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To the University Council:

The Dissertation Committee for Nakeisha Owens certifies that this is the final approved version of the following electronic dissertation: "The Power Within: The Influence of Spirituality On African-American Female Adult Learners."

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THE POWER WITHIN:  
THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALITY  
ON  
AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE ADULT LEARNERS

by

Nakeisha Owens

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Major: Higher and Adult Education

The University of Memphis

August, 2010

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## ABSTRACT

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This interpretive, qualitative study investigated the influence of spirituality in the lives of six African American female adult learners. The following questions guided the research study: 1) What role has spirituality played in the pursuit of educational goals of African American female adult learners? and 2) What influence has spirituality had on the development of these adult learners? An examination of the influence of spirituality in the areas of motivation, barriers, and adult development among college students framed the scholarly review of existing literature.

The data collection methods included interviews, timeline and song lyric elicitations, and field notes. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. An inductive analysis was used to analyze the transcripts for codes, categories and themes. A variation of an arts-based approach, “found lyrics”, was also utilized to further re-present the data. Memoing, member checks, and peer debriefing were utilized during analysis to increase credibility and trustworthiness.

The descriptions commonly accepted from existing literature present spirituality as a mechanism for meaning-making, a relation to a higher power, and an interconnectedness to all things. The findings were organized based on findings relative to each research question. Each participant held a Christian worldview. The four major themes, relative to the research first question, identified spirituality as: 1) a source of motivation/inspiration; 2) a source of guidance; 3) a source of strength; and 4) a source of connection. The idea that spirituality is “the essence of who they are” was also a prominent theme offering

insight into three key findings relative to the second research question. These key findings revealed: 1) Maternal influences significantly played a role in early experiences with spirituality and education; 2) Another category of motivator exists for the participants beyond the existing dichotomous internal and external categories; and 3) There was a movement beyond meaning-making into a greater personal awareness. Each theme and key finding is presented and discussed in detail.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step” (Lao Tzu, n.d.). Mary, (pseudonym), may not have known the author of that quote, but it was clear that the culmination of her 47 year journey was getting closer with each step across the graduation stage. After a hiatus from education, Mary, a 62-year-old mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, obtained her General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.) and went on to enroll in a local technical college. Mary believes spirituality was a key factor motivating her to continue her education. Mary is one of many non-traditional adult learners that now permeate colleges and universities across the United States.

#### Spirituality in Higher Education

Spirituality has traditionally been given little attention in mainstream academic adult education (Tisdell, 2000). Love (2001) states that this may be due to the long held adherence to the “separation of church and state” stipulated by the United States Constitution. Love further states that “the U.S. Constitution states that we may not favor one religion over another—not that we must totally erase all notions of spiritual development from public life and the academy” (p.16). Love concludes that “because there is an increased interest in students’ spiritual development and that spiritual development is important for college students, we need to bring spirituality into education, not keep it separate and banished to small sectors of campus” (p.16).

The concept of spirituality is beginning to be understood. However, our understanding of how it shapes college students and adult learners is limited. Although a

definition of spirituality is offered for the sake of clarity, this study did not seek to primarily define spirituality. Instead, the researcher sought to examine the role of spirituality as a part of the human experience of six African American female adult learners.

Taylor (1996) states that there is an unusual and significant outpouring of deep human longing, expressed in what he describes as a “wild” explosion of spirituality. Spirituality is a concept that is difficult to describe to others, but it is a major guiding principle in our lives. It is the source from where we often derive meaning, and it informs many of our major life choices (Lauzon, 2001; Tisdell, 2003). Love and Talbot (1999) further maintain that spirituality is a process that involves the pursuit for discovering direction, meaning, and purpose in one’s life. One of the key questions for adult learners is how spirituality can best be brought to bear on the learning process (English, 2001).

There is a growing interest in the role of spirituality in higher education and how it shapes the American college student (Allen & Kellom, 2001; Astin, 2003; Tisdell, 2003).

Astin’s (2003) study of college students concluded that:

...students coming to campuses today are a diverse group ethnically, socio-economically, religiously and politically. While they have high ambitions and aspirations for educational and occupational success, and college is the means by which they believe they can realize their goals, they are also actively dealing with existential questions. They are searching for deeper meaning in their lives, looking for ways to cultivate their inner selves, seeking to be compassionate and charitable, and determining what they think and feel about many issues confronting their society and the global community. (p.22)

There are only a few empirical studies, however, that have examined the effect spirituality has on African American students who are attending college (Herndon, 2003; Hunt & Hunt, 2001).

Religion, spirituality, and faith are often used interchangeably. Taylor, Chatters, and Levin (2004) define religion as “an organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals designed to facilitate closeness to God, whereas spirituality is seen as a personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, meaning and relationship to the sacred” (p. 102). Faith is “a person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives” (Fowler, 1981, p.4). Though religion, faith, and spirituality are often used interchangeably by some, spirituality was the focus of this study.

Recent research on spirituality by Mayhew (2004) noted that the higher education community recognizes a need for understanding the role spirituality plays in the development of college students in America, but recognized that few empirical studies have been conducted that reflect that interest. Similarly, few empirical studies have focused on the role of spirituality in the development of adult learners.

The purpose of Mayhew’s (2004) study of spirituality was to “describe the essence of spirituality as experienced by eight students representing eight worldviews” (p. 650). Participants in Mayhew’s study consisted of students from an evangelical Christian, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Agnostic, and Atheist world view. Participants described spirituality as “an internal and external process that serves as a mechanism through which humans make meaning of the world around them. The expression of this meaning-making may include reading, acting, working and learning” (p. 664).

The study of spirituality has seeped into higher education at two levels: systemic and individual. Duerr, Zajonc, and Dana (2003) studied academic programs and other initiatives in universities that took a systemic approach to incorporate transformative and spiritual elements of learning to determine how prevalent they are in higher education. The researchers were particularly interested in how spirituality and transformative learning can develop ethical and moral character in students. While Duerr et al.'s study of spirituality focused on a systemic look at spirituality in higher education, the focus of the present study was guided by examining the influence of spirituality on the individual learner. Studies that focus on the individual may examine learning, motivations and other areas.

Dantley (2003) describes spirituality as the nexus of inspiration, motivation, and meaning-making in our lives. It constructs for us our notions of calling, mission, or purpose. It is, perhaps, this notion of inspiration, motivation and meaning-making that most informs our understanding of the African American women who participated in this study. This meaning-making may be expressed by returning to school.

There has been a significant increase in the number of reentry women pursuing higher and continuing education. This may be due to more adults in the population, social change or technological advances (Cross, 1981; Isaac, Guy, & Valentine, 2001). Adult female learners now comprise a large percentage of the undergraduate and graduate population (Kasworm, 1990). About 43% of that population enrolled in postsecondary education between 1999-2000 were 24 years or older. More than half, approximately 58% were women. Of those 58%, 13% were African American, 11% Hispanic, and 4%

Asian. African American women comprise the largest number of women of color that are reentering college (Berker & Horn, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1998).

Many investigations have highlighted spirituality as a major component of African American women's identity, pervading every aspect of their daily lives and experiences (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2004; Frame, Williams, & Green, 1999; Thomas, 2001).

African Americans tend to have a very strong connection to religion (Cone, 1990) and typically acknowledge the value of religion, its liberating power, the reliance on a higher power, and the practical application of spiritual principles in life (McAdoo, 1993).

However, the role of spirituality on motivating adults to return to school was not explored in these investigations.

Spirituality is embodied in the teaching and learning process (English, 2000). Lauzon (2001) concludes that students do not check their biographies at the door. This implies that students bring their personal histories, stories and experiences into the classroom when they walk through the door. Similarly, Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy further supports the idea that students bring their experiences to the class. The nature of those experiences influences how they behave in the classroom, how they relate to others, and the nature of the learning space that is created.

Duerr et al. (2003) suggest that "education is at an important juncture in its development, one in which the contemplative and spiritual can be integrated into learning and personal transformation" (p. 178). Their study concluded learning should involve the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of the human existence. As students continue to seek ways to cultivate their inner selves, educators of adult learners could contribute greatly to that process.

Fenwick (2001) proposes that individual learners control the extent to which their spirituality is involved in any interaction, and others might hold that spirit is an undeniable dimension of all human experiences, including adult learning and development. Increasingly, educators subscribe to the latter line of thought (Dirkx, 2001; Palmer, 1993; Tisdell, 2003).

Educators who espouse the integrated approach to adult development are interested in promoting students' growth intellectually, physically, emotionally, aesthetically, and spiritually (Miller, 1999). An integrated approach, according to Baumgartner (2001), is a "lens" through which adult development can be viewed that focuses on the interconnection between mind, body, spirit and sociocultural factors and how they affect development. Tisdell (2003) recognizes that it is necessary that educators understand that spirituality is an aspect of the adult learner's experience and meaning construction.

Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) believe that learners are more likely to have transformative experiences if they are engaged on three levels of their individual being: the cognitive, the affective, and the symbolic or spiritual. Dirkx (2001) observes that when learners are encouraged to examine their images, thoughts, feelings and actions, they are engaging in soul work and assisting with their own personal transformation.

Tisdell (2003) proposes that spirituality is always present in the learning environment. Subscribing to this line of thought would then call upon the educators and learners alike to accommodate and incorporate spirituality into the learning environment. Spirituality should be welcomed as one would welcome a new student into the classroom rather than overlooking the elephant (spirituality) in the room and treat it as an outsider. Once spirituality is embraced, what is its role in the learning and development process? What

is its function in the lives of the learner and educator alike? The discussion is growing and the research base is widening, but there is still ground to be explored.

#### Statement of the Problem

Though interest in the influence of spirituality on the development of college students is growing, there are only a few studies that have examined the effects of spirituality on African American college students (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008). Even less attention has been given to spirituality's influence on African American women's development. This study sought to add to the growing discussion on the role of spirituality in the development of college students, specifically African American female adult learners.

#### Significance of the Study

Understanding the influence of spirituality on the theories of motivation/inspiration, barriers, and adult development allows educators to access a deeper understanding of what is happening in the classroom or in specific relationships within the classroom. This understanding better prepares them to deal with ongoing dynamics of learning such as varied student populations and the need to move beyond giving knowledge to developing students. It also prepares them to integrate spirituality into the learning process through teaching practices and classroom environments that are more learner-centered.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of spirituality in the lives of six African American female adult learners. The following questions guided the research: 1) What role has spirituality played in the pursuit of educational goals of

African American female adult learners? and 2) What influence has spirituality had on the development of these adult learners?

### Definitions

*Spirituality*, for the purposes of this study, refers to a process that involves the pursuit for discovering direction, meaning, and purpose in one's life through a connection to a higher power (Love & Talbot, 1999).

*Motivation*, for the purposes of this study, is the desire to achieve a goal that has value for the individual and which helps fulfill their needs for immediate achievement and a sense of moving toward larger goals (Madden, 1997).

*Inspiration* is defined as a divine influence or action on a person believed to move the intellect or emotions (Weber, 2002).

*Elicitations* refer to the strategies of data collection used in qualitative research to solicit information that draws out or brings forth the experiences of the participants

*Worldview* refers to a set of beliefs and assumptions that are foundational to an individual's basic concepts about reality (Wade, 2004).

*Adult Development* refers to a set of stages or processes that humans progress through that include biological, cognitive and emotional aspects

*Reentry women* and the term non-traditional women are used interchangeably in this study. Both terms refer to women who return to school to pursue their educational goals after a hiatus from either high school or undergraduate programs.

*Integrated approach* to adult learning is a "lens" that adult development can be viewed through that focuses on the interconnection between mind, body, spirit and sociocultural factors and how they affect development (Baumgartner, 2001).

*Barriers* involve events or circumstances that interrupt the educational experiences that can be categorized as situational, dispositional or institutional (Cross, 1981).

*Meaning-making* is the process of making sense out of the activities of life, seeking patterns, order, coherence, and relation between and among the disparate elements of human living. It is the process of discovering and creating connections among experiences and events (Fowler, 1981, p.358).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Astin (2002) states that spirituality has to do with the values people hold and the sense of who they are. It is also associated with the meaning and purpose people seek in work and life. Spirituality is the sense of connectedness to others and the world. Spirituality is just one of many factors influencing adult learners in education. The recent interest in the role of spirituality in the educational process expands on the examination of the multiple ways in which people construct knowledge (Tisdell, 2003). Dirkx (2001) further supports this perspective when he stated that,

given that spirit is always present in the learning environment, attending to spirituality and its relationship to culture does not necessarily mean discussing spirituality directly, and it certainly is not about pushing a specific religious agenda. It can simply mean creating an environment and a space where people can bring their whole selves into the learning environment and acknowledge the powerful ways they create meaning through their cultural, symbolic, and spiritual experience, as well as through the cognitive. (p. 42)

This review of literature sought to explore the role of spirituality on factors of adult learning that include motivation/inspiration, barriers, and adult development.

#### Motivation/Inspiration

Tisdell (2003) notes that many adults indicate that spirituality is a major organizing principle that guides their life choices and the kinds of work that they see as their vocation. In Tisdell's (2000) research, 16 multicultural female adult educators cited spirituality as affecting their way of life, thinking, and being in the world.

A growing body of literature suggests that spirituality may serve as motivation/inspiration to participate in education. Isaac et al. (2001) determined that factors such as spiritual and religious development, service to others, and support in facing personal challenges served as motivations for adults participating in education. Preliminary findings suggest that spirituality can motivate African American women to continue their educational goals.

