutional*

neglect towards some of these issues, so that's where the resistance comes. The first time is comes is through what I would probably call institutional defense-mode. So it's something like… "Well we do care about diversity! How dare you say we don't care about diversity! Here's what we're doing, here's what we do every year. Look at our branding! Look at our posters, look at our brochures"—but then, when it comes to directing resources to those efforts is when the actual demonstration of "care" comes forth. So I even challenge the word care. It sounds so benevolent but it doesn't speak to how resources are directed to those efforts.

Stephanie finds this resistance challenging and devotes time to calling out inconsistencies and inadequacies that she sees in her institution's commitment to serving diverse populations. Her passion is fueled by a love and desire for accurate representation. This passion causes Stephanie take up challenges that are met with various forms of resistance. She reflected on a resistance that she feels is more personal.

I think one way I might describe it is as the ignoring or the dismissing of my presence to an extent--and it's not palatable at all. I think it's the ambiguity of it all, I think that's what I mean. So it's very similar to the concept of a micro-aggression, you can't put your finger on it but you know it's there. I think I spend a lot of time speaking out about what it's like to be a black female scholar, what it's like to be a scholar of color, what it's like to be, um, one of the only faculty of color on campus, visible faculty of color on campus where you can see the color of my skin--and I do stand out on this campus that I'm on presently and I've stood out on many other campuses that I've been on for a lot of reasons--but I would say that it's this we acknowledge you, we see that you are here but it's almost as if…if… again it's hard to actually name it because it's so subtle and insidious at times. That's the best way that I can say it at this moment. Like being invisible but not. Like a shadow, maybe like a shadow! A shadow is formless in a sense, no dimension. Wow…that's interesting…um…probably…so then on the other hand, it's like this two-sided coin, so on the other hand there's like this hyper sense of self where I wonder sometimes if I'm making too much of things…

Stephanie has experienced many situations with students and colleagues that caused her to question if she was accurately perceiving the situation as it unfolding. The questioning of her

sense of self, of her way of knowing, were very familiar to her. As we began to talk about dominant ways of knowing and thinking, Stephanie reflected,

> *Academia is a microcosm of the general society so, these "western epistemologies" damage the entire society…they damage all of us in all of these institutions. It is one of many barriers to the function and existence of faculty of color. It is unequally damaging to all but its damaging to both- Although there are some, it is true, who benefit from these epistemologies—which translate to policies—which translates to action.*

> *…That's just one of many damaging aspects of being a Black woman academic. It's probably more overarching, but I'm still trying to cope with the day-to-day interactions with the people that I have to look at, and teach, and work with on a daily basis. So how do I maintain myself in my immediate space while also navigating the global, overarching space? So there are layers of damage, layers of negotiation-- layers of protection that I have to maintain.*

As we continued to talk with one another, I asked Stephanie about ways that she maintains the layers of protection that she describes. She talks about how she manages to cope with micro-aggressive, racially-inspired behaviors and what makes her work fulfilling, in a sense, given the challenges she describes.

> *Part of it is because of what I do study, I study race-related stress, race-related conditions, I studied that as part of my dissertation work. So I learned a lot of strategies from that work but then when I think back to even in corporate environments when I was working as one of few African Americans in the workplace I relied on other—this is before I understood the dynamics of it all—I would talk to other people of color, particularly Black folks because there is some nuances there that brothers and sisters of color can sort of relate to but then again not so sometimes I would specifically talk to other African Americans in the workplace. It could be college classmates who also entered the workplace and we maintained some of those friendships and relationships so we would just talk about it to find out ok so it's not just me going through those things, others are experiencing some of these issues of being dismissed, being silenced in the workplace. But then once I started reading the research literature and talking to scholars who studied these issues I now have a better understanding of how these dynamics work.*

76

So, I speak a lot about safe spaces, places where I and other people of color can come together to talk about things and to come up with strategies on how to deal with things. It might be just venting and having that space to vent without judgment. You might come up with strategies on how to navigate certain situations. Sometimes it might involve institutional resources, meaning we might have to talk to someone officially about what's going on, and that that you have that support for that. Um, it's also personal time to myself to talk to myself, self-talk, self-care, making sure I'm sleeping, that I'm eating well, that I'm getting in more physical fitness and living where I live now it's more assessable …and spiritual life, prayer, reading the Bible, having others pray with and for me. So professional, personal and spiritual approaches.

I think some of the things that outweigh the challenges are the epiphanies that I am honored to be a part of and contribute to for students and faculty, and colleagues as well—and myself. If I can see how the world works more clearly, I'm excited about that— I'm informed on how to navigate in this society, in this world, on this planet. When I see students and talk to students about their projects, about their speeches, about their college life, um—and there's an epiphany, it's like an "ah-ha" moment—it's exciting! When I see students from working class, lower income backgrounds, um, students of color who—nobody thought would ever get into college and not just get into college but finish! I'm hyped! I can live off of that for a good while!—because it defies these stereotypes, it defies the oppressors. They thought they were going to keep us down but look where we are. When I hear people, just in passing, who say things—and I have to laugh because I think "I could be teaching your child and you wouldn't even know it!"— and then when that child goes back home and says things that provokes thought or provokes, um, inquiry, because of something I might have said—it's fulfilling. To be able to get paid to think, to learn, to read, ,to discuss, to profess—I'm still in shock in awe that I'm sitting here today, even in this interview talking about these things. When I think about my dad and my mom who sacrificed for me to get here. My mother, who's a hairdresser…my father, who's a clerk with his associate's degree, my mom has a cosmetology license and they have a daughter who has four college degrees, including a doctorate. I didn't do that, that's not by happenstance.

Stephanie informed me that her faith is an important aspect of who she is, even though she does not intentionally make others aware of her belief. For Stephanie, letting her life demonstrate her faith through her behavior and choices is key. Having a sacred and safe space where she can freely express her faith is important.

> *Well ok, if we go by the description that something is sacred if you name it sacred—so my office, I would consider it sacred, um, I pray in there, I prayed when I first got there, I pray before I go home…um...I watch what I listen to, I watch what I allow in there, I watch—I'm mindful of that. I try to keep the space peaceful, um, and not only for me but for people so when they come in there, they leave feeling better than they did when they came in. So I think that if there might be an approach to making it sacred it's that. But no, there's probably no other place on campus that I* (emphasis) *would feel that way.*

As we continued to discuss Stephanie's sense of spirituality she informed me that, for her, spirituality is about a daily acknowledgement and interaction with a higher entity. Stephanie identifies as Christian and has belonged to Black churches for most of her life. At the time of the study, Stephanie was experiencing some struggles with her sense of spirituality.

> *I think I'm at a crossroads right now. Growing up, I attended two churches regularly— and the second church I attended, I spent the early part of my young adulthood there— and I can say it grew from being more spiritual to more religious and not in the best way. So the practices were there, but church attendance became more social than spiritual. My faith began to waiver a great deal. So when I first relocated to a different state, I was just grateful to be out of that environment- but I was still in that environment in the sense that I was still looking for the same kind of ways of doing spirituality. However, I found a church that rejuvenated my faith and my sense of spirituality—and I thought "Okay, I can do this!" Then I unexpectedly relocated again to another state, which was completely different from anything I've even known spirituality, and religiously, but my faith stayed the same. So my faith in God never changed, I just had to figure out new ways to interact with Him, which is what I'm struggling with now…*

Amidst her struggle, Stephanie maintained that her faith in God has not changed and that spirituality is essential in her life. As it pertains to the work she does on a daily basis, Stephanie

did not view spirituality as having the same imperative. When asked if she believed spirituality was significant to the work she does daily, Stephanie replied,

I want to say no, but part of some of the research that I've been curious about is this relationship of faith and learning. Just for my own personal development, and personal curiosity. What's interesting is in the state that I live in there is a predominantly or a dominant Christian sect--it is that particular religion that is the dominant force in this state. I have several students who identify with this religion, and a lot of the time I may not know if a particular student identifies with this religion until that mention it in passing. This religion in some ways governs political and socioeconomic aspects of this state but it also impacts, I think, student learning. However, I don't really talk about spirituality. I let the students invite that conversation in and we'll go from there but I would say no, not directly.

Stephanie continued by explaining why she didn't engage conversations on spirituality directly:

I don't know how I would do that. That's a good question—because again we will discuss religion and practices that people are engaged in to demonstrate their faith and or spirituality but I don't know how-- I haven't thought about that specifically. I also wonder if part of it has to do with the resistance that might come up, although I don't think that's the reason. I just don't know if I've ever thought about it from it being teacher-driven. If its student-driven, then I would probably, um, develop it more—but for the most part, I have not thought about incorporating spirituality—maybe the only place it might come up is in my other course on African American Civil Rights speeches because I don't know if you can talk about, well you can't talk about the Civil Rights movement without talking about the Black Church and its devotion to, um, faith as a means of coping and conquering and resisting racial discrimination and violence. But again that's [spirituality] not a focus, it bubbles up but it's not a direct focus.