Spirituality is receiving more attention in the literature on adult learning (Dirkx, 1997, 2001; English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell, 1999, 2000, 2003; & Tisdell & Tolliver; 2001). Aiken, Cervero, and Johnson-Bailey (2001) studied 10 African American women who completed Registered Nursing (RN) programs. The researchers did not indicate the faith of the participants, but did indicate that the participants had a “profession of faith” (p.311). Findings indicate that intrapersonal factors encouraged participation. These intrapersonal factors were defined as personal characteristics and beliefs that motivated the women, which included spirituality and a belief in God. Most women in the study spoke of God or a spiritual journey while they continued through their program. The women in the study stated that God played a motivating force in their educational experiences. Even more strongly, the women identified a belief in God as the factor that most strongly encouraged their participation.

Some researchers have identified specific factors related to adults’ participation in education such as involvement with a formal organization which encouraged adult participation (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Isaac et al., 2001; Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990). However, the research reviewed by this researcher strongly supports that a

combination of internal and external motivators factor heavily in influencing participation in education (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998).

### *Internal Motivators*

Internal motivators can include desire for a sense of purpose and meaning making, increased self-esteem and self-concept, and spiritual growth. Adult learners participate in education for numerous reasons including spirituality.

Boshier (1980) developed the Boshier Congruence Model of Educational Participation and Dropout and more recently the Psychometric Properties of the alternative form of the Education Participation Scale (Boshier, 1991) to examine motivations of adults to participate in education. Race and gender were not factored into the model or the Education Participation Scale (EPS). Boshier suggests that both participation and dropout stem from an interaction of internal psychological variables (either growth-motivated or deficiency-motivated) and external environmental variables. Therefore, participation and dropout can be viewed as a function of the relationship between the participant's self-concept, a match between student and other students, instructor, educational processes, and the environment, including job responsibilities, home responsibilities, and so forth. For some, spirituality may be considered as one of these psychological variables.

Wickett (1980) found that adults spend more than 50% of their time learning for spiritual growth. Wickett studied 50 people ages 35-55 that took part in an interview. The gender and religion of the participants were not reported. Participants were from three churches, an educational agency and respondents from a newspaper advertisement. Sixty-six percent of the respondents in the study indicated that much of their learning

efforts were related to their spiritual growth. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that all of their learning was related to their spiritual growth.

Isaac et al.'s (2001) study surveyed 330 male and female members of three African American churches to examine motivations for learning among African American adults. Their study supports that spiritual growth is a significant aspect of motivation to learn among adults. African American males, as well as females, have reported spirituality as a motivating factor. In a study of 13 African American males, Herndon's (2003) participants reported that spirituality provided a sense of purpose and served as a motivation to return to school.

#### *External Motivators*

External motivators can be more easily identified than internal motivators. External motivators can include job demands, life changing events, and sources of support. A common impetus for adult women returning to school is a personal, life-changing event. Changes such as empty nest syndrome, divorce, death of a spouse, loss of a job, desire for greater economic security, career limitations due to lack of education and other vocational factors were all cited as important sources of motivation for adult women returning to higher education (Johnson, Schwartz, & Bower, 2000; Mohny & Anderson, 1988). Coker (2003) suggests that women's motivations are based on myriad reasons that include intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Women view continuing their education as a good way to achieve greater economic security and a better standard of living for themselves and their children. A strong support system may be needed to achieve this better standard of living.

In the higher education setting, recent research seems to indicate that spirituality serves as a source of guidance, motivation, strength and support. Hall and Donaldson's (1997) study examined five African American and eight Euro American women that reported support from family, church groups and others were cited as motivational factors affecting their participation in education.

Spirituality has been found to serve as a major organizing principle and mechanism for meaning-making in the lives of adult learners (Mayhew, 2004; Tisdell, 2000, 2003). It has also been found to motivate adult learners to participate in education. For example, some studies indicate that among both Euro American and African American, male and female adult learners, a combination of internal and external motivators exist (Boshier, 1980, 1991; Coker, 2003; Johnson et al., 2000; Knowles, 1980; Mohny & Anderson, 1988). Spirituality is also reported as a major factor influencing participation in education among African American males and females in the literature reviewed (Aiken et al., 2001; Herndon, 2003; Isaac et al., 2001).

### Barriers to Participation

Knowledge of barriers to participation is as important as motivations to participation (Isaac & Rowland, 2002). Barriers have been commonly referenced and categorized into three groups: situational, institutional, and dispositional (Cross, 1981). Situational barriers arise from one's situation at a given time. Examples include a lack of time, conflicting home and job responsibilities, lack of child care, lack of money, and lack of transportation. Institutional barriers are practices and procedures that exclude or discourage adults from participating in activities. Examples include inconvenient schedules or locations of programs, limited course offerings, and emphasis on full-time

study in many institutions. Dispositional barriers are related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner. Examples include feeling “too old” to learn, lack of confidence because of poor previous educational achievements and simply being tired of schools and classrooms (Cross, 1981). Cross did not attribute these barriers to any particular race, gender or socioeconomic status.

Many women have found that the responsibilities of life and other barriers have interrupted their academic pursuits (Coker, 2003). Hall and Donaldson (1997) studied the reasons that five African American and eight Euro American women, ages 18-36, without high school diplomas from a rural Midwestern town chose not to participate in education. The researchers did not report the faith of the participants. Factors such as parent’s education, early pregnancies, and economic status were cited as barriers. Other barriers such as self-esteem and self-confidence were cited as contributing factors to lack of participation. Johnson-Bailey’s study (1998) examined the narratives of eight reentry African American women in higher education to determine the common experiences that shaped their academic lives. The women, ages 34 to 54, did not reference their faith or spirituality, but did report experiencing some of the situational and psychological barriers associated with reentry women such as self-doubt about performance and scheduling conflicts.

### Overcoming Barriers

Spirituality has been cited as a source of strength in overcoming some barriers encountered by adults returning to school. It was not reported as having much influence on institutional barriers. Kelley, Knafl, and Melkus (2002) concluded that spirituality provides African Americans with guidance, hope, solace and protection, and is a

powerful tool that can assist them in navigating through life's challenges such as death of a loved one. Similarly, Taylor, Thornton, and Chatters (1988) reported that African American adults felt that church sustained them by helping them overcome challenges. The church provided a connection to God and other believers that held a similar worldview and a venue to freely express their faith. Spirituality has been identified by male and female adult learners as a source of support in overcoming these barriers. In Herndon's (2003) study of expressions of spirituality among 13 African American college males, findings suggest that spirituality enhances persistence in educational settings by serving as a coping mechanism. Spirituality and church-based affiliations serve as one source of strength that African American women relied on when faced with the challenges of participating in post-secondary education (Coker, 2003). Coker (2003), in her study of the experiences of 10 African American women in higher education, discovered three main themes: motivations, challenges and sources of strength. Spirituality was reported as a source of strength for the participants.

The studies reviewed indicate spirituality has been identified as a source of support in overcoming barriers for adult learners (Kelley et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 1988). Spirituality seems to be a good tool for overcoming situational barriers such as lack of money and conflict with roles and responsibilities and dispositional barriers such as poor self-esteem, but may not be as influential in overcoming institutional barriers. This seems to be consistent in the reporting of various types of barriers that discourage diverse adult learners (Cross, 1981; Hall & Donaldson, 1997; Johnson-Bailey, 1998) from participating in education. Spirituality also served a source of strength and support for African American males and females (Coker, 2003; Herndon; 2003).

## Adult Development

"It is hard to imagine the field of adult education apart from the literature on adult development; many aspects of our thinking about adult learners and the learning process are shaped by our knowledge of how adults change and develop across the lifespan" (Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 1). Adult learning can be facilitated through building relationships and embracing and integrating spirituality in the educational setting (Cross, 1981). Theories of andragogy, generativity, faith development, transformative learning, and spiritual and emotional intelligence were also particularly relevant to the study. Each of these topics will be discussed further in the following sections.

### *Integrating Spirituality*

Tisdell (2003) suggests spirituality has three main themes: 1) development of self-awareness; 2) a sense of interconnectedness to all things; and 3) a relationship to a higher power or purpose. Mayhew's (2004) findings suggest that spirituality helps human beings make sense of themselves by understanding their connection or relation to others. Spirituality manifests the need for connectedness either internally through reflection and prayer or externally through reading, working and learning. Spirituality can be cultivated in the learning environment. This is best facilitated through an integrated approach.

Baumgartner (2001) discussed four models of adult development: biological, psychological, sociocultural, and integrative. The integrative model examines how the biological, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of adult development intersect and influence each other, but models that consider all three perspectives are rare. Integrative models seem to hold the most promise for understanding adult development. An

integrated approach to adult development recognizes the interconnection between mind, body, sociocultural factors and the spirit.

Promoting spiritual development in the learner is a part of an integrated approach to development (Dirkx, 1997; Palmer, 1999; & Tisdell, 1999). The integrated model promotes learner's' growth intellectually, physically, emotionally, aesthetically, and spiritually (Miller, 1999).

### *Andragogy*

Among several well known theories of adult learning is Knowles' (1980) model of andragogy. Andragogy is a concept of adult learning introduced by Knowles. Andragogy defined is the art and science of helping adults learn as opposed to pedagogy which is focused on children. Andragogy is based on five assumptions of adult learning. Two components of andragogy are related to this study: 1) Human beings enter into a learning situation with a varied background of experience; and 2) Human beings are motivated by both external and internal factors, but the latter are often the more potent. Adult learners enter the academic setting complete with a large amount of experience that cannot be separated from who they are as people. The adult learner is shaped by the sum of his/her experiences. As discussed earlier, adults are motivated by both external and internal factors including spirituality. Although Knowles did not include it, recent research (Coker, 2003; Mayhew, 2004) suggests spirituality may be added to the list of internal motivations. These two components of andragogy further support the argument for embracing, integrating and examining spirituality in the adult learning process. Another theory of development that offers insight into adult learners is Erikson's stages of development.

### *Erikson's Generativity vs. Stagnation Stage*

Erikson's (1963) theory consists of eight stages. The stage that relates most closely to the non-traditional student is that of Middle Adulthood and generally includes ages 35-65. It is characterized by conflicts between Generativity vs. Stagnation. Erikson observed that during this stage, adults tend to be concerned about meaningful work and issues surrounding family. One task during this stage is to transfer and perpetuate values. During this stage, adults tend to desire to offer something that will better society, which Erikson termed Generativity. Adults in this phase may fear inactivity and meaninglessness. If an adult does not successfully move beyond this phase, they may become stagnant and thus remain in stagnation.

During the generativity stage, children may leave home, relationships and goals may change. There may be a struggle to find new meanings and purposes. Women are motivated to engage in educational activities when there is a role, goal or major life change. Generativity can be characterized by an openness to self-growth. This self-growth may manifest itself in new learning experiences such as returning to school. Spirituality may play a key role in the generativity stage as adults seek new meaning for life and a way to connect and offer something to the next generation.

Dillon, Wink, and Fey (2003) conducted a quantitative study utilizing a sample of 183 participants (53% women and 47% men) from an existing study conducted by the Institute of Human Development at the University of California, Berkeley. All but six were Euro American. The study examined the relationships between religiosity, spirituality, and generativity. Dillon et al. (2003) suggests that some psychological

theories link spiritual growth to higher levels of cognitive development and/or self-actualization.

Both Erickson (1963) and Sinnott (1994) view spirituality as interwoven in the generativity stage of development. Adult development theories emphasize the relation between spirituality and a sense of human connectedness; integration of the self, and openness to new experiences.

### Stages of Faith

The terms faith and spirituality are utilized interchangeably in existing literature. Love (2002) described faith as a,

process of meaning-making, which is the process of making sense out of the activities of life, seeking patterns, order, coherence, and relation between and among the disparate elements of human living. It is the process of discovering and creating connections among experiences and events. Faith is differentiated from traditional cognitive development theories because it is the activity of seeking and composing meaning involving the most comprehensive dimensions of the human experience. That is, faith is trying to make sense of the "big picture," trying to find an overall sense of meaning and purpose in one's life. (p.358)

One well known theorist whose works reflect this notion of interchangeability is Fowler (1981). Fowler developed a stage theory of faith development based on a study of 359 adults of various ages. Fowler describes the concept of spirituality as "how to put our lives together and what will make life worth living" (p. 5). There is a clear commonality between faith and spirituality through their emphasis on the theme of meaning-making. Fowler uses the word "faith" to describe this experience and states that it is more personal than religion and not always religious in its content or context (p. 10). Fowler states that,

Faith is a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that

make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him- or herself in relation to others against a shared background of meaning or purpose. (p.4)

According to Fowler, "faith" is fundamental in the quest for transcendence.

Fowler (1981) further suggests that just as humans' cognitive development occurs in stages, people's notions of faith or spirituality develops in stages as well. He concludes that the function of meaning-making matures and changes from stage to stage in the direction of greater complexity. Fowler bases his stages of spiritual development on developmental theories of Erikson, Kohlberg and Piaget. However, he differs with them due to "their restrictive understanding of the role of imagination in knowing, their neglect of symbolic processes generally and the related lack of attention to unconscious structuring processes other than those constituting reasoning" (p. 103). Fowler's theory offers insight into how people construct knowledge through imagery and symbolism. One limitation which may limit the study's usefulness, is that his sample included predominantly Euro American, Christian participants.

Through his examination of imagery and symbolism and his reliance on existing theories of development, Fowler posits six stages of faith; they are intuitive-projective; mythical-literal; synthetical-conventional; individuative-reflective, conjunctive, universalizing.

In the first three stages of faith development, individuals rely on some authority outside themselves for spiritual beliefs. Young children, during the first stage of faith (intuitive-projective), follow the beliefs of their parents. They tend to imagine or fantasize angels or other religious figures in stories as characters in fairy tales.

In the second stage of faith (mythical-literal), children tend to respond to religious stories and rituals literally, rather than symbolically. As individuals move through adolescence to young adulthood, their beliefs continue to be based on authority focused outside themselves.

In Fowler's (1981) third stage, syncretical-conventional stage, a person's experience of the world extends to many spheres, family, school or work, peers, street society and media, and perhaps religion. Faith at this stage must synthesize values and information; it must provide a basis for identity and outlook (p.172). In this stage, meanings are not examined they are just accepted as they are handed down.

Fowler's (1981) fourth stage, individualistic-reflective, describes the faith of those who have thought a great deal about their religion and questioned its concepts. Those whose spirituality fits into this stage have demythologized what they have learned and have reinterpreted the traditional meanings of religious teachings which have been given to them. They experience a discord between the group of their religion of origin and their individual selves. They are more committed to a relative reality.

Conjunctive faith, Fowler's (1981) fifth stage, describes the faith of those who are capable of dialogue and who recognize realities other than their own. They think of knowing as an interactive-dialogic process. Those who practice this level of faith, see reality as the here and now. Faith is always open to reexamination. Individuals who move to the sixth and last stage of faith, universalizing, are rare. As older adults, they begin to search for universal values, such as unconditional love and justice. Self-preservation becomes irrelevant. Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi are examples of people who exhibit this form of spiritual development.

Fowler's (1981) Conjunctive stage is most relevant to the participants in this study. In the conjunctive stage, the conscious ego must develop an awareness of the power and influence of aspects of the unconscious on reactions and behavior. This transition coincides with a realization of the power and reality of death, the feelings of growing and looking older, children reaching teenage or adult years, and an awareness that there are aspects of identity that we will not be able to change. Many non-traditional women share experiences similar to those reported to be in this stage of faith development. Fowler suggests that the transition between phases is not linear. It is a dynamic process that only offers insight into the person's level of faith development at the time.

Others like Parks (2000) have built on Fowler's (1981) works by examining spiritual development in specific groups. Parks examined spiritual development in young adults. Her work was also heavily grounded in student development theory. She built on Fowler's work by proposing another stage of faith development between Fowler's Adolescent and Adult stage, which she called "Young Adult." This stage focused on traditional-aged college students and resulted in a four stage model of adult development as opposed to the three stages related to adulthood of Fowler's theory. Parks' stages include: 1) Adolescent or Conventional Faith; 2) Young Adult Faith; 3) Tested Adult Faith; and 4) Mature Adult Faith.

Parks (2000) model recognized that people can progress from stage to stage in a non-sequential manner depending upon the circumstances or life events of the moment. Each stage of the model is named according to the period of time it happened in life. The first stage is adolescent/conventional stage, which usually happens in adolescence. People in stage one are bound by authority and conventional. However, they begin to separate

themselves from the authority when they find conflicts in authorities or when the authority fails. Their relationships with authority also change as their knowledge of authority changes. Their sense of belonging also changes from a conventional community to a more ambiguous community.

The second stage usually happens in young adulthood. People in this stage believe in relativism, but the relativism has not been tested. They understand that truth is relative and contextual. They may also begin to reject authority and previously held constructions of truth. They begin to build up an inner-dependent relationship in which they recognize the authority of their own voice. They may reject parts of their current community and recognize that they are able to explore other communities.

The third stage happens when a commitment into relativism is made. People in this stage are confident with their inner authority and they spontaneously select the group to join. They have taken responsibility for their own knowing. They can articulate their beliefs and the meanings behind them. Their ultimate goal is to make meaning of the world. In this stage, the individual begins to view him-or herself as an authority figure. This empowerment allows them to select their own communities out of choice rather than accept communities that were forced upon them or that were accepted out to desperation to belong. Because of the support from their self-selected community, they are free to continue to build upon their thought processes and development.

The last stage differs for each person and some people never achieve this stage. This stage is typically for people who are well into middle age. People in this stage recognize the relativism of knowledge, but they also recognize that there is a truth beyond the relativism. They respect themselves as authority figures but still recognize that others

hold authority as well. A person's trust now resides neither in the assumed authority of others, nor in the authority of the inner self. They move from inner-dependence to inter-dependence. They begin to recognize and value this interdependence or connectedness and realize its value in their daily lives. They no longer belong to a specific community but to the larger community of human beings.

Parks' (2000) Tested Adult and Mature Adult stages are most relevant to the participants in this study. Individuals who reach the Tested Adult stage may be undergraduates, but are more likely to be postgraduates, graduate students, or beyond. Parks argued that a Mature Adult faith rarely is evident before midlife. The movement toward a mature adult faith is one of greater connection to, interaction with, and belonging to the broader world. It involves a recognition of one's interdependence and interconnectedness with communities and individuals beyond one's perceptual scope.

Parks (2000) states that "the spiritual quest is integral to the developmental process; it is a common process that generations must have in today's world" (p.198). She described spirituality as a personal search for meaning, transcendence, wholeness, purpose, and "apprehension of spirit (or Spirit) as the animating essence at the core of life" (p. 16). Parks argued that spiritual or faith development is human's way of understanding the world around them. Humans are unable to grow, develop and transform without meaning-making.

### Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is about making changes through transforming perspectives or meaning. Making sense of these changes frequently impacts development (Dirkx, 1997). The role of transformative learning in adult development is an area that has

received a great deal of attention (Baumgartner, 2001; Daloz, 1999; Mezirow, 1978, 1997). Transformative learning is the process of moving beyond merely obtaining factual knowledge to becoming changed by the knowledge gained from meaningful experiences. Transformative learning also involves questioning beliefs, values and assumptions, and exploring other viewpoints.

Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning posits that individuals can be transformed through critical reflection. There are ten phases of transformation. The impetus, many times, for this change is a "disorienting dilemma". This disorienting dilemma may be similar to the events that precipitate transactions in Parks' (2000) model and in Fowler's (1981) model. A "disorienting dilemma" is a situation that occurs that challenges previously held beliefs or assumptions. After being faced with a disorienting dilemma in Phase 1, the learner steps through the remaining phases reflecting on his/her own experiences. In Phase 2, the learner experiences self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame. Phase 3, the learner experiences a critical assessment of assumption. Phase 4, the learner recognizes that their discontent and process of transformation is shared and that others have negotiated a similar change. Phase 5, the learner explores options for new roles, relationships, and actions. Phase 6, the learner plans a course of action. Phase 7, the learner acquires the knowledge and skills needed for implementing new plans. In Phase 8, the learner provisionally will try out new roles. Phase 9, the learner builds competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships. In the final phase, the learner reintegrates new assumptions into their life on the basis of conditions dictated by their new perspective. Upon completion of the 10 phases, the learners will

have transformed their own beliefs, assumptions and experiences into a new and meaningful perspective.

Daloz (1999) views education as a transformative process, suggesting it is a way that adults make meaning from their lives. Findings, from the pilot study for the present study, support the idea of education as a transformative process. Two of the participants reported a transformation in their self-esteem and their ability to learn after returning to school. Mary, the 62-year-old grandmother reported that spirituality helped her focus on her reading and increased her understanding.

Recognizing spirituality in the learning process can provide another avenue for adult learners to continue to negotiate meaning throughout their educational experience. In a study by Wade (2004), 10 women (9 Euro American and 1 Hispanic) between the ages of 35-63, who returned to post-secondary education following an interruption, cited a Christian worldview as playing a major role in their development and matriculation through the program. The study utilized a qualitative methodology to analyze the process of transformation undergone by female reentry students. Wade concluded that for women, emotional and spiritual development was one context in which transformation occurred.

### Building Relationships

Relationships are central to adult learning. The works of several researchers (Mayhew, 2004; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Ross-Gordon, 1999; Tisdell, 2003; Wickett, 2000) explain the role of relationships in development. Relational models of development suggest that the centrality of relationships is an important factor in development. Relational models are primarily based on studies of women. The idea of

interconnectedness is tied to how women develop their sense of being connected to others (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Ross-Gordon (1999) that a sense of connectedness with others is necessary for development to occur (p.32). Inerconnectedness is also a reoccurring theme in the existing literature on spirituality. Existing literature suggests that this model best fits women, primarily Euro American women.

Wickett (2000) suggests that “adult educators who facilitate learning often work in relationships that have the potential for spiritual growth and development (p. 39). Astin (2002) states that higher education institutions have done well in developing the external aspects but not in developing the internal aspects—the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, spirituality and self-understanding (p.1). He further proposes that self understanding is a key component in an individual’s capacity to understand others such as spouses, partners, parents, children, friends, coworkers (p.2). Wickett (2000) states, “Adult educators need to create a space for the learner that fosters learning and spiritual growth” (p.47).

### Emotional and Spiritual Intelligence

Spiritual growth can be fostered through an emphasis on increased personal awareness and an understanding of emotional and spiritual intelligence. Dirkx (2006) suggests that developing personal awareness “involves cognitive, affective, somatic and spiritual processes” (p.19).

#### *Emotional Intelligence*

Gardner (1983), in his work on intelligences, proposed the existence of multiple intelligences beyond the traditional aspects identified by intelligence quotients (IQ’s). Gardner suggested that there are several intelligences that include linguistic, logical and

mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist. Gardner (1999) later considered the evidence for a existential intelligence that included the emotional and the spiritual. Goleman (1995) popularized the idea of Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Goleman (1995) defines emotional intelligence as how well a person senses and handles his/her emotions and the emotions of others we sense and handle our emotions and those of others. It further impacts how lives and relationships are managed (p.144).

Goleman (1995) suggests that feelings supersede thoughts and that emotions help people to survive and cope with life. There are four elements to emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-mastery and presence, empathy, and resonance. Self awareness: knowing what is being felt while it is being felt; Self mastery and presence: knowing emotions and how to handle disturbing emotions effectively; Empathy: perspective-taking and the ability to sense what other people are feeling; and Resonance: managing relations with another person-being able to handle emotions in relationships. Increased emotional intelligence can lead to an improved ability to cope with life's challenges. Experiences that increase emotional intelligence also have an impact on spiritual development as well.

### *Spiritual Intelligence*

Sisk (2002) describes spiritual intelligence (SQ) as a deep self-awareness in which a person becomes aware of self as more than just body, but as mind, body and spirit. There is a focus on the inner experiences that represent the essence of spiritual intelligence. An individual's spiritual intelligence is one of the four levels of self: the physical, the mental; the emotional and the spiritual" (Rogers & Dantley, 2001, p. 591). Spiritual

intelligence allows development of an inner knowing and an awareness of being one with the universe and everything in it. Spiritual intelligence can be enhanced through an increased deep intuition that is connected to a higher power. Sisk (2002) suggests spiritual intelligence is characterized by a oneness with nature and encourages a search for wholeness, sense of community, meaning (p. 209). Finally, spiritual intelligence assists in problem solving and overcoming difficulties by allowing individuals to move beyond a myopic view towards a more panoramic one.

Both emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence are characterized by a set of skills by which they can be measured. The skill set associated with emotional intelligence includes: self awareness; self management; other awareness; and relationship skills. The set of skills associated with spiritual intelligence includes: higher self/ego self awareness-characterized by awareness of individual worldview and life purpose; higher self/ego self mastery-characterized by a commitment to spiritual growth and seeking guidance from the spirit ; universal awareness-characterized by awareness of interconnectedness of all life ; and social mastery/spiritual presence-characterized by the ability to make wise decisions and align with the ebb and flow of life (Wigglesworth, 2006).

The studies reviewed above explored various theories of development in adult learners including relational and integrative models (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999; Ross-Gordon, 1999; Tisdell, 2003; Wickett, 2000), andragogy (Knowles, 1980), generativity (Erikson, 1963), faith development (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000), and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1997). In addition to the theories of faith development, other existing

models of adult learning (Baumgartner, 2001; Erikson, 1963; Knowles, 1980; & Mezirow, 1978, 1997) could easily incorporate spirituality.

The relationship between spirituality and Erikson's generativity stage was examined by Dillon et al. (2003) as it relates to self-expansive activities. The spiritual, as part of the learning process, was explored by Tisdell (2003), Dirkx (2001), Palmer (1993), and Daloz (1999). Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) studied the stages of faith development in the individual learner. The idea of the existence of an emotional and spiritual intelligence offers insight into the personal development of the adult learner (Goleman, 1995; Rogers & Dantley, 2001; Sisk, 2002; Wigglesworth, 2006).

Finally, Mezirow (1978, 1997) studied the transformative learning that occurs throughout the learning process. None, however, focused primarily on the experiences of African American female adult learners nor specifically on the role of spirituality for these learners. Examining the intersection of spirituality and the motivations/inspirations, barriers, and adult development in the learning process is an area of adult education offers more opportunity for research, especially as it applies to African American female adult learners.

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

Design of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of spirituality in the lives of six African American female adult learners. The following questions guided the research: 1) What role has spirituality played in the pursuit of educational goals of African American female adult learners? and 2) What influence has spirituality had on the development of these adult learners? In order to best explore this topic, I implored a constructivist epistemology.

Constructivism suggests that people construct meaning based on their interactions with the world (Bhattacharya, 2007a). Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that a constructivist paradigm is relative to the lived experiences of the people studied. Meaning and reality are constructed. In a constructivist study, the findings follow the data rather than developing from predetermined theories. Findings are grounded in the construction of meaning by the participants. Once the findings are generated, a theoretical framework is necessary to understand and explain these findings. One theoretical framework that helps to understand human reality and the human experience is Interpretivism.

Interpretivism, as defined by Crotty (2005) attempts to understand and explain human and social reality. Interpretivism attempts to understand and interpret the world as it is experienced by individuals. The interpretivist framework emerged from the field of sociology as a reaction to the efforts of positivists to explain human behavior in scientific terms. The purpose of an interpretivist framework is to describe and understand. Truths

and realities can be negotiated in different settings and contexts. Since the purpose of this study is to understand the participants' experience as it relates to returning to school, an interpretivist position is well-suited for the study.