Stephanie continued to reflect on spirituality in the classroom. She began to talk about generational approaches to education and reasons why she is at a crossroads when it comes to balancing her sense of spirituality with her intellectual work as a teacher and scholar. Stephanie stated,

As I was thinking about today and what the inquiry might be like I was thinking about the influence of schooling, post-secondary schooling on spirituality…and I think the underlying message that I heard, not directly but indirectly…what some of the "old saints" use to talk about was limiting the book learning because it drives you away from God or spirituality and um, so when I noted that—probably prior to my generation schooling was not, it wasn't discouraged but it wasn't encouraged—and so I think one of the ways that my generation at least, and I'm thinking about my childhood church encouraged schooling was that they scholarships for students to go to college. So I got , I believe like two hundred dollars and at that time that was a big deal—and it was the notoriety that came with that, you know, proud parents, proud congregation. "We're sending students away to go to school" I think the expectation was okay, you go and you get your undergraduate degree and you get a good job—and you be productive. Of course you give back to your church, be a part of your church, give back to the congregation, to be upwardly mobile. *But the further I went the more I began to question my faith, to an extent—and at this moment in time I'm not sure how to be spiritual, because the book learning is kicking in…*

Sarah's song: "Running with the wolves to protect the sheep"

Sarah serves as an assistant professor of educational administration and policy studies. She entered academe after extensive experience in public school administration. What led Sarah to her work was not her role as a teacher, but as a mother. When Sarah was in the process of finishing her doctorate degree, one of her child went through an experience that helped to steer Sarah's research and career in academe:

At the same time that I was finishing my work, one of my children, who was a junior—was denied access into an AP class—and after having gone through several conversations with the administration, it was clear to me that they were tracking him out of higher learning opportunities and therefore, what I considered to be life opportunities. Then I started having different conversations, and including different readings into my work for my dissertation, including coercive structures of schools, positive constructs, teaching and learning, stereotype threat, racial fatigue…a lot of the nuances that I was then experiencing, not as an educator but as a mother trying to get a Black young man

appropriately prepared for a college experience. Once that happened, and I started writing about that—I listened first, to the voices of mothers who were going through similar but not exactly the same struggles trying to educate their children,—that was the first piece that I published actually, and I did that prior to finishing my dissertation. Then I completed my dissertation looking for optimistic solutions to get around those structures that continually keep traditionally marginalized students on the lower realm with little educational opportunity. So, higher ed became a platform.

Sarah's use of higher education as a platform was not something she fell into lightly. As she reflected on the space from which she entered academe, Sarah stated,

I'm not 25 and I know I'm not 40 starting a new career, but the way that this all came about it was very clear to me that this was by God's hand and design. This was not my initial choice, as I've said, but the circumstances led me to believe that my purpose and calling had changed, at least momentarily…and as I said, I don't know if this is on-going. I covered myself should I need to go back to the field, but I honestly felt the pull of the Spirit to do this. I knew that I had a very unique and different experience, I had a vast base of knowledge, and direction, and I happen to have been mentored by a leading scholar. Now, I don't think all of those dots fell into place as they did by happenstance. That was the hand of the Lord—and then for my son to go through what he went though at the very same time I was researching…um…that was not by chance.

Sarah situates her work in academe as a calling and a purpose given to her by God. She reflected on the ways that her journey demonstrated an act of God for her and she also explained how this purpose impacts her identity.

…Finishing my dissertation under the mentor I had, it became a healing process for me as well. And that's how you know it's a calling, because when it can speak to your spirit, when your work speaks to your spirit, it makes your day more purposeful and more meaningful, then yeah, you've touch on something very special—and its more than just a purpose and a calling and drive, it really becomes the foundation of your identity.

Sarah clarifies her purpose in academe by stating:

> *I am about running with the wolves to protect the sheep. So my purpose and calling is different. I'm not just throwing articles up or throwing them in journals here and there and writing in chapters here, there, and everywhere just to show the world how prolific I can be. If I don't have something of value to say, particularly about practice, I don't see the value in saying it. And that may cost me over time, but I don't know honestly. I feel very comfortable in that because when the Lord sits me down to be still, or He shows me something unique and real, that's when He gives me something to say.*

I asked Sarah about her spiritual beliefs and how she draws on her spirituality. Sarah reflected,

> *My father was the son of a Baptist preacher, my mother attended an African Methodist church in her youth. So when my father was in the Air Force, well, you get one church on base—and the church on the base holds all of the services including Jewish services, Catholic services, and Protestant services. But it was a place where I found comfort, so I liked going to church. That meant I exposed myself early to a lot of different religious practices. I married a man who was raised in the Seven-Day Adventist church, I knew nothing about that faith and I'll be honest, it created real challenges in our marriage. I thought it wouldn't matter so much because I knew so much about religion, but what I learned through that experience was religion is not my spiritual foundation. My spiritual foundation was my relationship with The Creator. Where I found the most exposure and openness to the Spirit was when I sang. So I sang gospel and hymns from the time I was 12 years old until the time I married. I was not a member, and still am not a member, so I sang, but I sang privately. Singing became the only way my father and I connected in his last days when he could no longer speak. He would respond to the sound of my voice singing his favorite hymns. Singing became a conduit of the Spirit for me and then also scripture. I also read scripture, and prayed. My mother enjoyed my prayers and rarely let me leave her presence without a special prayer. The one good thing about exposure to various faiths was that I was forced to learn scripture and that becomes a wonderful comfort in challenging times. You know, you might hear one or two words and then instinctively can repeat the rest of the verse. The nice thing about scripture is that those words act like a balm, in different contexts, in different situations—same words. Those*

82

same words treat you special, even in different situations. When you ask me where I find my spiritual centering, it's in scripture and music—and it's in sharing and caring too. I pray a lot, I have a lot of prayer partners and I enjoy them. I feel like that is sort of a calling too—when people are going through, you know, and they come to you for a word of encouragement, that's a special gift that you have to give. But, you have to be able to say, "Lord give me the words that you would have me to share because I don't know how to help them in their problem - in their situation, but I do know that when two or three are gathered in your name, there you will be." So I hold Him accountable to the promises that He gave us, and it works out. It just works out.

When asked if she openly discusses her spirituality amongst her students and colleagues, Sarah replied,

Do I hold class and tell them about it? No. Do they pick it up in my teaching? Yeah. Do I hide it? Not necessarily. Do I flaunt it? No. But when I talk, and I often talk, and I talk about it in the same way that I talk about experiencing life as an African American or an African American parent—this is my truth and this is my reality, but that doesn't shape or shake your truth and reality. So when I talk to you, I talk to you from my perspective and it's going to sound different from the perspective of others. It is just going to sound different because their truth is their truth and my truth is my truth. So I don't really feel the need to teach or preach it. That's not what I'm there to do. My purpose here is really to talk about academic excellence, academic equity, and optimism in education and that's where I stay, I stay in my lane. But if someone wants to access me, I make sure that I'm available to them. I do not have any desire to teach or preach but if someone needs me, they're going to know where I draw my strength—because I'm hopeful that as they see me draw my strength, they will find a conduit to theirs. Their strength may not look like my strength, their strength may not be my strength but, they need to know how to center and find their strength.

As Sarah continued to reflect, she talked about the difficulties and challenges that happen and the ways in which she finds her strength in those situations.

There are days I will tell you Kyra, where I have fallen on my face and said "Ok Lord, what are you doing and what do you want me to do with this?"—you know, sometimes

the Lord shows you things and you're not real clear about what direction you're supposed to take with it. It's in those moments, and I happen to be going through one of those moments right now in my personal life, although my personal life and my professional life are closely intertwined. In my personal life, having experienced tremendous loss this year in both my father and then my mother—you get to a place where you feel like you are walking into a cave, and as soon as your eyes adjust to the darkness you find out you have to walk in a little further, then a little further, then a little further in, until there is absolutely no eye adjustment. And it is in those moments that you just have to close your eyes and be, still perfectly still, and rely on your hearing, listening. You stay and listen until the Voice from within speaks. When you hear the voice and see even a glimpse of light, then you know, everything is going to be alright. You are safe and on holy ground, even while in the darkness of the cave. So personally, that's where I am and I have been there professionally too, where I no longer see the daylight, where I have to rely on hearing a word for my next step, a word of guidance to offer enough light for that step. That comes from learning how to rely on The Creator, when you understand who you are spiritually, you can suffer these kind of losses and still get up in the morning hopeful, that my purpose is not yet done. Challenges come to all, and challenges at work come, but when you have experienced challenges and know how to persist through challenges, you know how to get back to your own center. Then the challenges that really shake you become fewer and fewer.

Sarah noted stereotyping as a constant challenge to her work both inside and outside of the classroom. She also described situations where she has to made decisions about completing the work she is called and purposed to do, and the work that she is hired to do. In her own words, Sarah reflected,

As an African American woman, you know, if you're not careful to get to the table of decision-making, you end up being the worker bee. So one of the challenges is knowing how to appropriately work on your work. Gloria Ladson Billings said something in a fireside chat I attended. She said something like, "When you're out there doing your job, you're doing your job, but that's not necessarily your work. You need to be able to do your work." I understood that differently once I got into academe. Many of the things

84

that go with doing the job have nothing to do with your work. You have to know your purpose and your work to keep it moving forward, even while the job makes demands on you. So the first challenge I had was figuring out how to find place and space to do my work. The second, was to figure out a way to manage the demands of the job so that I could do my work. When I talk to you about being stereotyped, the third challenge of this when you're teaching, just like in any other industry, the stereotype about you and your professionalism is real. So women, Black women are often stereotyped as being over-sexualized. I'm very aware of that when I approach my class, when I'm dealing with my students. I handle myself in a very professional manner, above question. That is something that I learned even as an administrator early on. I did not really know how that would flesh out in higher ed because my white counterparts can be very relaxed. They can invite students to their homes, they have a greater freedom to be more one on one without question, than I feel I have as an African American woman. So I'm much more careful. Now maybe in time, that will change and I will feel less of that threat but I know how African American women are perceived and so I understand that stereotype. It is something that I push against. I am also very dutiful and careful about how I present myself intellectually. When I talk to students, when I talk to my class, professionalism is number one for me. I know that no matter what I bring to the table, there are some who continue to think, as you see with our president, "I don't care how intelligent you are, you are still an African American and therefore less than." So that piece still exists in our journey.