My beliefs and experiences lend themselves more towards a constructionist epistemology because I believe that meaning is constructed and negotiated based on ever-changing experiences. The truths that I held as a child are not necessarily the truths that I now hold as an adult. My experiences and my studies in adult education have influenced my selection of a theoretical framework that is derived from an interpretivist perspective. I chose this epistemology because I lean more towards the belief that there is no one way or right way of knowing. People construct multiple realities as they progress from experience to experience.

#### Participant Selection

Six participants were selected utilizing purposeful or purposive sampling. Patton (1990) notes that with purposive sampling, the power lies within selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of a central importance to the purpose of the research, thus, the term purposive sampling (p. 169).

In order to be selected for this study, the participants met the following criteria:

- African American females
- Age 25-70
- Identify themselves as spiritual

- Returned to school to pursue their General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.) or any post-secondary degree.
- Had a hiatus of at least 5 years prior to enrollment

#### Data Collection

The data collection methods utilized included interviews, timeline elicitation, song lyric elicitation, and field notes. An attempt to establish rapport with the participants was made by sharing the purpose for the study and allowing an opportunity for the participants to ask questions about the study. This information was shared, initially, by providing the participants with the Informed Consent letter via e-mail or in person. Participants were contacted by phone or in person within a one to two day time period to allow for questions about the study and determine interest in participating in the study. Once the participants agreed, an initial interview was scheduled.

#### *Interviews*

Interviews in qualitative research seek to describe and extract the meanings of central themes in the lives of the interviewee. A qualitative research interview seeks to cover factual information and meanings on deeper levels (Kvale, 1988). Interviews are useful for exploring the story behind a participant's experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study. The advantage of the semi-structured interview is that the interviewer is in control of the process of obtaining information from the interviewee, but is free to follow new leads as they arise (Bernard, 1988). A copy of the interview protocol is located in Appendices B and C. Each participant received a copy of the interview protocol, by email or in person, prior to the interview. In an effort to ease anxieties that may have existed, I allowed participants to ask questions and express concerns.

Participants received the interview protocol, based on their preference, via e-mail, fax, or postal delivery. The participants were given the opportunity to select a pseudonym allowing for the protection of their identities.

Two interviews were conducted as well as two additional interviews for the purposes of member checks. The first interview was guided by a timeline developed by the participants at the beginning of the interview. The second interview was guided by song lyrics selected by participants. The follow up interviews allowed the participants to review the transcribed interview for errors or additions and review my interpretations of the data. They were also given an opportunity to express any concerns or ask any additional questions at that time. The majority of the participants were mainly interested in viewing the final product. They were assured that they would receive a final copy once it was approved by the committee. Only one participant, Lisa, wanted a copy of the transcribed interview. A copy of the transcription was hand delivered to her within two weeks of the interview. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour. Once each interview was completed, I immediately began to transcribe the data. This allowed me to take advantage of my initial impressions gathered from the interview and from my field notes.

### *Timeline*

In the first interview, each participant was given a sheet of paper and was asked to create an educational timeline that depicted her high and low points in her educational experience. They were told that they can begin anywhere that they felt was relevant (i.e., elementary, high school or beyond). The use of timeline elicitation is supported by well established research using photo or drawing elicitation (Collier & Collier, 1986; Prosser

& Schwartz, 1998). Photo/drawing elicitation is the use of photos or drawings to elicit responses from the participants. Photo/drawing elicitation is participant-driven. It allows for the participants to utilize pictures or drawings to elicit the hidden consciousness of their experiences (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998). I elected not to give them an example because I wanted to elicit authentic responses from the participants.

Upon completion of the timeline, the participants were asked to tell the story behind the “high’s and low’s” of their timeline and their rationale for selecting them. This began the first part of the interview process. I allowed the participants to completely elaborate on their timeline before proceeding with the interview protocol. This allowed an opportunity for the participants to tell their story in a way that was most relevant to them. The timeline served as a non-threatening tool to ease participants into the more structured interview phase. I then conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. Initially, the timeline was going to be used as an additional tool for analysis. However, only three of the participants successfully completed drawing the timeline at the beginning of the interview. They moved directly into the storytelling phase. This was acceptable because it demonstrated that they were emotionally invested in providing rich data during the interview. Since the timelines were not completed by all participants, they were not used in the analysis of the data. The construction of the timeline allowed the participants to engage in a concrete activity to focus their attention on the experience to be studied. To that end, it was quite successful. The timelines that were completed are included in the appendix (see Appendices D, E, F, and G).

### *Song Lyrics*

The second interview began with song lyric elicitations. Historically, the use of photos and other visual data that has been well accepted in qualitative research (Collier & Collier, 1986), but no evidence was found that utilized song lyrics as a method of elicitation. Similar to photo elicitations, the use of song lyric elicitations is designed to provide a “snapshot” of a song that had relevance to the participant that related to their spirituality or a particular time in their educational experience. The participants were given the second interview protocol via phone or email. They were asked to choose a song before the interview. It is believed that individuals are the sum of their experiences (Knowles, 1980). Subscribing to that line of thought, then songs are an extension of our experiences and therefore an extension of ourselves. In the second interview, participants were asked to select a song that they most identified with or that resonated with them. It could relate to the time period when they returned to school or one that reflected them personally. Each participant explained her selection and give examples of the song’s relevance from the lyrics.

The songs that participants chose were negotiated within them long before they are even able to share such intimacy with a stranger. There is a thought process and a self-analysis embedded within the choice itself. It may have been a song that helped them through the trials of returning to school; one that may have helped to inspire them during their return to school; or one that just speaks to them on some internal level. The adage goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words”. I submit that the words of a song can assist in understanding participants’ inspirations for returning to school.

For those participants that provided me their song choice prior to the interview, I was able to download and play a portion of the song at the beginning of the interview. This use of their song choice acted much like the timeline and provided a concrete experience for them to reflect on. It also allowed me to observe and record affective aspects of the interview. These observations were recorded in the field notes and later reviewed during the analysis. One example of the affective observation recorded was the way Sasha began to cry as she listened to the song that she selected. As she listened to the song, she closed her eyes, shook her head, swayed back and forth and began to cry. When asked why she was crying and what this song meant to her, she began to explain the significance of the song. She explained how this song took her back to a very difficult time in her life and how her spirituality and belief in God helped her overcome it.

Spiritual songs have long been used to convey messages. During the times of slavery, African Americans used the words of the spirituals to relay messages to all those listening. They were messages of hope, encouragement, and plans of escape. Gospel music has functioned in much the same way. Music has been used as a form of worship. The lyrics uplift and rebuild weary souls. Music is said to “soothe the savage beast”, but it is the lyrics that touch the soul. Lyrics tell a story. Much like a well-selected greeting card can express the exact sentiment of the buyer, song lyrics can express the sentiments of the listener.

This study sought to extract meaning conveyed in song lyrics selected by each participant. Elicitations are a valuable tool that can assist the researcher in collecting and re-presenting data. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate any studies that utilize song lyrics as a form of elicitation in qualitative research. However, I did locate research in the

field of music theory that offered insight into analyzing song lyrics. Unfortunately, this type of analysis did not assist in understanding the role of spirituality in the educational process. In the absence of an existing model, I created my own process for analysis of the song lyrics. This is discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

### *Field Notes*

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) define field notes as accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher made while participating in an intense and involved manner. I also wrote down ideas, preliminary analysis and other ideas that came to me during the course of the research. As the interviews progressed, I noted facial expressions, hesitations, and changes in voice and tone in my field notes. I was careful to note my reactions without disrupting the flow of the interview. I attempted to maintain eye contact or offer some gesture to let the participant know I was actively listening. A brief description of the field notes analysis is included in Chapter 4.

### Analysis

Once the data were transcribed, I utilized a combination of Moustakas' (1994) inductive analysis data reduction technique to condense the data and an additional form of analysis was used for interpretation termed "found lyrics". Memoing, member checks, and peer debriefing was also used to assist with analysis, credibility and trustworthiness.

Moustakas' (1994) Reduction technique consists of examining the data to determine if it meets two requirements: 1) Does the data contain an element of the experience which is necessary to understand the experience? 2) Is it possible to separate and label the data? If the statements from the data do not meet both these criteria, the data are eliminated and

the data are, thereby, reduced. Data that remain from this elimination process are considered relevant to the experience.

Inductive analysis utilizes the raw data to work up to generate general themes that cross all data sources (Bhattacharya, 2007a). The data are first coded to identify relevant statements or pieces of data. The coded data are then categorized according to common ideas and statements. Once the data are categorized, they are examined and general themes are identified.

The inductive analysis consisted of evaluating relevant statements in the transcripts and assigning corresponding codes. At times, I utilized line-by-line coding and at other times, I coded entire statements or paragraphs. This technique, influenced by Strauss and Corbin (1990), was helpful because there were times when line-by-line coding may have missed some of the meanings offered by the participants that whole sentences or paragraphs were able to capture. Once the transcripts were completely coded, I began to organize like codes into categories. Each category was then analyzed, reviewed and compared to the data constantly throughout the analysis. From the categories, common themes were identified and then listed along with supporting narrative data from the transcripts.

The initial analysis of song lyrics consisted of comparing the lyrics to the findings from the inductive analysis of the interview transcripts. Lyrics from the songs participants selected were compared with categories and themes found in interview transcripts. In an effort to increase the rigor and credibility of the findings, I conducted further analysis to interpret the data using an arts-based qualitative methodology.

### *Arts-Based Methods*

Arts-based re-presentations can be useful in qualitative research. Bhattacharya (2007a) states, “these forms are generally very evocative and cross the academic boundaries into spaces where multiple types of audiences can relate with the experiences of the participants” (p.8). Arts-based research offers the researcher an opportunity to use the data to not only represent the views and experiences of the participants to the audience or reader, but to also re-present the experience to the audience and the participant in a way that evokes emotion and is more relevant than simply “retelling” a story. Many times, we can choose to express ourselves in words such as poems, songs, or stories. Qualitative research relies on such expressions as sources of data and/or methods of inquiry and presentation.

The data collected from the song lyric elicitation interview were then analyzed for deeper meanings and insights into the experiences of the participants. In the initial analysis, I compared interview data to lyrics from the song that each participant selected. During the arts-based analysis, I utilized the lyrics of contemporary gospel songs that I felt accurately reflected the themes that were discovered from the initial analysis. One way that I chose to re-present the experiences of my participants is through the use of “found lyrics”. “Found Lyrics”, coined here, is a variation of found poetry. Found Poetry is a type of poetry created by taking words, phrases and sometimes whole passages from other sources and reframing them as poetry by making changes in spacing and/or lines (and consequently meaning), by altering the text with additions and/or deletions (Found Poetry, n.d., p.1). I utilized a “found lyrics” methodology to re-present the findings in the form of 5 songs (odes) that represented the five major themes. I, then, reduced that data

into a brief statement that could easily have been spoken by any of the participants in the study based on the findings. This re-presentation was provided to the participants, in person or via email, to determine their feedback. Each participant felt that the odes and statement appropriately reflected their sentiment.

### *Memoing*

Analysis begins during the interview process. The use of memoing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) can assist with the analysis process. *Memoing* is a process for recording the thoughts and ideas of the researcher as they evolve throughout the study. Early in the process these memos tend to be very open while later on they tend to increasingly focus in on the core concept. Memoing can also be viewed as marginal notes and comments that analyze the connection of key ideas that emerge from interviews and analysis. Memoing is an analysis of the observations and recordings documented in the field notes. Once the field notes were obtained, memoing was utilized to analyze and compare observations and thoughts to the data .

### *Member Checking*

Member checking is a process of engaging the research participants in analyzing data and confirming findings (Byrne, 2001). Member checks were scheduled as soon as the interview was transcribed. The transcripts were given to the participants, via email or in person, for review. Each participant was given the opportunity to offer any suggestions or corrections to the transcript. None of the participants offered any corrections or suggestions. They felt that the information was accurately captured.

### *Peer Debriefing*

Peer debriefing occurs when someone other than the researcher analyzes and confirms the data. The peer debriefer's role is to provide a fresh perspective for analysis and critique (Byrne, 2001). The peer debriefer should have some knowledge of the method, content, or theory to challenge the researcher's assumptions regarding the findings. Peer debriefing was utilized during the analysis phase of this study. Two researchers that have had training in qualitative research methodology and/or adult education served as peer reviewers. Our findings were then compared to ensure that a comprehensive analysis of the data had occurred.

### *Credibility and Trustworthiness*

To address the areas of credibility and trustworthiness within the scope of this study, the following techniques were utilized:

- Subjectivities were openly addressed.
- Triangulation through the use of interviews, field notes/memoing, and lyric/visual data.
- Member checking to allow participants the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy.
- Peer debriefing to allow peers with knowledge in qualitative methodology an opportunity to review transcripts and my analysis for consistency and accuracy.

### *Subjectivities*

I was told very early on in my doctoral studies that a topic of interest for my dissertation research may serendipitously emerge. I have always loved education. The world of academia has always served as a comfort zone for me. It was an arena where I

could excel and be rewarded and recognized for my accomplishments. Regardless of my disappointments in the “real world”, I knew that I could get my ego stroked once I returned to education. I completed my Master’s degree and though I had always experienced success in school, had no real plans to continue my education further.

In the year following my degree completion, I was attending a small church service and the pastor of the assembly was advocating betterment and spiritual service through education. After evaluating the message, I came to the conclusion that maybe God was encouraging me to continue on for some divine reason or purpose. If it were not for attending that service on that day or divine inspiration, I probably would not be pursuing my doctorate degree. Shortly, following the sermon, several other women of the church began enrolling in educational programs. Each woman’s educational career had been interrupted either voluntarily or involuntarily. I became interested in this topic after I began to evaluate why I was choosing to stop with my Master’s degree.

I remember sitting in a park alone at night, something that you would not dare these days, and crying out to God to help me. I was tired of my situation. I wanted to change. I was going through a depression and could no longer function. It seemed like no one cared about me even though I was surrounded by love. I couldn’t function anymore, I was miserable. I didn’t want to kill myself, but I didn’t want to live anymore. Shortly following my episode in the park, I was lead to a church and began the journey of transformation and rebirth. I gave up some things and some people that were destructive to me. During that time, there was a song that I related to. It became a source of strength and motivation whenever I became down or wanted to quit. I would reflect on the words of that song and I would draw strength. The lyrics that spoke to me most were:

*My life was torn beyond repair  
I felt so alone, seemed no one cared.  
But you came along, gave me a song  
To ease the pain and erase the stain  
You could have left me standing there  
With no one, no one to care  
You promised me, you'd be there on time  
And you did just what you said  
I gave it up, that's when you blessed me  
I let it go, that's when you blessed me  
Lord, you brought me through, now I'm brand new  
I said, "Have your way, I am here to stay"  
And you did just what you said*

You may visit the link below to hear a sample of this song.<sup>1</sup>

[http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002LWFD02/ref=pd\\_lpo\\_k2\\_dp\\_sr\\_2?pf\\_rd\\_p=486539851&pf\\_rd\\_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf\\_rd\\_t=201&pf\\_rd\\_i=B0000047XB&pf\\_rd\\_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf\\_rd\\_r=1FRDXTV53VJ9YHXG8PV3](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002LWFD02/ref=pd_lpo_k2_dp_sr_2?pf_rd_p=486539851&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_i=B0000047XB&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_r=1FRDXTV53VJ9YHXG8PV3)

If you had interviewed me during that time or shortly after, these are the words that I could have easily spoken. It was truly more than I could have said in a thousand interviews. This song captured my experience during that time.

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<sup>1</sup>The songs/lyrics used in this study are covered under the Educational Use Copyright Policy.

It still evokes emotions in me that take me back to that place, that time, that park when it was just me, God, and my tears. I know now that he heard me. It was not until learning that qualitative research could encompass more than interviews that I began to embrace the idea of analyzing songs, pictures, and poetry.

I came into the study from an emic, insider perspective. An emic perspective involves analysis of cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who participates in the culture being studied (Weber, 2002). Lett (n.d.) states that emic knowledge is essential for an intuitive and empathic understanding of a culture, and it is essential for conducting effective ethnographic fieldwork.

Some assumptions that I brought to this study were that the women in the study were motivated/inspired in a fashion similar to mine and that this inspiration influenced them to return to school as well. I wanted to hear the women's stories about returning to school because a few of them had to overcome barriers to pursue their education. I felt that it took real courage and I wanted to learn about their experiences. I realized that my returning, even with my previous successes, took some encouragement and inspiration. I expected to discover more about what motivated/inspired the participants to continue their education and how the motivational/inspirational experiences influenced the decision to return to school.

### *Limitations*

One limitation that is innate within the design of the study, as with all qualitative studies, is that it does not allow the results to be generalized to others beyond the particular sample within this study. Other limitations may exist due to inclusion or

omission of questions that may not have prompted participants to reveal elements related to the influence of spirituality in their decision to return to school. There is always a possibility of misinterpreting of the questions outside of their original intent.

Misinterpretation of the questions may influence the type of response given and thereby influence the results. To reduce this possibility of these limitations, a pilot study was conducted utilizing four participants in which a similar protocol and data collection methods. The pilot study allowed me to modify and adjust the protocol to facilitate a more effective interview.

This qualitative study utilized an interpretivist framework to examine the experiences of six African American women. Interviews, observations, field notes, and timeline and song lyric elicitation were used to collect data. To analyze the data, I utilized a variation of the data reduction technique and inductive analysis. Additionally, an Arts-based method of analysis was utilized to re-present the findings. Subjectivities were addressed within the scope of the study. To ensure trustworthiness, memoing, member checks, and peer debriefing were used.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This study utilized the stories and experiences of six African American female adult learners. This chapter is divided into three sections: Description of participants; Findings related to the research question; and Findings related to the overall purpose of the study. Each participant offered valuable insight for this study. The purpose of the description of the participants is to offer a more in-depth look into the participants' backgrounds and stories. The participants were Molly, Keisha, Evelyn, Lisa, Sasha, and Jasmine.

#### Description of Participants

##### Molly

Molly is a very proud 57-year-old, African American woman who is driven and focused. She comes from a strong family background where education was stressed as important. Her mother was a college graduate and an educator that encouraged reading, learning and having a positive attitude. This sentiment is one of the guiding tenants of Molly's life, even today. Molly attended an all Euro American college during Affirmative Action so she "had issues", as she phrased it. Molly's experiences are very much grounded by the struggles from the Civil Rights movement. During the interview, she reflected on some of these experiences as if they happened yesterday. It is clear that this time period and experiences of racism had a strong impact on her. She is keenly aware of situations where race or racism may be a factor. Molly experienced many of the same situations or disorienting dilemmas experienced by other women in the literature.

Molly was a happily married woman with two children. Unfortunately, Molly found herself eventually going through a nasty divorce. She was forced to evaluate her

situation while also becoming the sole provider for her two children. She was devastated by the end of her marriage. During this time of distress, she sought refuge and comfort in her spirituality and relationship with God. She tells tales of being guided and comforted by scriptures, unctions of the Holy Spirit, and words of encouragement from others in her life. Her mother, a strong influence in her life, emphasized positive thinking and maintaining a positive attitude. This influence is still manifested in Molly today.

Becoming the sole provider also became a major impetus for Molly seeking to return to school. She felt that she needed a better education in order to obtain a better job to better provide for her children. She stated that she realized that “Affirmative Action wasn’t going to take care of my child”. At certain points in her life, she literally worked six jobs at one time. She eventually moved past the pain and financial devastation of the divorce and now has an excellent job in her field of study. Her two daughters have completed college and her finances are stable. She believes that her current motivations for continuing her education will yield more internal rewards. Providing for her children, better job attainment, and better pay are nice collateral benefits, but the real reward is the satisfaction of completing her doctoral degree.

#### Keisha

Keisha is one of the younger participants. She is very soft-spoken, 32-year-old woman that has a strong spiritual grounding. She is a married mother of two small children. She had a relatively uneventful childhood. She grew up in a middle class, two parent household. It was not until she was about to begin college that she experienced her disorienting dilemma. She was preparing for college and her parents announced their plans to divorce. She was devastated. She attempted college but could not focus. She

transferred schools and was about to attend but then gave birth to her first child. This presented another barrier for returning. On her timeline, she was somewhat ambiguous in her feelings about this moment. She was grateful for the birth of her child but was saddened by the inability to finish her degree. She acknowledged that during these times in her life, she relied on her spiritual strength to guide her through.

Keisha eventually went back to school and obtained her undergraduate degree in social work. She believes that her chosen vocation is divinely ordained in order for her to help people. Her current goal is to complete her Master's degree in social work. She also feels that meeting her educational goals is another way of increasing her financial status and also opening up more opportunities to help her family and other people. She stated that, "Education is the key to me increasing knowledge and my ability to service clients. It helps me to be knowledgeable about the people I will be working with." She continues to desire to move forward in her educational goals because she feels as though this is what God wants her to do.

#### Evelyn

Evelyn is a 51-year-old, married mother of three. She currently works as a special education teacher but was formerly a Director of her own child care center. Her husband is the pastor of a local church assembly and she is very much grounded by her faith and her relationship with God. Evelyn is currently working on completing her doctoral degree in Early Childhood Education. Evelyn experienced minor gaps in her education during her undergraduate pursuits. However, the major gaps occurred during the time she was attempting to obtain her Master's degree. She was newly married with a small child and could not continue her education. She then entered a program with a cohort of

people that helped her to work towards completing that goal. She then experienced a significant disorienting dilemma with the closing of her child care center. She explains that the closing of the her center that she had nurtured and brought to fruition was like the death of a child. It was her baby. With that closing, she was forced to evaluate her current career plans and decided to return to teaching. She describes the pursuit of her doctorate as another way God is pushing her into the position that she needs to be in.

Lisa

Lisa is a married, 59-year-old woman with three adult children. She a very proud woman who comes from a background of strong individuals. She describes her grandmother as a woman who loved reading and encouraged her to read at every juncture. She fostered a love of reading and learning that Lisa still reflects. Her mother died when she was young but she remembers her mother as being “ a classy lady that was before her time.” She remembers that her mother took pride in her clothes and her appearance. This, too, was instilled in Lisa at an early age. Lisa has always loved learning, but experienced several interruptions in her educational experience. Lisa married young to her high school sweetheart. She supported his educational endeavors but the favor was not reciprocated. Lisa found that when it was time to pursue her educational goals, her husband was not supportive. For that reason and the birth of her children, she was never able to successfully complete her educational goals. Her original goal was to be a nurse because she has always had a desire to help people and to give back. Her major disorienting dilemma was her divorce from her husband, who she loved dearly. She was devastated. At the time of the divorce, she was left with three small children and little, if any, support. She spent the next 26 years starting and stopping her

educational pursuits until the recent completion of her Bachelor's degree. Throughout this process, she credits unctons from the Holy Spirit, God, and divinely placed people with providing the strength and support needed to complete this process. She has since remarried and is currently pursuing her certification as a special education teacher because she feels that God will allow her to help children in this capacity. Lisa is currently working in the school system and feels as though working with children is a way to give back to the next generation and also keep herself young.

Sasha

Sasha is a 38-year-old, married mother of one. She is a very proud, driven person that feels that her personal relationship with God is what guides her from day to day. She remembers being "spiritual" as far back as middle school. Sasha always had a good experience with school. She graduated with a 3.8 G.P.A. from high school and always had a desire to go further in her education. Her mother and father instilled the importance of education in her and life experiences reinforced that. Her disorienting dilemma occurred during college when she decided to move out of her mother's home. She reports that "real life" kicked in and she experienced several things that caused her to re-evaluate her life and life choices. She decided to stop school in order to work for a while. She spent the next 13 years starting and stopping her educational pursuits. During that time, she married and had a daughter. She finally completed her Bachelor's degree and credited her relationship with God as her source of strength that she relied on to help her complete her studies. She is now pursuing a graduate degree. Finances, job demands, and life responsibilities continue to disrupt her ability to matriculate through the graduate program uninterrupted. However, Sasha is a very driven, determined

individual that feels that God's plan is for her to get more education. She feels that continuing her education will allow her to obtain the credentials that will be needed when God blesses her with another job opportunity.

Jasmine

Jasmine is a 48-year-old, married mother of one. She has a strong religious background that she feels heavily influences her today. Her father was a preacher and her mother was a strong, proud woman that raised 13 children; 7 boys and 6 girls. Jasmine had a relatively uneventful experience during her undergraduate years. She was able to complete her Bachelor's degree without any interruptions. She began working in the field of social work shortly after college and continues to work there today. Jasmine views her vocation as a way to help give back and be a blessing as she has been blessed. She operates under the motto of "work as unto the Lord". She believes that one way she maintains her strong connection to God is to treat people right and to stay prayerful.

Jasmine feels that she is being compelled to return to school. She credits God as the source of this prompting. She has tried to put in out of her mind and has avoided the discussion of returning to school mainly for fears of starting something new and not being able to complete it. However, she feels God is pushing her towards more and believes that education is the vehicle that will bring about those opportunities. She has a strong faith that she believes will guide her in her decision to return to school and ultimately be a source of strength during the challenges that she may face.

#### Summary of Participants

The participants vary in age, life experience, and family background (see Table 1). Some are under 40 and some are over 50. Some come from two-parent households and

some come from single-parent households. Some experienced divorce of their parents or divorce of their own. Some experienced loss of a parent at an early age and some have parents that are still living. Some had parents that finished college and others had parents that did not complete high school. However, in spite of these variations, there are some similarities. Each of the participants credits her parents (mom, dad, or both) with instilling the value of education, learning and a connection with God. Each one spoke of the influence of her mother on her life. Each woman had a strong faith, religious background, and sense of being connected to God.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

Name/Age	Employment Status	Marital Status	Number of Children	Highest level before hiatus	Type of current Program
Molly/57	Full-Time	Divorced	2 Adult	Bachelor's	Doctoral
Keisha/32	Full-Time	Married	2 Small < age 6	Some College	Considering Master's
Evelyn/51	Full-Time	Married	2 Adult, 1 adolescent	Bachelor's	Doctoral
Lisa/59	Part-Time	Married-2 <sup>nd</sup> marriage	3 Adult	High School Diploma	Special Education Teacher Certification
Sasha/38	Full-Time	Married	1 small < age 6	High School Diploma	Master's
Jasmine/48	Full-Time	Married	1 adult < age 20	Bachelor's	Considering Master's

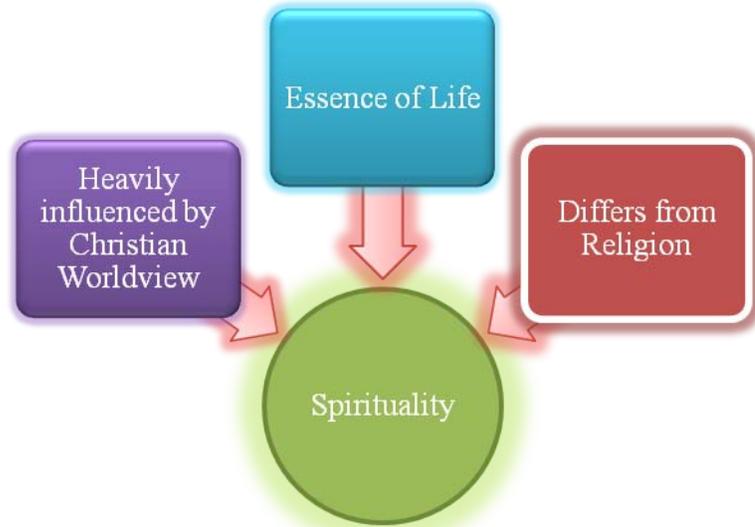
## Understanding Spirituality

### *Defining Spirituality*

An examination of the participants' definitions of spirituality, allowed for insight into the role of spirituality in the pursuit of their educational goals. The participants in this study subscribe to a Christian Worldview. This Christian worldview includes religious connections and spiritual experiences linked to a belief in Jesus Christ, God and the Holy Spirit. Adult learning and adult development are an ever-changing, set of processes that involve emotional, social, physical, cognitive, and spiritual factors (Mackeracher, 1996). The findings of this study suggest that, for these participants, adult learning and development are not only connected to the spiritual, but is also heavily influenced by it.