Sarah continues in her work despite the challenges she described because she believes her work is purpose-driven and that in many ways it is a form of activism. Sarah's research primarily focuses on the structure of school organizations and the ways in which school leadership, instruction, and curriculum impact the achievement. As a result of her parenting experiences, Sarah became particularly interested in the various ways that historically marginalized children are tracked out of educational opportunities at the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels. She examines these issues from a historical context, highlighting opportunities that were available for marginalized students in the 1960s and 1970s and how this opportunities were stifled in the 1980s. Though Sarah takes a critical approach to her research, she purposes her critiques in optimistic ways that suggest better opportunities for the generations to come.

I never felt lucky to have a job. I know how to work and I know how to work hard and I've never been without a job. Although, as I get older that possibility becomes more of a possibility. And yet, the truth of the matter is, when you know how to work, you know how to work. So being fearful of a job has never been part of my process. Being fearful to finish my work has been. When challenges come, such as they are now in my personal life, they begin to interfere with your ability to concentrate and keep focus, and to know your calling is real and must continue to be honored. When you have that, and you know you have a voice, and you know people hear your voice, it becomes obligation. It is an obligation and a responsibility to do my work not just for me and my children, but for the generations to come. We are in an interesting time and state of affairs in education. If we don't start really watching and actively countering, the way our elders did in the 60s and 70s, I am very fearful that the next generations will not have real intellectual opportunities. Period.

Anita's song: I may not walk on water, but I don't deserve to drown

Anita serves as a full professor at a large regional campus. She has always taught in some capacity, albeit through educational segments on her radio program or professional development segments in corporate America. Anita chose to work in academia because she believes that college students have minds can be persuaded to think differently. While Anita's campus is located in a suburb that has a history of prevalent racism, she informs me that her campus does not have the same overtly racist culture. Anita does, however, describe some challenges that she has experienced as a Black female professor in the classroom. She reflects,

I thought I was reading body language quite well. I knew this was a class—this was maybe about four years ago, and I knew by the third week I did not like walking into that classroom. I rarely have that experience. I like the majority of my students, and I like what I teach, you know, and even if I don't love it, I'm pretty okay with it. However, this was a class that I hated going into. I realized that there was at least a third of the class that just would not talk--and that's not usually my experience. I tell them, you know, I do not come in here to do hard, cold lectures, so I expect that you will come in having read the material and that you'll talk back to me and ask questions, and engage with, you know, the text and with me. This class wasn't doing it. The long and short of it is, on the

86

final day, I was going to pass out the evaluation forms and give them a final when a Black woman in the class came to me and said, "I just needed to tell you this, they're planning to set you up." I said, "Who's planning to set me up?" She says, "They said things like, "Well my mother says there's nothing that she says that I have to pay attention to" and she told me that someone else said, "Maybe you understand her because you're from her culture." I'm thinking, what the hell language am I speaking if not English? Anyway, she said, "So I'm graduating this semester, but I have never encountered this much racism before, you know. That they would just be willing to say these things in front of me, was just mind blowing." All I could say was, "Thank you." Well, I have this running joke with some of my Black girlfriends in academia which is that we do not cry in front of White children. I was in my office, it was ten minutes before class starts—I couldn't really remember having cried on campus, but I got it out of my system. I called my dean and I said, "My understanding as a senior faculty, because I was an associate at that time, is that I don't have to let students evaluate me during the second semester. Is that true?" She said, "Well, I know it's true in my discipline." I said, "Well I'm going to say that it's true, I'm going to let you know yada-yada yada, this is what happened." I walked in [that classroom], and I didn't even say hello. I handed out the forms—in fact, I didn't even hand out the evaluation forms. I just handed out the exam. When they were finished, I was just done. Later on that same day, an older sister in the class came to me and she said, "I want you to know that I think that class was possessed." Now I thought she was laughing, but she was serious. She said, "I would just get a chill every time I walked in there, and it just made me feel nauseous." I said thanks for telling me that, and I think I just decided from that point on, if I get to the second or third week and I feel as if there is just something off with that class, even if it means that I have to teach in the summer, I would rather do that, because that was stressful.

The other experience was in a different class. It was earlier on- I think I was still an assistant professor at the time. It was a class on multicultural literature, and it was filled with mostly education majors. I went into the classroom, and I'm kind of doing my thing, you know, "Here are some examples of this" and "Oh, here are some examples of…" Maybe I shouldn't have said this, but there was a friend of mine who had done a book on multicultural places in Detroit and I said "Perhaps you guys might want to look at this,

maybe use this in your classroom"—not thinking that this was going to turn some people off. Someone who had been my teacher in elementary school happens to be an expert in reading so I invited them to do a presentation for the class. So anyway the long and short of it was, a student came to visit me and she said, "Uh, I feel really bad because, they were having these conversations and saying that the worse thing in the classroom is an educated Black woman." I just stood there looking at her. Now this student was from Africa and she said, "And I felt so bad because I joined in the conversation. Then I needed help on my assignment, and you were so kind, and you were so helpful. I feel really bad that I joined in." I just looked at her. I didn't know really what to say. First of all I'm thinking, "I don't even know why you're telling me. But on the other hand, why would you join in?" Later on, a Black male student from another class who did some spectacular work with me said, "So and so was in your class and she said, before I had even brought your name up, she said `I'm feeling like I'm gonna throw up.'" I had no idea what that was about but I have decided to have a standing rule. I need you to write it down because it's my covenant saying! It is, "If you don't believe the ones who say that you walk on water, you don't have to believe the ones who say you deserve to be drowned, because the truth is somewhere in the middle." I am not Holy, and I am not Satan. I show up and I am generally well prepared. I know what I'm talking about, and that's it. I tell students that, you know, we're not coming in here to have a love affair. I'm coming in here to give you the material the best way I know how. Now, if you find something about my personality that is unsettling for you or whatever, then remember its only fourteen weeks. You can do anything for fourteen weeks if it gets you down the road to your degree. Now the other side of it is I've got some very positive-- I've got all kinds of little knick-knacks and tchotchkes and books from students—I'm talking about Arab-American students including women who are so orthodox they cover everything except for their eyes. I have received gifts on what is a wonderful teacher. I have received baklava—I have gotten all kinds of stuff from Black and White students, you know, just to say they appreciate being in the class.

Anita also reflected on an experience with colleagues in which she was thought to be carrying a knife because she was a Black woman. Challenges like these, according to Anita, have not generally landed on her, so to speak, but more so on other Black faculty and Black junior faculty

at her institution. Additionally, Anita reflects on challenges as it pertains to the legitimacy of her research when she explains,

> When I told some of my friends I was coming back to school one of my friends said, "Can you get a real degree studying that?"—and I thought, "If I had said Shakespeare, she would not have questioned that."

Anita is an English literature professor with a research area in contemporary gospel music. The challenges she describes reflect attitudes towards Black women but also towards research steeped in Black culture. For these reasons I wanted to know if Anita considered her work as activism. To this inquiry, she replied,

> I don't know that I would call it that, only because I teach with colleagues, one of whom was a member of SNCC, another who was a member of the Black Panther Party, and I think for most people that's what they consider activism--But if it means someone who is engaged in trying to help people better understand a particular part of the culture, as vibrant, important and as intricately woven into the culture as anything else, then I would say perhaps I'm an activist to that extent. —For me, reading about what happened during the Azusa Street Movement or hearing about what happened in the tent meetings and revivals is just fascinating to me.—[Reading] about how missionaries looked at what some of our ancestors were doing during those meetings, how they responded to that music. I find that interesting and, you know, not to say that I'm some great contributor to it, but in some small way, if somebody picked up my piece a hundred years from now and understood what was going on in gospel music and in the churches in terms of this music then, even though I'd be gone, I think that's a pretty good deal.

Listening to Anita describe her interests in the history and historical movements within gospel music, I began to wonder if she felt a spiritual connection to the work that she engages in. When asked if she believed there was a spiritual purpose behind her work, Anita replied,

> You know, spiritual is not really a word that I use. I have a relationship with God, Jesus Christ is my savior, so I just speak in terms of my relationship. What I try to do, most days is ask God to help me to be a good representative just in my life period, be a good wife, be a good professor, be a good daughter, sister, friend and those kinds of things.—

You know, I always ask Him to help me be a better professor, I want to be good at what I do. Even in my gospel class I start by telling them, "So for the record I'm a Christian, but I'm not here to convert anybody in here. I am not telling you that you need to stop being—whether its atheist or Muslim or anything else, but you will have to go to church one time."-- and I tell them why—because gospel music was born in the Black church and so no matter how many videos and documentaries we look at, you will not have a feel for this until you experience it in real time, in a real church service. So, this is the day that you need to decide that you can either stay in the class or that you can leave. Let me know if you have a problem; it won't hurt my feelings. I've said, "Yes, some people have gone on to join the church that they visited, but that's not my agenda." So, there are things that have to do with my relationship with God that are part of what I write, certainly in my research area. In the rest of my teaching? Oh, I don't know, like I said, I try to be careful.