Dantley (2003) describes spirituality as the nexus of inspiration, motivation, and meaning-making in our lives. Love and Talbot (1999) suggest that spirituality is a process that involves discovering direction, meaning, and purpose in one's life. This study further suggests that spirituality is not just an abstract construct for the participants, but rather an encapsulation and manifestation of who they are and thereby influences every area of their life.

In order to better understand this idea of spirituality serving as inspiration, motivation and meaning-making, it is necessary to construct a definition of spirituality. Analysis of the participants' stories revealed three main tenets important in the construction of their definition of spirituality: Spirituality is: 1) the essence of life that 2) differs from religion but is still very 3) heavily influenced by a Christian Worldview (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Definition of Spirituality*

*The Essence of Life*

Participants viewed spirituality as the essence of who they are, the essence of life or their existence. It is so integrated into their life that it is the guiding force that influences every aspect of their life, including their education, career, and other life choices.

“So spirituality means just the essence of life.”(Evelyn)

“When I think of spirituality, I think of the Holy Spirit. I think of life, I think it is what makes a person whole. I see spirituality as the essence of your existence.” (Evelyn,)

“I don’t know that I necessarily have a definition. But what it means to me is that it is the foundation. It is the anchor. Without that firm foundation, everything else would not exist.”(Keisha)

All participants believed that there is a distinction between spirituality and religion.

*There is a Distinction*

The second tenet of the participants’ definition of spirituality revealed a clear distinction between religion and spirituality. Rogers and Dantley (2001) support the idea that spirituality is distinct from religion. They describe organized religion as an outward

process and spirituality as an internal, private one (p.591). Taylor et al. (2004) define religion as “an organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals designed to facilitate closeness to God, whereas spirituality is seen as a personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, meaning and relationship to the sacred” (p. 102).

Mayhew’s (2004) findings suggest that spirituality helps human beings make sense of themselves by understanding their connection or relation to others. He further concludes that spirituality helps humans explain their purpose through recognizing the self’s need for connectedness. Spirituality is manifested in the way the self meets this need either internally through reflection and prayer or externally through reading, learning, and working. The participants in Mayhew’s study held eight different worldviews. Many of them did not describe themselves as religious, but did describe themselves as spiritual. Similarly, each participant in this study was adamant about spirituality differing from religion.

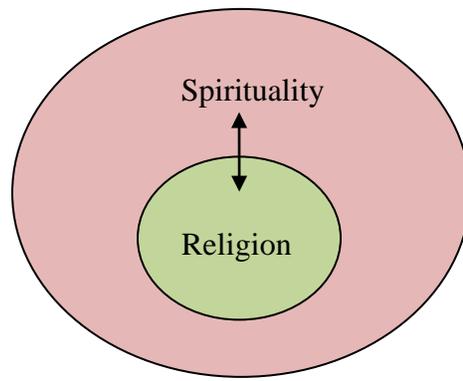
“There is a distinction. There are a lot of spiritual people. But I don’t know if they are Christians or they believe in Jesus. I hear them talking about being positive and having lots of positive things to say and they talk about God. But I believe in Jesus so of course I feel like everything that has been done in my life has been done for a reason.”(Molly)

“It is different from religion. It is knowing there is a greater being. It is something out there that reminds me that .....it is just having that relationship with, for me it is God. Just having that relationship with God. It is having a connection with something greater.”(Keisha)

“Spirituality that is two different things-well ok-spirituality to me is not the act of being religious. It is the connection you have with God and the understanding you have of what God expects of you and what it is he promises to give to you. That is what spirituality is to me. A lot people get that confused, I think, with being religious. Religion is something that is quite different from spirituality....”(Sasha)

### *Heavily Influenced by Religion*

Though viewed as distinctly different and in a seemingly paradoxical way, all of the participants utilized their religion or their early experiences with religion as the vehicle for tapping into their spirituality. For those who have difficulty describing spirituality, religion provides a framework for dialogue about spirituality. Religion also connects spirituality to the participants' worldview. Each participant, when referencing their spirituality, consistently referred to Christ, the Holy Spirit, or Jesus anytime they described their spirituality. Spirituality was clearly considered distinct from religion, but was never described aside from God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit. This seemed somewhat contradictory in that some people, for example the participants in Mayhew's study, described more an interconnectedness with all things and a tool for meaning-making in their definitions. Though viewed separately, the participants' spirituality encompassed religion. Kegan (1994) offers one possible explanation for this. He identifies religion in the context of family as a "culture of embeddedness". Family and religious backgrounds influence ways in which people frame their view of the world. Life events are filtered through their religious and spiritual histories. Figure 2 depicts the view of spirituality that reflects this "embeddedness".



*Figure 2.* View of Spirituality

“If you are a spiritual person, there is a connection that you have with Christ”  
(Lisa)

“Spirituality to me is that connection to a higher power, which for me is God”  
(Keisha)

“There are a lot of spiritual people. But I don’t know if they are Christians or they believe in Jesus... But I believe in Jesus so of course I feel like everything that has been done in my life has been done for a reason.” (Molly)

“Spirituality ...spirituality to me is not the act of being religious. It is the connection you have with God.”(Sasha)

Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformative learning may also offer insight into this situation. Mezirow states that most people are unaware of the origin of the meaningful structures that make up their worldview. He suggests that “our frames of reference represent assimilated cultural norms or personal perspectives derived from the idiosyncrasies of the primary caregivers” (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 16-17). All of the participants reflected on their early religious experiences and the mandates of the parents to attend church at an early age. The dogma of the early religious teachings became assimilated into their Christian worldview. So, though their spirituality is more of

internal, individual journey towards a relationship with God; it is still influenced by their religion. Similarly, participants in Aiken et al.'s study (2001) reported that their spirituality was fostered by their family and culture from their earliest years of their lives.

#### *Role of Spirituality in the Pursuit of Educational Goals*

Spirituality is a construct that is difficult to define but is easily described based on the role it plays in individual's lives. Based on the participants' descriptions, Spirituality serves as a: 1) source of motivation/inspiration; 2) a source of guidance; 3) a source of strength; and 4) source of connection. Figure 3 depicts spirituality's roles in the participants' lives.

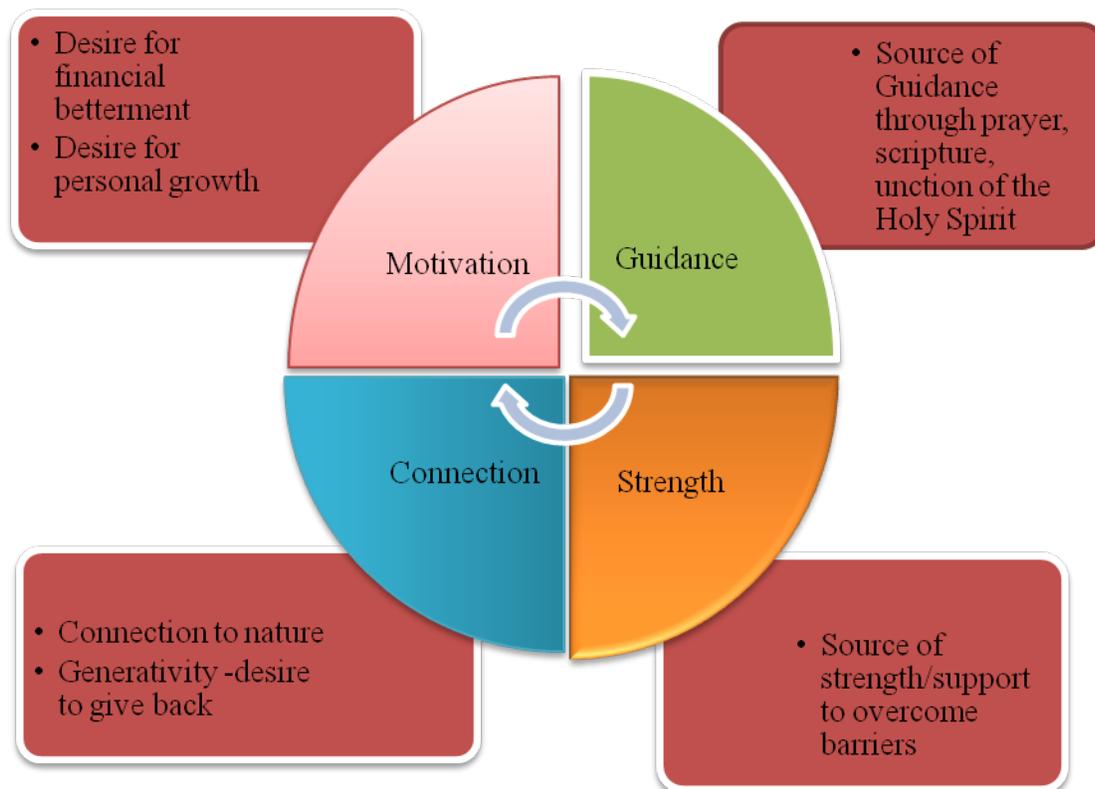


Figure 3. Role of Spirituality

*Motivation/Inspiration*

*Moving the Mind.* Spirituality was found to serve as a source of motivation or inspiration for participants to return to school. One participant, Lisa, coined this phrase “moving the mind” during our first interview. She said, “If I couldn’t move my body, I could move my mind,” to explain one of her motivations for returning to school. She

described feeling as though she needed to constantly better herself. And even though, she may be physically or financially constrained by her current situation, she knew that through education, she could move her mind until her reality caught up with her vision.

“Also my pastor was a strong motivator... When I would be frustrated or down... he would talk to me and help me focus on God and God’s plan for me. I didn’t think I could do or be successful. He would tell me you can do it. Just be focused. From the spiritual aspect, I learned that I can do all things through Christ. He could help me in college and by being prayerful, he [God] pushed me to excel.” (Jasmine)

“I found out real early in college that there were some things that I was underdeveloped in such as writing and mathematics. So with me being the person that I am, being very driven, I didn’t give up on that because I knew that I was intelligent. I sought God and I prayed a lot and studied a lot and just had the sure will and determination that God gave me and I meant I was going to graduate and I did”. (Sasha)

Spirituality has been found to serve as a major organizing principle and mechanism for meaning-making in the lives of adult learners (Mayhew, 2004; Tisdell, 2000, 2003).

It has also been found to motivate adult learner participation. For example, some studies indicate that among both Euro American and African American, male and female adult learners a combination of internal and external motivators exist (Boshier, 1980, 1991; Coker, 2003; Johnson et al., 2000; Knowles, 1980; Mohny & Anderson, 1988).

Spirituality is also reported as a major factor influencing participation in education among African American males and females (Aiken et al., 2001; Herndon, 2003; Isaac et al., 2001).

Numerous research studies have explored myriad reasons women return to school to pursue their educational goals. Reasons that include divorce, loss, empty nest syndrome, desire for better economic security, improved self image, and serving as a role model to children. These reasons were categorized as, what is commonly termed in the existing

research, as internal and external motivators (Boshier, 1980, 1991; Johnson et al., 2000; Mayhew, 2004; Mohoney & Anderson, 1988). However, it should not be overlooked that some research findings also suggest that spirituality is a major organizing principle in the lives of women and may actually serve as a motivation to return to school (Isaac et al., 2001; Tisdell, 2003). These findings also appear to be consistent with the reports of the participants in this study.

The findings in this study further support research on motivation. The assumption that human beings are motivated by both external and internal factors was evident with the participants. Another popular theory in adult education is linked to spirituality is Mezirow's (1997) theory of Transformative Learning. Individuals can be transformed or changed through critical reflection. The impetus for this change is often a "disorienting dilemma". A "disorienting dilemma" is a situation that occurs that challenges previously held beliefs or assumptions. Disorienting dilemma's can consist of divorce, deaths of loved ones, or other life changing events. After being faced with a disorienting dilemma in Phase 1, the learner steps through the remaining phases reflecting on his/her own experiences. All of the participants in this study experienced a disorienting dilemma that had a direct impact on the pursuit of their educational goals. This disorienting dilemma either originated from their own divorce, divorce of a parent, or challenging life experiences. Each of the participants discussed how spirituality served as a major source of strength in moving past these dilemmas. The disorienting dilemma is the first of ten phases in Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. Upon completion of the 10 phases, the learners will have transformed their own beliefs, assumptions and experiences into a new and meaningful perspective. Transformative learning is about making changes

through transforming one's perspectives or meaning; making sense of these changes frequently involves development (Dirkx, 1997). Spirituality, based on its description as a process of meaning-making (Mayhew, 2004; Tisdell, 2003) is often integrated into the transformative learning process.

### *Source of Guidance*

*Going with the one who has the map.* Another role that spirituality plays for these adult learners is as a source of guidance through a connection to God, or a higher source. Each participant described spirituality as a relationship or intimacy with God and Christ. This relationship manifested through a deep intuition or knowing relative to what God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit wanted them to do or know.