Anita made it clear to me that while her relationship with God is an important aspect of her personal life, she does not overtly express that relationship in the classroom. Anita is also very cognizant of the language she uses in the classroom as opposed to the language she uses in other spaces, like home or on her radio program. I believed Anita was describing an element of code-switching. She described this process in her own words, stating,

I rarely use that particular language in the classroom … in some ways it may seem as if it's compartmentalizing, but what it is…maybe we'll go back to your way of talking about it, it's like code-switching. I have colleagues, who say in class that there is no God, or they ask how can people believe this? But I never have those conversations with them. I guess to that extent, I feel respected, and I hope they feel respected because I'm not going down that path. These are trained people, they know how to read, they know what's out there, and they've chosen not to accept it? That's their business! And when they look at me and say, "So with all this training you still believe?" "I just think, with all of the millions of atoms that make us up and how intricately they work, you can really think that we just sort of evolved from nothing? But okay! Whatever!" You know, that's just two different ways of thinking. I respect it and without making it sound as if it's difficult, it's not difficult. I just basically watch my language and like you said, it's like code-

90

switching. I'm in academia; this is what I talk about. When I'm at home or with my friends, this is how I describe it. That's that…maybe it is compartmentalizing, but that's just how I choose to live…

My story is not quite that dramatic but that doesn't mean I don't want to share my story. I choose to share where it's appropriate.

While Anita makes clear boundaries between her role as an academic and her personal relationship with God, she is willing to engage with students on a spiritual level. She explains,

I've had students come to my office and say I know you're a woman of faith, Can you pray for me? Oh Lord. Now if they come to me that directly, then I'm going to say, "Ok, come in and close the door. Let's have some private conversation-- and I'll say to them, "Ok, now I'm stepping out of my role as your professor because that's what you're asking of me. So tell me what it is that you need me to do, and I try to do that, you know, and I'll put you on my prayer list if that's what you're asking of me." …I have no problems in that area because I am cognizant of where I work. It is a public university so I try to walk that line, but I don't hide…

Like many the other women in this study, Anita spoke about a deep and personal commitment to prayer and to an approach towards life that privileges actions that reflect a relationship with God, as opposed to rhetoric about God and spiritual matters. Anita said that she finds strength to do her work in the belief that we are all here for a reason and in her understanding that she is "fearfully and wonderfully made." Her statement that she "may not walk on water, but she does not deserve to drown" provided a summation of the thoughts she shared during her reflection.

Julia's song: I'm not conformed to academe, I transform academe

Julia serves as a full professor of music. Like many of the other women in this study, she did not initially plan to work in academe but felt she was led to her work by a purpose placed on her life. As we began to converse with one another, Julia reflected,

I don't want to sound cliché-ish but I really think that this is my calling. I really do, you know, I grew up as a child wanting to be a teacher but I wanted to be a public school teacher. So my undergrad degree is actually in music education. How I got to college-

level teaching was that I was teaching at a middle school near Richmond, Virginia that was 98% Black, but the Black teachers comprised 2%, hear me, of the faculty. So I had all these Black kids in this music class, extraordinary program—it was run by a White woman—but I kept saying, how do we find musical elements, you know, composers that they can relate to? Because you can only teach so much Bach and Beethoven and Mozart, our kids need to see someone that looks like us when we're doing that kind of music as well. At that time, I really could not find a lot. This was the late 80s early 90s and people weren't really writing about us in that way—and my academic advisor was like, you know, you can only change the system from within the system…and I kept saying, pishhhh I ain't going through no more schooling! I want a job! I'm tired of being poor, you know?—But every day that I went in this school, I kept seeing these kinds and they were saying that these kids have behavioral problems, there not focused. I was like, no, it's just that the subject matter does not interest them. They're not seeing themselves, you know? Long story short I went to grad school. I had an opportunity to go to two grad schools because I'd just went through an exchange program at a university in Virginia. Then I ended up visiting another university because they had minority visitation days, and they were really targeting Black students to go. I never knew you could go to college to study what I wanted to study until somebody said, "You know you can write about Black music?" I was like, for real? Like the stuff I grew up hearing? So long story short, I ended up taking a job right out of grad school and I've been here sixteen years. I was supposed to have been here for only one year, and in the middle of my first year they were like, "You have something that we don't have here." The people I was dealing with had such a vision, in the late 90s I want you to catch this, where they said, "We don't teach Black music, but we're going to let you develop a program." So we have one of the first degree programs, undergraduate degree programs, where you could concentrate in Black music—not the performance but the history of it. So when I took this job, I surrendered to this whole notion of "Lord, this is where you want me to be." There were a whole lot of days when I was like, okay I know this place is not it Lord—but then I realized that that's exactly where He wanted me to be because so many things fell into place that just didn't make sense, they were not logical—even how I developed there. Over those sixteen years, my whole perspective as a school teacher and as a scholar has

92

changed. My work is about filling the spaces, the gaps in what I see being written and taught in the classroom so that people get a much more developed picture of who we are as Black people. But as a professor, my goal is to give hope to people who look like me and people who don't look like me—who are in these spaces where they won't normally be in, or they, you know, it was never projected that they would be there. You know? So I look at what I do as not just teaching or not just writing, it's a type of ministry—without preaching—because our presence makes a difference in those spaces. I've been the only Black person on the faculty for sixteen years. It don't bother me. It doesn't because I had to get over that a long time ago and just say, you know, my presence means something. So, maybe I'll make some White person think differently. Maybe I'll make some Black girl think differently, about how she perceives herself. So, it's been something that has developed but the older I've gotten the more that I see that everything that I've achieved hasn't been orchestrated by the best moves or me having the knowledge, it's really been a more divine thing that's happened because that's what my calling is. If I tried to do something else, I don't think it would work—and there are some days I want to quit, but it's not because I hate what I do, it's the frustration of that moment. But I get up the next morning and go, because I know it's a purpose. My purpose, is not for people to speak my name and quote my stuff, you know. It's about transforming lives and transforming minds.

Julia's faith and sense of spirituality are very important to her, and the work that she does. As we continued to talk, Julia began to talk about various challenges she faces as a Black woman scholar. One of those challenges was the struggle between her intellectual and spiritual self. Julia reflected,

We feel like we have to separate our spiritual selves from our academic selves, but I refuse to be two different people. I did it for a long time. Not to say that I go into my classroom and feel like I've got to give a sermon, even when I'm in my office hours I don't feel that—but what I have started to see--even in my conversations—is that these students are broken. Some of the academic struggle, has nothing to do with the academics…

I went to a Black college for undergrad. There was a different level of caring about you in those spaces. And I know I would not have survived that, had it not been for some of those sisters—when I missed their class—showing up at the dorm like, "Where were you, what's wrong with you?" and I'm not exaggerating! I remember one morning there was a knock on my door—I had a professor that was also a sorority sister-- I opened the door and she says, "I came to find out why you're missing class" and I said, "Uh, I won't be missing anymore!"—but that's real ministry! Without me having to give you 23 scriptures and 5 poems, its love. That's love, and that's all God asked us to do—was to love. To meet people where they are and love them—and if I've learned nothing else in this past year with my battles and struggles with the church, it was that God met people where they were. He didn't ask them to be any more than what they were, but what He did was He changed them for the better when he left them. Without judgment and condemnation, He just loved them…As much as some of these young people get on my nerves, it's my job to love them. It is my job to love them…

Even though Julia is an ordained minister, she made it very clear that she does not directly discuss her faith with students and colleagues. For Julia, she said it was more important that people saw the ways she chooses to live her life than to hear rhetoric. Her approach to teaching and researching is one that demonstrates this belief. Julia focuses on telling the stories of Black female composers and musicians that have been excluded from history or had parts of their lives excluded from history. Julia's desire to write these women into history parallels her desires for Black female academics. Julia reflects,

I think it's important that we figure out how we fit in this larger academic thing. Like, you know, at first I didn't do Black music because I'm Black. That's the music I grew up with, that my grandmother played. I said, you know, why do I feel like I have to go outside of myself to represent myself, when I have lived this stuff? -- I did not read it in a book, I lived this stuff in a house with a grandmother who played a banjo and a fiddle and spoons—when people talk about all that bluegrass stuff, that's what my grandmother did! So I had to reconcile myself…But because this academy, you know, if you don't know yourself you will fall into that trap and eventually one of two things are going to happen, you're going to exhaust yourself or people are going to throw you out. A lot of us

don't make it through because we don't really know who we are and we've created these artificial contexts of who we are both in our scholarship and in our presentation—and the moment we hit a challenge, because that's not entrenched organically in who we are, we get disqualified from the game. We can't publish, we get locked out of those academic circles because we feel like it is only one pathway.

Mia's song: There's a well over here, you can draw from me

Mia describes herself as both a mathematician and an educator. She, like all of the women in this study, had not intended to work in academe. As Mia reflects on her experiences as a Black female in higher education, she states,

It was a career change. My original degree was in engineering and I worked as an engineer for almost ten years. I woke up one morning and didn't want to go to work and that was really odd because I enjoyed the work that I was doing—it was very intellectually stimulating. But my weekends were spent in ministry and they were much more people oriented than my weekdays which were spent in research for photovoltaic cells- I was doing solar cells. So I realized that though I was being intellectually stimulated, I wasn't being satisfied in my heart. When I was on the weekends and in contact with people I was much more fulfilled. I felt like I was really doing what I was supposed to be doing. So I prayed and the Lord really made it clear to me that I was supposed to be teaching. That's where I really had belonged all along-I had been a natural teacher all of my life. When I was in the first grade, I would go back to the kindergarten teacher and help out the teacher—I was a teacher's helper. So I literally had been teaching all of my life but had never considered it as a profession. So when I changed careers I started off in middle school and high school classes. I realized that there was a lot going on with the system, and they didn't want to hear from me because I was a lowly classroom teacher—and I said, "Well, what do I have to do to make my voice heard?"—and someone said, "Well, you've got to have some alphabet soup behind your name. You have to have a masters or a doctorate." So I went back and pursued my graduate studies, um, in mathematics. At the time, that's really where my focus was. In the process of finishing my masters, the Lord made it clear it was supposed to be a doctorate. We struggled against that. I didn't want to spend that much time in school, I

thought I was too old, you know—I was like, "I was just trying to do my two years and get out"—but then I realized that I wasn't going to study mathematics purely, I was going to study teaching and learning in mathematics and then it all fell into place. It all made sense at that point so I stopped resisting because God was going to win anyway. I went ahead and pursued and finished my doctorate in a five year time span , my master's took a year and a half and then it was another three and a half years to finish my dissertation. So, as I was in the process of working on my doctorate—it was important to me, see I had a fellowship, I had been blessed. So I didn't have any work responsibilities, all of financial needs were met plus I was being paid a stipend and I didn't even have to TA, I had no responsibility whatsoever but to maintain the g.p.a.—but that wasn't working for me, I had to get back. So I started tutoring on the side for my colleagues who were studying in masters programs or struggling with their stats classes. So from me just wanting to get back into tutoring, someone heard about me from reputation and literally a position opened up for me as a teaching assistant with the Emerging Ethnic Engineers program at a research institution. I started that my very first year of graduate studies and they literally just facilitated my career until I finished my doctorate. They actually went over to the math and science department and said, "You must hire her as a faculty member because we want to keep her. She's been teaching for us for five years and we're not going to let her go." So that was my journey there, that's how I ended up in academe and it has been a complete blessing ever since. It is exactly where I was supposed to be.

Mia continued to reflect on her journey to academe. She identified students as the focus of her passion. Mia's research agenda involves qualitative research that examines the experiences of marginalized groups in math and science, particularly Black students. For Mia, this research agenda is not only a calling, but a result of her personal experiences.

…I was always the only Black in any science or math class that I ever had through high school and then when I got to college, and my first degree was in engineering—I was always the only Black, Black female, Black anything. So I kept seeing all of these statistics and it was very troublesome to me that no one could tell me why. So that's where my research agenda was birthed from.

96

Mia's research area is one that she described as "marginalized" because research in the sciences typically reflect quantitative measures. Mia recognizes that numbers can identify that something is happening, but cannot explain why it is happening. For these reasons, Mia's work focuses on mathematics education and on the particular contexts of the students reflected in the achievement gap. For Mia, the students are at the heart of what she does. She reflected,

> *I am madly in love with students and I love to see students learn. I am truly a student-centered instructor by philosophy and by practice so my pedagogy is very much about student learning. So my experiences with students is why I came into it and it is why I have stayed as long as I have actually. I was an official faculty member for thirteen years. The reason I stayed in a faculty position so long is because I absolutely love facilitating the learning of my students. I couldn't imagine not being in the classroom. So that part of the experience has been the best part of the experience. Even when I was doing middle high school and junior high school, the best part was still the student's learning—and then math in itself has always been a high anxiety subject, it's been a high failure rate for what I call my people—African American students, underrepresented ethnic minorities, have always historically in mathematics, mathematics education, um, and it was important for me to be able to facilitate that for all students, but for them in particular. So it has been a really good journey and a fulfilling experience with regards to interactions with students. My students literally become my children. They become a part of my family and they allow me to become a part of theirs. My students become my students for life. I have students that started off as freshmen and are now finishing up their doctoral programs. I just conferred one of my former students this past week with his doctorate degree. So, the students are the best part of it. It's the reason why I began and stayed as long as I did. But there are also some systemic things. My own personal characteristics are those of leadership, and so even as a faculty member I was always heading committees and leading programs and I've been a director of various programs through the years. So career wise, it has always been leading to this type of administrative leadership role and I think the future destination for me is to be a dean—because of the things that I want to be able to implement at the systemic level.*

I have had experiences at a major Research 1 university with my initial academic experience and then I left there and went to a smaller, private liberal arts, Jesuit University, and then left there to come to the community college where I am now. In all of those experiences the students and the demographics have changed greatly. There are very different demographics across those three institutions and yet I always felt like I could make an impact for that particular demographic. That was always the calling card that got me to where I was.

Mia's experiences at various institutions varied because of the demographics of the students but also because of the university's culture and approach to her spiritual beliefs. Mia shared,

Well, everything that I am, anything good in me comes from the Lord and I make no secret of that. My relationship with my Lord and savior and father, my spirituality, is an extreme necessity for my existence anyway but in particular professionally. Especially now, with me being in the position that I'm in—this had to be a God thing, it couldn't be a good thing, it had to be a God thing for me because I literally left everything that was known and familiar to me to go to a place that I knew nothing about other than the fact that I was supposed to be here. It is certainly my relationship with Christ and my ability to express and share that—to feel like it permeates every aspect of my life. I never felt like I had to separate who I am from what I do. So that has always made it easier for me. I couldn't imagine a career where I could not be who I am in what it is that I do. Interestingly enough, although I taught at a Jesuit institution, this institution that I am at now—which is not religiously affiliated at all—almost everyone here is so outwardly Christian and happy about it and celebrating on a daily basis! We have devotions every Wednesday. I have never been surrounded by so many people that, when they walk in the door and say "I need you to pray for me," they mean it for real. I mean, it's very clear to me why the Lord has sent me here in this particular place—and it was not when I went through the interview process. It was after I had already accepted the position and I came on campus just to do a walk-through and the Spirit in the atmosphere was so clearly God that it was like, "Oh, this is why you brought me down here." I have literally had the opportunity to just outright minister the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to people who have come in my office for one thing—seeking advice and counsel for their academic

careers and we end up giving advice and counsel for their life…and it's a wonderful position to be in—that I have that kind of autonomy to be able to do so, and the freedom to do so. It's life-changing for me to be able to impact the lives of the people that walk through the door. So I'm very blessed by what He's done.

…I can tell you that at the Jesuit institution, well I'll say this, they had an atmosphere of tolerance and they tolerated anything, I mean anything. So my expression of who I was, was certainly tolerated but it was not necessarily celebrated the way that it is now…At the research one university, it certainly wasn't supported by the infrastructure but what happens at that particular university is that it's so large and so disconnected and impersonal that I could do whatever I wanted to do on an individual basis anyway. Had it not been as large, I think, if someone had been able to identify, "oh, she's doing this" it could had been a problem and God just didn't let it be, you know.

That's why the students have always been important to me because they will come to you and tell you, "look, I'm pulling from you, everything you've got, I'm coming to draw from the well" and then they go spread the word and say, "hey, there's a well over here that we can drink from"—and I'll tell them that my office door will stay open, you can come by whenever you want to.

As our conversation came to a close Mia offered,

It's important for me to say that my experience has always been…a peculiar one…because I have always been "foolish enough" to believe whatever God says—I believe that and I live my life according to it. So, I've never seen myself through the perspective of other people. I've always seen myself through the lens that he gave me. All of that was instilled to me by my mother. My mother said I was beautiful, Black, intelligent, worthy—and I believed her. She told me every day and I believed her every day and then I tried to live a life that was in line with what it was that she said I was. But what she said I was and who she said I was is who God says that I am. So I think the experiences I've had in academe are not the typical ones—in particular for Black women in academe. Now, what I have found in my new position is—I have more Black faculty members in my department on this small campus than I have ever encountered probably in my entire career. However, they are all master's degrees, they don't have doctorate

level degrees and one of the things I want to do here is institute a way for all of them to go to the next level and get their PhDs. I have always been the only, not one of the only, the only—when I got my PhD, there were 8 people of African descent that got PhDs in my same field in the country. Five of them were women at a university on the East coast, myself, and there were two brothers—but they were all African, they were not African American. That was in the whole country.

We have always been few and far between. I know what that experience can do for people—it's an attack from every side if you choose to see it that way. But my faith did not allow me to view it from that perspective. I come in every day believing that I am victorious and that I can overcome and that every person that walks through my door can do the same thing—and that I can empower them to do the same thing. I understand that that is not a typical experience but it has been mine because of Jesus Christ and what He has done for me, and through me, and continues to grow in me. I'm still learning every day how to navigate this process of life and to do it in a way that not only glorifies Him but that impacts the kingdom of God. This is a wonderful experience that I am in right now but I really believe it has to do with my perspective of it. I have a kingdom perspective so there is no defeat. Now, the challenges certainly come, but I cannot dwell in that place. I have to see that as just one more prayer request, one more thing that God will cause me to have the victory over. I realize that is not the norm. I understand that—but, I needed you to hear me say that I'm walking in what I'm walking in because of Him. That's an extremely important part of the testimony, of the data.

Chapter 5: Synthesis, analysis, and implications

This chapter presents the collective story of a sample of Black female professors navigating academia. A synthesis of their individual narratives was constructed to reveal four root narratives permeating through their experiences. By root narrative, I mean an underlying story that connects the experiences of multiple people. The root narratives in this study demonstrate how spirituality interplays with the pedagogy, research interest, and career navigation of Black women faculty. These root narratives also reveal how spirituality counters epistemic violence. The purpose of this study was to examine how Black women faculty use spirituality to navigate academia. Research shows that spirituality has played an integral part in the ability of African American people to work in and work through spaces of marginalization. Various scholars have highlighted actions and traditions in academia that can be considered epistemologically violent towards African American women. To this end, this study seeks to bring to light the ways in which African American women faculty draw on and bring spirituality into spaces where such violence may be present. Here are their collective stories.