“it is just having that relationship with, for me it is God. Just having that relationship with God. It is having a connection with something greater.”(Keisha)

“If you are a spiritual person, there is a connection that you have with Christ. A warmth that is unbelievable.”(Lisa)

“spirituality to me is not the act of being religious. It is the connection you have with God and the understanding you have of what God expects of you and what it is he promises to give to you. That is what spirituality is to me.”(Sasha)

The perceived connection is established and maintained through prayer, scriptures, unctons from the Holy Spirit, and other experiences that the participants describe as God, Jesus, or Christ, speaking to them. It is also described as a feeling of peace and a knowing that can only come from a connection with God or a higher power. One participant described the connection with God as a means of guidance. She described the unctons of the Holy Spirit as going with the one who has the map. “If you are going on a trip, you want to go with the map.” She feels that God has her life already mapped out

and all she has to do is follow his divine guidance. Each participant described spirituality as characterized by a relationship with God.

“I consult the Holy Spirit. I use my word as a tool..... He helps me to understand if I am doing something...because the Bible tells us to speak it and in all thy ways get understanding. (Evelyn)

“I have always felt myself to be especially connected to the Lord for some reason. I have been searching and trying to figure out what that is and I guess it will be revealed to me.”(Sasha)

“But, God has saw fit again to put his arm around me through someone else and I feel him telling me to go back to school.” (Lisa)

“But I can remember praying so hard about that that I was directed to some scriptures, but I can’t tell you where those scriptures are. And that happened to me a few times. When I have had some really hard challenges, I can just be directed to scriptures.” (Molly)

“So I think spirituality is something that each person has to develop with the Lord themselves....I think all of us actually have a small part of that in us because He put that in you to desire him and look out for him but in order develop that you have got to go through some things, get close to him, understand him, learn of him and then your spirituality will be stronger. “(Sasha)

“All of my intuition comes from the Lord. ...if you have any kind of relationship with the Lord, you know when he is talking to you and when he is not. I base a lot of my achievement, a lot of my decisions on my spirituality. I go to God and I talk with Him and he will move me in such a way that I will know it is him talking to me and I will use that to answer questions or to answer hard things in my life or to make decisions.”(Sasha)

When you have God you know how to pray when things aren’t going the way they should. There is someone you can consult with and communicate and share whatever you are going through with. You have that Guidance and interventions. You have that freedom to really go to God and ask God what should I do about this? How should I handle this situation? You are free in spirit. (Jasmine)

### *Source of Strength*

*Host and a Multitude.* Kelley et al. (2002) concluded that spirituality provides African Americans with guidance, hope, solace and protection, and is a powerful tool that can

assist them in navigating through life's challenges. Studies support that spirituality serves as a source of strength to overcome barriers and challenges (Coker, 2003). One source of strength described by the participants was the infusion of divinely inspired people into the participants' lives. These people included friends, family, and others. They reported various people that entered their life at a divinely appointed time who served various purposes that helped them reach their educational goals. During our first interview, Molly described that through all of the obstacles she faced, she felt that her faith and the people that God had placed in her path were a source of strength. She stated, "Some people have a guardian angel. I feel like I have a host and a multitude. And they're always around me and protecting me and seeing and doing various things." All of the participants echoed a similar sentiment.

"I feel that if I didn't have spirituality, I couldn't have gone through various things in my life. Things that I have experienced or gone through whether stress or decisions I couldn't make." (Jasmine)

Lisa, who has now returned to school to obtain her special education certification, credits a professor at her school as being a source of strength.

"But, God has saw fit again to put his arm around me, through someone else, and I feel him telling me to go back to school... One of the professors on the campus that is over education, he is in the education department, he walked up to me the first year that I was there and told me that I should be teaching and that he would pay for me to go back to school." (Lisa)

Participants described several sources of strength throughout their educational journey.

Some just spoke a word of encouragement or were just present in their lives as a sign of support. These sources of strength can include pastors or other clergy, family, friends, or other people that were divinely placed to be a "quiet strength".

“And I remember the minister saying something and it just struck a chord in me and I know that it was nobody but God, because I had been praying about some things...”(Sasha)

“My husband is my friend.... He’s the one that is my quiet strength”(Evelyn)

“My best friend. She is someone who always supported me in everything that was positive. I had friends you know, my mom was always there.”(Sasha)

“Well, my family is supportive and encouraging. I have had a lot of encouragement from my friends.”(Molly)

“Mainly my mom, husband. I have extended family that is supportive even though they are not here. But mainly my mom and really my husband.”(Keisha)

“My daughters have supported me. My daughter’s friend has supported me. I have a lot of physical support. To me it is coming full circle for me. He [God] has just given me everything that I needed.”(Lisa)

Often times, women have life responsibilities and other barriers that can prevent or disrupt their educational pursuits. Spirituality seems to be a good tool for overcoming situational barriers such as lack of money and conflict with roles and responsibilities and dispositional barriers such as poor self-esteem, but may not be as influential in overcoming institutional barriers such as class scheduling conflicts or lack of availability of needed classes.

#### *Source of Connection*

*I am a vessel.* In the literature on spirituality (Mayhew, 2004; Tisdell, 2003), there is a constant reference to a theme of interconnectedness to all things. Participants in these studies expressed that their spirituality is manifested through connection to God or a higher power, other people, and nature. Participants reported that they show their connection to God in the way that they treat their fellow man, observe nature, and give

back to future generations through their choice of vocation. Similarly, two of the participants in this study, echoed this idea. One participant, Evelyn, described it like this,

“... spirituality is like I am a vessel.... So my spirituality would be would be how I interact with my fellow man, how I interact with the world, how I interact with myself, with my family, my neighbor, anyone that I come into contact with.”  
(Evelyn)

Jasmine also reported that spirituality influenced her way of interacting with her fellow man.

“Spirituality is being a example to other people, being kind. Being different from other individuals whose life may not be going well. Their life may be destructive and I can let them know there is a better way.” (Jasmine)

One participant, Lisa, reported an interconnectedness to God through observing nature. Observing nature reinforces her belief that there must be a higher power. Nature is the evidence of God and by connecting with nature, she is accessing and strengthening her connection with God.

“I often stand and look out of my back window. I like the quietness and the silence and wonder how did you get where you are? Who put you there? Who is taking care of you? Where did this air come from that you are breathing? I look out there in the backyard a lot of times and I love it. I have a woody backyard. I have trees and flowers. I love that. The nature part of it.” (Lisa)

*Giving Back.* Spirituality may play a key role in the way adults seek new meaning for life and a way to connect and offer something, or give back to the next generation.

Erickson’s (1963) stage of generativity encompasses this desire. During the generativity stage of development, adults exhibit desire to offer something that will better society.

Generativity can be characterized by an openness to self-growth. This self-growth may manifest itself in new learning experiences such as returning to school.

Women are often motivated to engage in educational activities when they encounter a role, goal or major life change. At times, the impetus for returning to school is to connect

and interact with peers and establish relationships to replace ones that may have been lost due to death, divorce or empty nest. The exposure to new learning opportunities and the establishment of new relationships may cause some women to re-evaluate their purpose in life. Participation in activities that extend beyond their current circumstances establishes connections. These connections to others sometimes manifest in generativity towards future generations and other people in general. This includes the desire to serve as a role model for their children. It can also manifest through their job choice.

Spirituality, as the nexus of inspiration, motivation, and meaning-making in our lives, constructs for us our notions of calling, mission, or purpose (Dantley, 2003). All of the participants in this study believed that their job was enhanced through education. By furthering their education, they opened up the door to possibilities that did not previously exist. Education is the vehicle through which the participants will reach maximum performance in their predestined job. Spirituality not only influences how they do their job but also their choice of vocation. Four of the participants stated that they feel that their job is what will ultimately allow them to give back and influence current and future generations. Evelyn stated,

“Because, I know He that has begun a great work in me, is going to finish it... I use this because I am a Sunday school teacher. I told you, I teach everywhere I go. I tell the children, I tell the adults, whoever I deal with, God drops a seed into each and every one of us and that seed is how you play a part on earth. I am an educator by heart.”

Keisha felt as though her job as a social worker is not only her chosen vocation, but also her ministry.

“I feel like this career is a ministry. In undergrad, I changed my major several times. I know that I am a people person, I like working with people, I like people. Social work is a ministry. It is my way of giving back. Education is the key to me increasing

knowledge and my ability to service clients. It helps me to be knowledgeable about the people I will be working with.”

Lisa shared that her completion of her special education degree will allow her to help children in a more profound way.

“ I have always been the type of person that felt that everybody needs an education and it betters you.... I feel like this is my true calling to work with children..... When you get older, you mellow... you begin to look at life a little bit differently and you begin to understand a little bit differently because of children and your surroundings.....There is so much help that is needed in this world today with our children. Because our children are our future. They have to take care of us and people must realize that. So every child that you can save or that I can save it just amazing to me.”

### *Song Lyrics*

Participants selected gospel songs that served as a source of guidance and support during difficult times. The participants reflected on the words of the songs and described how certain lyrics allowed them to feel a closer connection to God. They knew that they could overcome their situation and that God cared about their circumstances. Once they had this knowledge, they were motivated to go on and received strength and comfort.

“I never could have made it without you I would have lost it all but now I see that you were there for me. And I am stronger, I am wiser, I am better so much better” and that is why when I went to the altar and He [Holy Spirit] told me it is time to start, when he told me it was time to leave New Orleans, when he told me it was time to become a part of this program, time to open the center....he was there for me. It is all a part of the one big designed plan. So that is why that song is so meaningful (Evelyn)

“Never Would Have Made It performed by Marvin Sapp

You may follow the link below to hear a sample of this song.<sup>2</sup>

[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_i\\_0\\_24?url=search-alias%3Ddigital-music&field-keywords=never+would+have+made+it+marvin+sapp&srefix=never+would+have+made+it](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_0_24?url=search-alias%3Ddigital-music&field-keywords=never+would+have+made+it+marvin+sapp&srefix=never+would+have+made+it)

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<sup>2</sup> *The songs/lyrics used in this study are covered under the Educational Use Copyright Policy.*

Never would have made it, never could have made it, without you  
I would have lost it all, but now I see how you were there for me

And I can say  
Never would have made it,  
Never could have made it,  
Without you

I would have lost it all,  
But I now I see how you were there for me and I can say  
I'm stronger, I'm wiser, I'm better,  
much better,

When I look back over all you brought me thru.  
I can see that you were the one that I held on to  
And I never  
Never would have made it  
Oh I never could have made it  
Never could have made it without you

No matter where I am in life, God is with me. It reminds me that he's there. No  
matter where I am or where I am going, he will fight my battles for me." (Keisha)

The Battle is Not Yours, It's the Lords performed by Yolanda Adams<sup>3</sup>

There is no pain Jesus can't feel  
No hurt He can not heal  
All things work according to His perfect will  
No matter what you're going through  
Remember God is using You  
For the battle is not yours  
It's the Lord's

There's no sadness Jesus can't feel  
And there is no sorrow  
that He can not heal  
For all things work  
according to the Master's holy will

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<sup>3</sup> *The songs/lyrics used in this study are covered under the Educational Use Copyright Policy.*

No matter what you're going through  
Remember that God is only using You  
For the battle is not yours  
It's the Lord's

It's the Lord's  
Yes It's the Lord's  
Hold your head up high  
Don't you fright  
It's the Lord's  
It's the Lord's  
Yes It's the Lord's

No matter what  
You're going through  
Remember that God  
Only wants to use you  
For the battle is not yours  
It's the Lord's

“especially when I was high school and my parents divorced. Those songs were really true. The first year of college is hard. I would often listen to those songs.....I was struggling...(Keisha),

Through the Storm performed by Yolanda Adams  
You may follow the link below to hear a sample of this song<sup>4</sup>  
[http://www.amazon.com/Through-The-Storm/dp/B0013872MC/ref=sr\\_1\\_fkmr0\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1278379065&sr=1-1-fkmr0](http://www.amazon.com/Through-The-Storm/dp/B0013872MC/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1278379065&sr=1-1-fkmr0)

The storms of life will blow  
They're sure to come and go  
They meet me at a time  
When I'm calm and doing fine

But the Captain of my soul  
He's always on board  
He rocks me in His arms  
While riding through the storm

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<sup>4</sup> *The songs/lyrics used in this study are covered under the Educational Use Copyright Policy.*

While riding through the storm  
Jesus holds me in His arms  
I am not afraid  
Of the stormy winds and the waves

Though the tides become high  
He holds me while I ride  
I find safety in His arms  
While riding through the storm  
I have no fear of the raging seas  
Knowing Jesus is there for me  
He can speak to the wind and the waves  
And make them behave

All power's in His hand  
On sea or dry land  
I found safety in the Master's arms  
While riding through the storm

Sasha had the most comprehensive example of how the lyrics of a song served as a source of motivation, strength, guidance and connection to God. Her series of quotes from the second interview are presented together so that the full meaning can be conveyed. The song that she selected was “In the Midst of It All” performed by Yolanda Adams.

"In The Midst Of It All"

You may follow the link below to hear a sample of this song.<sup>5</sup>

[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_i\\_0\\_22?url=search-alias%3Ddigital-music&field-keywords=in+the+midst+of+it+all+yolanda+adams&srefix=in+the+midst+of+it+all](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_0_22?url=search-alias%3Ddigital-music&field-keywords=in+the+midst+of+it+all+yolanda+adams&srefix=in+the+midst+of+it+all)

I've come through many hard trials  
Through temptations on every hand  
Though Satan's tried to stop me  
And to place my feet on sinking sand

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<sup>5</sup> The songs/lyrics used in this study are covered under the Educational Use Copyright Policy.