1. *God led me here.*

One of the most consistent elements of the stories shared by my participants was the statement, "I didn't choose to work in academe." Of six participants, all stated that they did not plan initially to pursue careers in academe. Four participants specifically identified their journey into academe as result of spirit-led decision making while the other two identified this decision as a result of a calling or passion for the work in academe. Nina said that she believed that "God was giving [her] a mission." She had intended to return to teaching in K-12 schools upon completing her degree but felt spiritually compelled to take a position in higher education. Sarah also intended to return to K-12 schools as a superintendent when she recognized that God had given her "a purpose" in academe. Thus, as she stated, "Higher ed became a platform" for her to be used as "His writing instrument." Sarah also described her career change as something that was being done "by God's hand and design." Stephanie and Mia both left careers in the television industry and engineering respectively to work in academe. Mia stated that she made this decision because she prayed and "the Lord made it clear that [she] was supposed to be teaching." Stephanie and Anita, however, did not discuss their decisions to work in academe as a

result of a specific prayer or encounter, but as a result of a calling or internal purpose of teaching and learning. This point carries into the next root narrative of this study.

2. *Work fulfills a calling or purpose.*

Another root narrative shared by the participants in this study was one that highlighted a "calling" or purpose to do the work they were doing in academe. In our conversations, the use of the word "calling" to describe their work and the reasons why they work in academe, considering the challenges inherent in the space, was frequent. Some participants described their calling in terms of life-long passions. Stephanie, for example, described a life-long "passion for learning and for equipping people with information to make healthy choices about how to view the world." She labeled this calling as "an inherent desire" within herself. Anita also described her calling in terms of a passion for teaching students who "have minds that can be persuaded to think in new ways." Anita stated that no matter where she has worked, both in academe and in corporate America, she has always taught in some capacity. To this end, Anita's description of her passion reveals something that she believes she was designed and created to do. Mia also described her calling and passions in this manner. Mia stated that she has always been a teacher, but had not considered it as a profession until God revealed to her that she needed to make a career change. Mia identified her work in academe as something that was in many ways spiritually fulfilling. This was echoed in my conversation with Sarah. Sarah discussed how she knew her work was a calling by stating that "You know it's a calling when it can speak to your spirit." Sarah expanded on this notion by saying that a calling or purpose becomes the "foundation of your makeup." This belief was also shared by Mia. The belief that they were called to do the work they are doing in academe also appeared to be the crucible that keeps them working in these spaces. Julia demonstrated this point by stating, "Everything that I've achieved hasn't been orchestrated by the best moves or me having the knowledge--it's really been a more divine thing that's happened because that's what my calling is."

3. *Internal spiritual compulsion, no pressure on you.*

Through this root narrative, participants reveal that although they feel compelled to their work because of their sense of spirituality, they have no desire to convert others to their beliefs about spirituality. This narrative can be grouped based upon two corresponding approaches: 1)

Stating beliefs plainly and engaging those who desire to communicate in such matters and 2) revealing beliefs through actions. Nina uses approach number one and she describes this approach as "testing the waters." Nina stated that she will open herself to discuss spirituality but has no desire to argue or debate. Therefore, she will engage with whoever wants to engage on that level but has "respect" for those who do not, and does not try to convince them to believe as she believes. Nina's approach to sharing her sense of spirituality is tied to the ways that she perceives relationships and interconnectivity among people. Thus, she will try to connect with people based upon how they make sense of the world, not just on her personal beliefs. Anita also uses approach number one. She gives an example using her course on gospel music in which she requires students to attend one church service in a Black church. Anita states that "For the record, I am a Christian, but I am not here to convert anybody…that is not my agenda." Anita explains that she uses this approach so that students will recognize that although she share certain beliefs, her intentions through this course is to help students understand a particular experience, not to convince them to adopt the beliefs of those who are having that experience.

Mia, on the other hand, also tells students in a direct manner about her sense of spirituality but unlike Anita and Nina, Mia feels like part of her work in academe is to minister her spiritual beliefs to the people she serves. Mia stated, "Everything that I am, anything good in me comes from the Lord and I make no secret of that." Mia talked about ministering and praying with students and colleagues in her office and in a group devotion that takes place on campus weekly. Mia's passion and love for students leads her to want to be accessed both spiritually and professionally in order to improve the lives of students. Mia stated, "I never felt like I had to separate who I am from what I do" and she described herself metaphorically as a "well" that students can "draw from." In this sense, Mia differs from Anita and Nina because she directly lets students know that she can be accessed for spiritual matters even though her purpose is not to convert students to her beliefs. Anita and Nina let students know about their spiritual beliefs but do not offer themselves to be engaged about such matters unless someone expresses a desire to do so.

Stephanie takes approach number two and allows her actions to revel her sense of spirituality as opposed to directly informing people about her standpoint. Stephanie stated, "I don't go around revealing my spiritual foundation, not out of shame or fear…what I've learned through

the years is to let my life demonstrate my faith." Julia echoed this point when she said, "I don't flash the Christian card so much, even though it's a part of who I am. I'm not trying to make them feel comfortable but it's not about my rhetoric--it's about who I am and how I live my life." Julia expands on this point by discussing the life of Jesus Christ and the examples and requirements laid out in the Bible. Julia says that her requirement is not to tell people how to live their lives or to inculcate them with religious doctrine. For Julia, her requirement "is to love them." Therefore, Julia's approach is to allow her teaching style and interactions to demonstrate love that reflect her spiritual beliefs. Sarah also takes approach number two. She directly states that she is not in academe "to preach" however if someone expresses a desire to access her in that way, she will make herself available. Anita echoed Sarah's statement and also agrees to "step outside of [her] role as professor, [if] that is what [students] are asking of [her]." To this end, this root narrative demonstrated that in both approaches of directly stating their beliefs about spirituality or allowing their sense of spirituality to be demonstrated through their actions, each participant respected a boundary for persons who do not share their beliefs. No participant stated that they believed all people ought to share their beliefs about spirituality or had to engage their sense of spirituality in the same ways that they were choosing to do so (i.e. through Christian beliefs).

4.   *Research for social justice, not recognition.*

Without regard to any of the academic disciplines represented in this study, this root narrative reflected a desire to promote and/or achieve social justice in the research agendas of every participant. In this narrative, participants talked about their desires to help others as opposed to receiving accolades for their work. Sarah contributed to this narrative when she stated that many scholars are in academe in order to "run with the wolves." Sarah specifically identifies her purpose as being different and describes herself as "running with the wolves to protect the sheep." She informed me that her research is not about demonstrated how "prolific" she is, but about community ways to achieve excellence and equity in education. Nina shared this same desire to achieve excellence and equity in education and communicated a desire to have a legacy that reflects her commitment to others. Like Nina, Julia also wants to live a legacy that reflects a commitment to helping others. Julia also stated, "My purpose, isn't for people to speak my name and quote my stuff ... It's about transforming lives and transforming minds." Nina, Sarah, and

Mia situated their research as socially just projects intended to effect the achievement gap for students of color along various points in the educational pipeline. Stephanie identified her research as work that intends to provide accurate representations of communities, particularly communities of color, where people are often labeled in monolithic ways. Her current projects encompass calling inconsistences in the commitments of universities to initiatives centered on improving the experiences of faculty and students of color. Most participants labeled their work as a form of activism, with one participant stating that her work was "not yet" but has every intention of becoming activism.

Exploration of root narratives

Through this study I examined the use of spirituality among Black women faculty. The narratives of six women have been presented as individual stories that reveal a collective story about the experiences of Black women faculty in higher education. This collective story revealed five root narratives. In the first narrative which I refer to as, "God led me here," these women identify their sense of spirituality as the means that directed them to work in academe. All participants described their work in academe as a second career that they did not "choose" but felt compelled, purposed, or spiritually-led to do. This root narrative reveals the level of importance and impact that spirituality has in these women's lives. It supports claims within the literature that identify God as being present in the lives of people facing oppression, leading them to their freedom (Cone, 1999). The work of Denise S. Williams, which highlights the close walk with God that sustains Black women is reflected here. These women, in the face of all challenges known and unknown, followed the guide of the Spirit and yielded their career to God's control. The phrase "not my will but yours" proves significant to the women in this study. The old saying that those who walk with God always reach their destination also seems to apply here. As these women allow themselves to be led by God, as they have professed, they reach their purpose even as they are seeking to fulfill that purpose. The idea that one is constantly in a state of walking in while walking to something is common in African American spirituality, as the literature and the data has proven.

In the second root narrative called, "Work fulfills a calling or purpose," each participant, in her own way, identified her research as a calling that was a result of her relationship with God as well as a communal obligation to complete the work of God that demonstrates love and social

justice. This particular narrative reveals a connectivity to a larger agenda, beyond personal desires and interests. Participants did not mention financial gain, or any personal gains that did not benefit the lives of others. Situating their work as a "calling" these women put a high level of importance on their work. They identified this purpose as one that would either uplift the current state of the African American community and ultimately all of society or they identified their purpose as one that would write into history the stories of people and the culture of people who have been omitted or distorted. Here, the literature that suggested African American spirituality represents an inextricable connection between the individual and community is supported. This root narrative also situates the work of Black women academics as "fruit" nurtured by God. Later on, the root narrative concerning work for social justice and not recognition also speaks to this idea of "fruit" and captures the purpose of this "fruit" as a means for spreading seeds of love and justice throughout the educational pipeline.

The third root narrative which I have titled, "Internal spiritual compulsion, no pressure on you" is a very important one because it helps to clarify the intent of these professors as they use spirituality in their work. This root narrative also demonstrates a distinction between the *uses* of spirituality as opposed to the exchange of religious doctrine. None of these participants teach religion or theological courses. Two participants, Mia and Julia, are ordained ministers, however neither expressed intentions to convert students or colleagues to their religious traditions. This root narrative is critical to this study because it helps to further demonstrate the difference between spirituality and the religious practices used by people to demonstrate their sense of spirituality. In this study, spirituality was used by participants as a guide, anchor, and instructor for how to interact with others. Spirituality was not something to be forced upon others. For my participants, their sense of spirituality was tied to specific outcomes, not of which involved recruiting others to their faith traditions (although it could happened if others felt compelled). The internal spiritual compulsion of the Black women in this study can be understood as a deep passion and desire for teaching and learning that makes their work "soul work." So much of what has been said about African American spirituality is reflected here. The act of educating and being educated is a "spiritual striving" as W.E.B. Dubois and Cynthia Dillard have expressed. Jeanne Noble, the first person to analyze and publish work about Black women in academia, was a Black women who took on this spiritual striving. Through her words, the goals behind the work of my participants is stated clearly. She writes:

> The ultimate outcome of education as it touches upon the individual's life is to strengthen her freedom to become what she is willing and able to become. It would include a daring to dream as well as to labor, a daring to pursue as well as to conform, a daring above all else to be true to herself, or to strive to realize what trueness to self could mean, what it will involve and what it will cost (Noble, 1956, p.141).

In this way, the personal connections of my participants become more visible. In their strivings, as Dillard suggests and Noble contends, the essence of who they are is revealed. The trueness of their identity is established. This is highly significant in the lives of people, like the women in this study, who face a constant barrage of stereotypical, marginalizing labels on their identity. The internal spiritual compulsion expressed by my participants reveals a desire to perhaps (re)member oneself in the ways that Dillard suggests when she describe a putting back together of things we've learned to forget. For my six participants (re) membering is about connecting purpose, passion, and career into one collective being. This root narrative demonstrates the presence of African American spirituality as a force, affirming the work of Black liberation theologians of the 1960s. In this sense, African American spirituality provides motivation in the sense of a "fire shut up in the bones" of those who yield to its presence.

I have labeled the fourth root narrative "Research for social justice, not recognition." This story tells us about a scholar-activist agenda in the lives of Black women faculty. Each participant described their research agenda as one that intended to make society more socially just and equitable. These women view their presence in academe as an act of social justice because of the marginalization of Black women and the absence of persons of color in these spaces. Their research agendas are very political and they expect their writings to produce positive change for others. In this root narrative, it appears that a sense of spirituality overpowers epistemologically violent act that demonstrate that academic activism is not valuable research. The literature informed us that these kinds of research agenda often are denied funding and support, or are not considered to be in connection with public protest forms of activism. The participants of this study where not concerned about these challenges however, seemingly because their work represented a higher calling. Therefore, their desires to eradicate racism and sexism where not about them, but about a larger agenda. For these women, issues of race and gender were not always experienced on a personal level, but remained a factor in their research. What I mean by this is that some participants, like Mia, did not feel that her race and gender had affected her negatively in her personal career. However, Mia recognizes the presence of sexism

and racism at a systemic level thus, she pursues administrative work and written research that will allow her to effect change in these areas. Other participants, like Sarah and Stephanie talked about personal experiences of being stereotyped or ignored on the bases of race and gender. Whether or not these experiences were personal did not influence their research agenda. These women feel connected to a larger, communal struggle and talked about the level of responsibility they felt to make a difference. In this manner, academia becomes their platforms to address social ills of society. The work is about more than teaching and writing. It is about leading a movement, transforming the ways people think, and forging a new reality. For this women, they have chosen to write the wrongs with intent to right the wrongs. Whether or not they felt those wrongs on a personal level was superseded by the personal connections they feel to others. Therefore, these women have taken up a cause to stand in solidarity with oppressed others so that, as Cornel West suggests, everyone can have opportunity to reach their full potentialities. This root narrative reveals an element of surviving and thriving that signifies the presence of African American spirituality. Why should this matter? Audre Lorde said that:

> *Survival is not an academic skill* [emphasis hers]. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we all can flourish (2007, p.112).

Survival, for Black women, is also a spiritual pursuit. The women in my study seemed to be sustained by their abilities to endure their conditions enough to positively affect the conditions of another. It is as if, when these women enter academe, the whole world enters with them. The life and legacy of Anna Julia Cooper, a visionary Black female educator, is reflected here. Cooper informed us years ago that, "Only a Black woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me"*(1988, p.31). The women in this study echo Cooper's words, replacing the emphasized phrase with "the oppressed enter with me," "Black children enter with me," "all women enter with me," and "humanity enters with me." These women feel a moral obligation to address the social ills of their day in their own way and many of them purpose their work to affect future generations. I am reminded here of the metaphor of the tree and why trees bear fruit. These women feel they are carrying seeds, so to speak, that need to be spread across a wide range. This is why academia is their platform, so that their work might reach a larger population than it did when they worked in local school districts or

108

companies. While their work did impact the people there, it is as if now God has allowed the "fruit" to be carried into space where they might plant more seeds of justice among more people.

To work for the advancement of others is a selfless act. Such actions are plentiful through the history of African Americans, women, and those who work from a spiritual center. This is not to say that all others have selfish agendas, but the women in this study represent a population of African American women whose sense of wholeness is captured in these lyrics:

> *We ran the race,*
> *kept the fight,*
> *shed our blood,*
> *For what was right.*
> *We carried our cross,*
>
> *Through stormy weather.*
> *Because of Christ*
> *Now we can say,*
> *We are conquerors* (Franklin, 1996).

Implications for change

The review of literature within this study informs us that Black women faculty face many challenges in the form of epistemic violence. The data in this study, however, suggests that these challenges are displaced by a sense of spirituality among Black women. This sense of spirituality guides their career choices, sets their research agendas, and dictates how they interact with students and colleagues. African American spirituality, as understood in this dissertation, allows Black women to work in academia, for academia, and against academia simultaneously. African American spirituality acts as a subversive strength in a space where difference is often equated to deficiency. There is an abundance of literature that highlights the challenges among Black women faculty, the stereotypes that foster feelings of isolation, and the policies that continue to block Black women from opportunities. None of these problems are new. Sheila T. Gregory (1995) informs us that Black women have participated in higher education for well over a century and that these problems are endemic. While I agree with Gregory that more research is needed detailing the experiences of Black women, this dissertation demonstrates a needed change in the direction of the conversation. So often Black women enter the conversation from a point if pain. When one enters the conversation from their place of strength, however, more can be revealed about the strategy as opposed to the problem. I believe that more work that centers

spirituality as a force, as a space from which one can bear witness, and a tool of resistance is needed in academe. Education is more than an intellectual pursuit guided by the mind. As we teach and learn, the essence of who we are is revealed, challenged, sustained, and evolved. Overcoming racism and sexism requires more than declarations that such oppression exists. It requires a radical shift in thinking and acting in the world. How might spirituality propel us towards this kind of change? How could a fundamental shift from privileging individualism to favoring interconnectivity release us from our silos in academe?

I am compelled by participant Nina to reflect on what "working in the thicket" really requires. The thicket she described mirrored the thicket that the ram had his horns caught in when Abraham went to sacrifice his son Isaac at the request of God. While Abraham and Isaac are the popular focus in this passage of biblical scripture, the ram caught in the thicket holds meaning. This ram, was forced to remain in a space, arguably becoming more entangled in this space the more he tried to move. This can be interpreted to mean that the ram had no other choice but to remain where he was, until the will of God was completed. Could it be, as Nina professed, that Black women among others working in the "thicket" of academia, have no other choice but to yield to a divine purpose? Is it possible that focusing on the barriers that keep us "entangled" only lessens our ability to progress? Stephanie's narrative was summed up by the statement, "I don't know how to be spiritual, because the book learning is kicking in." Her words and that of many scholars suggest that Eurocentric paradigms are often antithetical to spiritual paradigms. Just as we are divided on the basis of Black/white, female/male, the bifurcation continues onto separate intellectual and spiritual. However, from many, like the women in this study, spiritual is intellectual as intellectual is spiritual. The act of separating one from the other places one, like Stephanie, in a space of "not knowing." Educational research could arguably become more relevant if more attention is given to the ways people experience education and ultimately produce knowledge based upon their spirituality. This relevance is not just toward the African American community, but to various others who operate from a spiritual center. This work could help to reveal people who are not only working from the margins on the basis of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other oppressed groups, but also people who are working from epistemological standpoints diametrically opposed to Western academic traditions.

Julia's narrative, "I'm not conformed to academe, I transform academe," offers a testament from such spaces. Julia recognizes that the place she is in is not only oppressive but opposed to her way of being. Therefore, her agenda is one of transformation that would provide the space for her to dwell in the fullness of all that she is. Could this transformative space be the space where the gaps in academe, like the achievement gap, the graduation gap, or the tenure gap are closed, healed, and permanently remedied? This dissertation suggests that spirituality fosters a sense of wholeness among African Americans and that it could also be the "repairer of the breach" in academe. Offering up a remedy is a dangerous proposition because it might suggest that there is a singular answer to addressing the problems we face. The social ills of society are far too compounded and complex to entertain such assertions. These same ills are, however, far too compounded and complex to dismiss what any one remedy could alleviate. I believe that we each have to play a role in fostering our freedom, just as we all play a role in maintaining our oppression. These roles could never look the same or represent one singular strategy. Having the ability to connect in solidarity with other's who strategy mirrors yours, I believe, does make one's work more impactful. It is like the difference between one pointed finger and a balled fist, together five fingers strike a more powerful blow than one finger ever could. This solidarity requires that we be like Mia and declare that, "There's a well over here, you can draw from me." So often the oppressions that we face keep us from wanting to reveal our agendas. While remaining tempered and subverted has its political advantages, it also helps to maintain the systems that are in place to temper, subvert, and control.

Becoming bold in one's agenda will quite often be seen as an attack on someone else or as a declaration that your way is better than theirs. This is very crucial to the future of marginalized courses for many reasons. One of which is an inherent fear among oppressive groups of becoming oppressed. The other, which I believe is more damaging, is the desire to maintain power. Power is so very often the focus of critical research. Educational researcher have been concerned with how power is maintained, transferred, and manipulated. Power, however, is often defined and viewed from a Eurocentric standpoint that equates power with domination and control. By positing spirituality into the discourse, researcher may be able to see power as a form of submission, as an internal ability to yield one's will to a divine connection. Through this lens, Sarah's declaration that she is "Running with the wolves to protect the sheep," signals that our use of power could shift if such a yielding defines that power, not quests for the

111

seat of supremacy. I am not suggesting that this is the agenda behind critical studies in administration and curriculum. I am offering spirituality as a force, a space from which to bear witness, and a tool that could allow these researchers to actualize their work in more transformative ways. The word transformation is strategically used here, as opposed to words like integration, which is often the remedy for acknowledging communities of "other." In essence, I am asking researchers from the margins to consider what it might look like to completely change our ideas about the governing board per say, as opposed to asking for a seat at the table. Joy James informs cautions, "Integration and "inclusivity" as new forms of segregation can act as a subterfuge for racist, (hetero)sexist and classist education" (1993, p. 123). In this way the momentum of many social movements, particularly in education, has been stifled. As James continues, "Curriculum integration, an easy home remedy to a racist canon, lends itself to the creation of more sophisticatedly segregated academic departments, programs, and courses (1993, p.23). In this way, it becomes easy to recommend that the implications of this study suggests the need for special interests groups in education. James' words inform us that such decisions would simultaneously integrate and segregate. This is already the case in academe, as Eurocentric, often white-male dominated and defined disciplines determine what is excluded and included from 'mainstream' academe. Power in this sense remains intact, even as communities of "other" are offered new silos to dwell in. A close examination of the interconnectivity rooted in African American spirituality might allow us to envision new meanings for what academe could look like.

African American women are only one demographic that has been excluded or marginalized in academia, but their narratives offer an intriguing entry point into the discussion of epistemic violence in academia and the use of spirituality in academia. It is clear from the literature and the data in this dissertation that spirituality empowers Black women. These women, however, should not be set upon pedestals as idols. Anita's declaration, "I may not walk on water, but I don't deserve to drown" resonates here. The use of spirituality among African American women expressed in this study in no way intends to suggests that Black women are the faultless, morally superior others. The systems of oppression at work in society while captured understanding of whiteness, does not always a white person. Additionally, the worldview expressed through African American spirituality is reflected in others who are not members of the African American culture group. This work is not to indicate the "holy ones" among us. It is

to declare that we do not, however, deserve to drown. Drown in oppression, drown in isolation, drown in victimhood. The very fabric of African American spirituality demands that we seek life more abundantly.

Concluding thoughts

I have studied the use of spirituality in the lives of Black women faculty and discovered that spirituality has played a significant role in cultivating and justifying knowledge. Spirituality, not in the sense of religious practices, but in the sense of a shared connectedness and a faith in possibility. African American spirituality proved to be inherently creative, as this marginalized population has had to find ways to overcome historical barriers and to imagine a new reality. This new reality is often one that challenges traditional epistemologies and justified beliefs in higher education. When your way of knowing is rooted in a different cultural experience, such as the women in my study, the knowledge that you are then able to contribute to the world has distinctive characteristics. The perspectives of the women in my study have been expressed through an endarkened feminist epistemology. This theoretical paradigm has allowed me to offer research through and about versions of intellectual thought often unheard in traditional educational research projects. The key component of the epistemology suggested in this study is the centering of spirituality to transform the foundations of academia that were built upon logic and reason, using faith. Faith that reflects a history of envisioning freedom, forging liberty, and expanding pathways to education even when it was unlawful and unpopular to do so. Faith like that of Anna Julia Cooper, Jeanne Noble, and Barbara Jackson who pioneered pathways for Black women to enter academe. Faith like that of womanist theologians Denise L. Williams, Emilie Townes, and Kelly Brown Douglas, who each have decreed the Black woman's perspective as more than the reflections of other people's thoughts. Faith like the women in my study that is necessitated by spiritual compulsion and desires to actualize intellectual freedom in new ways. I ask the reader to consider how spirituality could offer change similar to the ways it allows Black women to transform their experiences in academia. The narratives of Black women faculty are only an entry point for considering how marginalized scholars can contribute to the knowledge production process and the role that spirituality might play in that. This work is a small beginning to the work needed to examine epistemic violence and the range of perspectives pertaining to how various communities might overcome it.

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Appendix A

IRB Consent form

Dear (Participant):

     I am a current doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University. Under the leadership of my advisor, Denise Baszile, I am conducting a qualitative inquiry on the use of African American spirituality among African American college faculty.

     You are invited to participate in a research study of spirituality and its use when navigating the academy. I will ask you to discuss how you define spirituality and how you believe it impacts your experiences as a faculty of color. You will be given a pseudonym in order to protect your identity. The name of your institutional affiliation will also be kept confidential. Your pseudonym will be attached to demographic information concerning your race, position with the university, and spiritual affiliation, which are important to the nature of the study. Your response will not be transcribed using your name, thus your responses cannot be associated with you. Nonetheless, the interviews will be treated as confidential information, conducted and stored in a secure location for the duration of the project, accessed only by myself. Again, in the records, your name will not be associated with your responses. Initial and secondary interviews should take approximately 1-2 hours. Any additional interviews will be for clarifying purposes. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risks caused by scientific inquiry. The benefit of the study, is it will help us understand more about how African American faculty might use their sense of spirituality to navigate the academy and how university officials, faculty, and student affairs practitioners can provide support for this community. This study should also provide a time for critical self-reflection of your personal experiences and the nature of your methods for gaining/sustaining strength in tough situations. Upon completion of this study, the researcher will make the general results available to you. The generalized results will be submitted as part of a doctoral dissertation, presented at professional conferences and/or published in articles describing the results of the research.

Should you have further questions about the study, please contact Kyra Shahid at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 529-3600 or email: humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you in advance for your participation. I am grateful for your assistance and hope that this will be an interesting and beneficial experience for you. Please keep this form for your records.

I agree to participate in the study on spirituality and epistemic violence. I understand my participation is voluntary and that my name will not be associated with my responses. I agree to allow my interview to be audio recorded, with the understanding that recordings are for transcription purposes only and will be destroyed upon completion of the study. By signing below, I also acknowledge that I am 18 years or older.

Participant's signature _____   Date: _____

Interview Protocol

Your participation in this study is appreciated and respected. I assure you that what you share with me will be respected. Our conversations will be transcribed and I will review them with you to check for accuracy throughout our time together. You are invited to participate in the analysis of this project, should you choose to do so.

1. **Background Questions:**
    a. Why did you choose to work in academia?
    b. Prior to your current assignment, in what ways were you active in your field and where?
    c. As a student, did you ever believe that the curricula in your courses misrepresented, distorted, or neglected the voices of people like you?
    d. Describe some of your early academic perceptions and whether or not they have changed today.
    e. If so, how has that curricula impacted your work?
2. **Current Position and Successes**
    a. What is your current assignment and how long have you worked in this capacity?
    b. What has been your experience as a professor? (As an administrator?)
    c. Please describe a typical day of work.
3. **Research Interests**
    a. What are your research interests?
    b. Have you met resistance to your research agenda? Please describe.
    c. Describe your experiences with receiving funding from your department or affiliated organizations for your research.
    d. Would you describe your academic work as activism? Why or why not?
    e. Do you believe your colleagues would describe your work as activism?
    f. How successful in your opinion, have you been in maintaining and carrying out your work in this area?
    g. Why do you believe you have been successful, or not successful?
    h. What do you believe could make your work more successful?
4. **Spirituality**
    a. How would you define spirituality?
    b. Is your spirituality significant to the work you do?
    c. If so, where do you draw your strongest sense of spirituality? If not, what would you say is most significant for you to carry out your work in academia?
    d. Do you tell your colleagues and students about your beliefs about spirituality? Why or why not?
5. **Challenges**
    a. Describe some of the most challenging situations you face as a Black woman scholar.
    b. Do you believe the quality of your work has ever been questioned based on your race and/or gender? If so, how did you respond to these circumstances?

6. **Racism**
    a. Have you experienced any situation in your field that caused you to believe that your way of knowing was illegitimate, problematic or inferior? If so, how did you respond?
    b. Describe ways that you have been able to counter, overcome, cope with, or resist these challenges.
7. **Addressing Challenges**
    a. What in your opinion, outweighs the challenges you have described?
    b. How fulfilling has your work in academia been and why?
    c. How might you become happier, healthier, and more resilient?
    d. What gives you strength to continue in your work?
    e. What would you like your legacy to be?
8. Are there things you would like to share that I have not asked that might help me to understand your experiences in academia?

<div align="center">**Appendix C**</div>

Member checking

Greetings,

Thank you for participating in my dissertation study on African American women in academia. I have completed the full transcription from our interview and have attached a portion of this transcription for your review. Please review the transcription and make any necessary changes. If changes are made, I ask that you track those changes using the Microsoft Word track changes function. On the Word dashboard, under the review tab, you can find the track changes command. If you do not use this function, I ask that you use red font to signify your change, and return the file to me via email.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding this transcription via email at shahidks@miamioh.edu or by phone @ XXX-XXX-XXXX. Thank you, again, for your participation in this study.

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