Through the pain and all of my sorrows  
Through tears and all of my fears  
The Lord was there to keep me  
For He's kept me in the midst of it all

Not because I've been so faithful  
Not Because I've always obeyed  
It's not because I trust him  
To be with me all of the way  
But it's because He loves me so dearly  
He was there to answer my call  
There always to protect me  
For He's kept me in the midst of it all

“I can't listen to her [Yolanda Adams] without getting chill bumps right now. I am about to cry.” (Sasha)

“I was in a city that I did not know... And I realized how alone I was. I can remember listening to that CD every day. That CD and that song is what helped me to make it. But that song carried me through. ....listening to that song just helped me to put in my mind that I wasn't by myself. You know I had God and if I had nothing else, that was all I needed. ....I had to turn to God. It literally made me closer to God because there was nobody else there physically that I could touch. But the mental anguish I was going through subsided when I realized that I had Him there in spirit and that was better than anything that I could ever touch.” (Sasha)

“You know, when I hear that song today, it just makes me wanna bawl. I just wanna cry. ....it really helped me to understand that I really wasn't by myself. And even now, whatever I go through, if I listen to that song and I can make it. I made it through that.” (Sasha)

“And what I do is listen to that song to remind myself... you made it through that and you had God. You've got your family around you now and God, so you have double support. There is nothing you can't do. So yeah, I use it as a tool to remind myself that I am strong, I can make it. You know, with Him. So I usually don't let too much get me down.” (Sasha)

Spirituality is reported to serve as a source of motivation, source of guidance, source of strength, and a source of connection for the participants. Music serves as a symbolic means of tapping into spirituality (Parks, 2000). The music is one non-cognitive vehicle for accessing the unconscious symbols associated with the inner self and the affective

aspects of spirituality. This seems to be consistent with the reports of the participants. It was clear that emotion was evoked when the participants heard these songs or reflected on the songs and a particular time in their life. The combination of the affective aspect and the meaning-making aspect of spirituality became apparent through the use of song lyric elicitation. Although participants were free to select any song that was relevant to them, each participant immediately selected a gospel song. This selection is yet another example of how spirituality is heavily influenced by their Christian worldview and manifests in simple, everyday choices for the participants.

#### Arts Based Interpretation

Arts based research is “a form of qualitative research that employs the premises, procedures, and principles of the arts. It differs from traditional qualitative research in its representation of the data” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 29). It allows the reader or audience to experience a different view or perspective the phenomenon under investigation. I re-present or represent the experiences of the participants as filtered through this researcher’s interpretations. Re-presentations are multiple forms of presentations of research. They can take on many forms such as poems, plays, short stories, digital stories, or photo essays. Bhattacharya (2007a), states that re-presentation is a means of “academically presenting the complexity of the human experience by making a persuasive argument about the issue of interest” (p. 92). These re-presentations can serve as a symbolic way of presenting the experiences of the participants.

Spiritual meaning making can involve symbolic and unconscious processes (Tisdell, 2003). This symbolism can be accessed through non-cognitive means such as poetry, dance, nature, and music. It is this idea of music that guides my re-presentation of

findings in this chapter. I chose to do this in a manner consistent with my epistemology, theoretical framework, and the relevance of song lyrics. I have chosen to re-present the findings through the metaphor of song.

### *Song Lyric Interpretation*

The participants describe spirituality as a part of who they are but also what they do. It is how they connect with the higher power or God. They feel that connection through prayer, scripture reading, meditation or songs. Music is a vehicle for accessing a part of their spirituality. Music takes them to a time or a place of a significant spiritual experience in their lives. Analyzing the participants' definition of spirituality offered insight into the role of spirituality in the pursuit of their educational goals. The use of song lyrics elicitation provided a framework for further understanding the role of spirituality at various times in the participants' lives.

The words of a song can assist in understanding the participants' motivations for returning to school. The songs may have helped them through the trials of returning to school; helped to inspire them during their return to school; or just spoke to them on some internal level. There is a thought process and symbolic connection embedded within the choice itself. Therefore, analysis of the lyrics and the emotions evoked by them offers more insight into the experience of the participants. Table 2 shows participants' song choice, comments related to the song choice, and comparison to the role of spirituality in their lives. Relevant statements taken from the second interview were compared to the four roles identified as themes from the inductive analysis of the first interview. The information was reviewed and organized to assist in further analysis.

Table 2

*Participant Song Choice vs. Role of Spirituality*

Participants	Song Choice	Participants' Comments	Role of Lyrics
Sasha	In the Midst of It All performed by Yolanda Adams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I use it as a tool to remind myself that I am strong, I can make it.</li> </ul>	Motivation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>And even now, whatever I go through, if I listen to that song and I can make it.</li> </ul>	Strength
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening to that song just helped me to put in my mind that I wasn't by myself. You know I had God and if I had nothing else, that was all I needed. ....I had to turn to God. It literally made me closer to God</li> </ul>	Connection
Evelyn	Never Would Have Made It performed by Marvin Sapp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am stronger, I am wiser, I am better so much better .... He[Holy Spirit] told me it is time to start, he told me it was time to become a part of this program, ....he was there for me. It is all a part of the one big designed plan. So that is why that song is so meaningful</li> </ul>	Guidance
Keisha	The Battle Is Not Yours, It's the Lords; Riding Through the Storm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No matter where I am in life, God is with me. It reminds me that he's there.</li> <li>No matter where I am or where I am going, he will fight my battles for me.</li> </ul>	<p>Connection</p> <p>Strength</p>
	Both Performed by Yolanda Adams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In school my parents divorced. . I would often listen to those songs. I was struggling</li> </ul>	Strength

Examples of arts-based representation can include novels, short stories, ethnographies, ethnodramas, documentaries, photographs, paintings, dance, music and found poetry.

### *Found Poetry*

Found Poetry is a type of poetry created by taking words, phrases and sometimes whole passages from other sources and reframing them as poetry by making changes in spacing and/or lines (and consequently meaning), or by altering the text by additions and/or deletions (Found Poetry, n.d., p.1). Found poetry is an arts-based representation that is building momentum in qualitative research. In qualitative research, it is commonly used by extracting lines from the transcribed interview data of participants and using their words to create poems that express a particular meaning or thought that is aligned with the study (Bhattacharya, 2007b).

Drawing on the premise that song lyrics can be viewed, in essence, as poems set to music, I utilized the techniques of found poetry to create a variation called “found lyrics”. I extracted lyrics from some of the more prominent gospel songs that exist and the songs that the participants selected, to develop five, “Odes to Spirituality”. There is one ode for each role of spirituality and one for the most salient aspect of the participants’ definition of spirituality. Each ode is composed completely of song lyrics from the songs the women provided and a few provided by me. An ode is defined as a short poetical composition proper to be set to music or sung; a lyric poem (Wiktionary, n.d., p.1). Maximizing on this interplay between lyrics and poetry, I selected the ode as an analytical tool that captured the lived experiences of these participants. This analysis was informed by the data that were found from the initial analysis and knowledge of descriptions of spirituality from the literature. They were as follows:

Ode 1: Oh, Spirituality, you are the essence of who I am, my essence of life<sup>6</sup>

You are my Life  
You are my strength.....Fred Hammond

You are More than life to me  
You are the joy and air I breathe.  
No other lover shall there be.  
That makes my spirit sing.....Kirk Franklin

Oh Lord, I can't live without you  
There is no life without you  
You're the source of my being.....John P. Kee

Ode 2: Oh, Spirituality, you are the source of my motivation and inspiration<sup>6</sup>

You need courage now, if you're gonna persevere  
To fulfill divine purpose, you gotta answer when you're called  
So don't be afraid to face the world against all odds  
Keep the dream alive don't let it die  
If something deep inside keeps inspiring you to try, don't stop  
And never give up, don't ever give up on you  
Don't give up  
Every victory comes in time, work today to change tomorrow  
It gets easier, who's to say that you can't fly  
Every step you take, you get closer to your destination  
The key that can unlock your understanding  
It's all inside of you, you have everything you need.....Yolanda Adams

Ode 3: Oh, Spirituality, you are the source of my guidance<sup>6</sup>

Every step of a righteous (wo)man  
Is ordered by God  
Though you may not know his mind  
He will reveal it all in time  
Just know till then  
Your steps are ordered by God  
I depend on the spirit  
To gently remind  
When my faith is challenged

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<sup>6</sup> The songs/lyrics used in this study are covered under the Educational Use Copyright Policy.

And my vision is obscured  
I hear in the spirit  
One word to help me endure  
And it says ordered.....Fred Hammond

Ode 4: Oh, Spirituality, you are the source of my strength<sup>7</sup>

I've come through many hard trials  
Through temptations on every hand  
Through the pain and all of my sorrows  
Through tears and all of my fears  
The Lord was there to keep me  
For He's kept me in the midst of it all.....Yolanda Adams

I never would have made it, never could have made it, without you  
I would have lost it all, but now I see how you were there for me  
I'm stronger, I'm wiser, I'm better, much better,  
When I look back over all you brought me thru.  
I can see that you were the one that I held on to  
I never would have made it without you.....Marvin Sapp

Ode 5: Oh, Spirituality, you are the source of my connection to everything and everyone<sup>7</sup>

I need you, you need me  
we're all apart of God's body  
stand with me, agree with me  
we're all apart of God's body  
It is His will that every need be supplied  
You are important to me  
I need you to survive.....Kirk Franklin

I think that a song is something more than a beautiful melody,  
to tell the story of truth and reality.  
I think that a song should be shared among friends,  
then when friends are gone the melody and meaning still lingers on.  
Everything You [God] touch is a song.  
You touched my life one day  
You wrote a song that even the bees could hum,  
You touched a bird and that bird started to sing .  
You went in the jungle and touched a lion ,  
If you listen real close, everything in nature sings,  
Most importantly, You touched my life,  
oh, I'm mighty grateful

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<sup>7</sup> The songs/lyrics used in this study are covered under the Educational Use Copyright Policy.

You wrote a song that the robins could sing along.  
 Everything You touch is a song..... The Winans

A more succinct presentation of the participants' views on spirituality could be expressed as: Spirituality is my life. It is more than life to me. I can't live without it. I never gave up on my educational goals and God ordered my steps. Spirituality was there in the midst of all of my obstacles and I never would have made it without it. I recognize that I need you [fellow (wo)man] to survive, we are connected by God and that everything you[God] touch in nature is a song.

Table 3

*Lyrics Compared to Roles of Spirituality*

Title of Song	Performed By	Theme
You are My Life	Fred Hammond	Essence of who they are
More Than Life To Me	Kirk Franklin	Essence of who they are
I Can't Live Without You	John P. Kee	Essence of who they are
Never Give Up	Yolanda Adams	Source of Motivation
Ordered	Fred Hammond	Source of Guidance
In The Midst Of It All	Yolanda Adams	Source of Strength
Never Would Have Made It	Marvin Sapp	Source of Strength
I Need You	Kirk Franklin	Source of Connection
Everything You Touch Is A Song	The Winans	Source of Connection

## Field Notes Analysis

### *Affective Aspects*

By engaging the participants in the context of story-telling and music, there was an opportunity to make relevant observations in my field notes. Spirituality deals more with affective experiences than reasoning or logic (Astin, 2002). Astin proposes that thoughts and reason take place in affective contexts. Spirituality also involves development of personal awareness. Astin (2002) states that developing personal awareness involves “cognitive, affective, somatic and spiritual processes” (p.19). Reflective analysis, story and symbol provide tools for increasing awareness.

All of the participants were emotionally engaged by either the story-telling or song lyrics during the interviews. Three of the participants completed the time line activity and referenced it throughout the interview process. They seemed appreciative to have something to use as a reference tool or a spring board for the discussion. They were somewhat hesitant to just tell a story. The other three participants were so immersed in the story telling that they failed to complete the time line. They became somewhat frustrated while attempting to complete the timeline because they kept starting and stopping their stories. The same three that were emotionally engaged by story-telling were also the three that could not identify a song.

In each instance, an event on the time line triggered a memory that was so compelling that it propelled them instantly into the interview. In all three instances, the triggering event centered around stories of how their mothers or grandmothers stressed the importance of getting an education. Each of the three participants appeared very proud and excited as they told stories of their parents and their sayings. However, this same

sense of pride was apparent with each participant who reflected on her mother or grandmother. The affective aspects could also clearly be observed during the song lyric interviews.

In their interviews, three participants discussed a song that held meaning to them. Each of those three spoke of the effect that the song had on them during a difficult time in her life. Two of the participants were able to provide their song choice in advance so I could play the song for them at the start of the interview. One participant began to cry as she spoke of the lyrics of the song and how they helped her. She stated that she still cries every time that she hears the song because it takes her back to a time in her life where she became completely aware of her dependence on God. Though crying, she smiled as she reflected on overcoming those trials through God's help.

Each participant spoke of how she had come to rely on God and/or the Holy Spirit. They learned to take the leadings of the Holy Spirit and utilize them as a source of guidance, motivation and strength. Each one expressed that she became aware of her strengths and ultimate potential through overcoming life's challenges.

The participants defined spirituality as the essence of who they are. Spirituality differs from religion and is influenced by their Christian worldview. They described the role of spirituality as a 1) source of motivation/inspiration; 2) source of guidance; 3) source of strength; and 4) source of connection. Gospel song lyrics reiterated these themes at various times in the participants' lives.

This study posed the question: What role has spirituality played in the pursuit of educational goals of African American female adult learners? In order to fully answer the question, I first had to determine what spirituality meant to each participant.

Spirituality is a construct that is more easily described than defined. Following the definition of spirituality, I was able to explore the roles of spirituality in their life. Spirituality played four roles: 1) a source of motivation; 2) a source of guidance; 3) a source of strength; and 4) a source of connection. The idea that spirituality is “the essence of who they are” was the most prominent theme offering insight into the overall study.

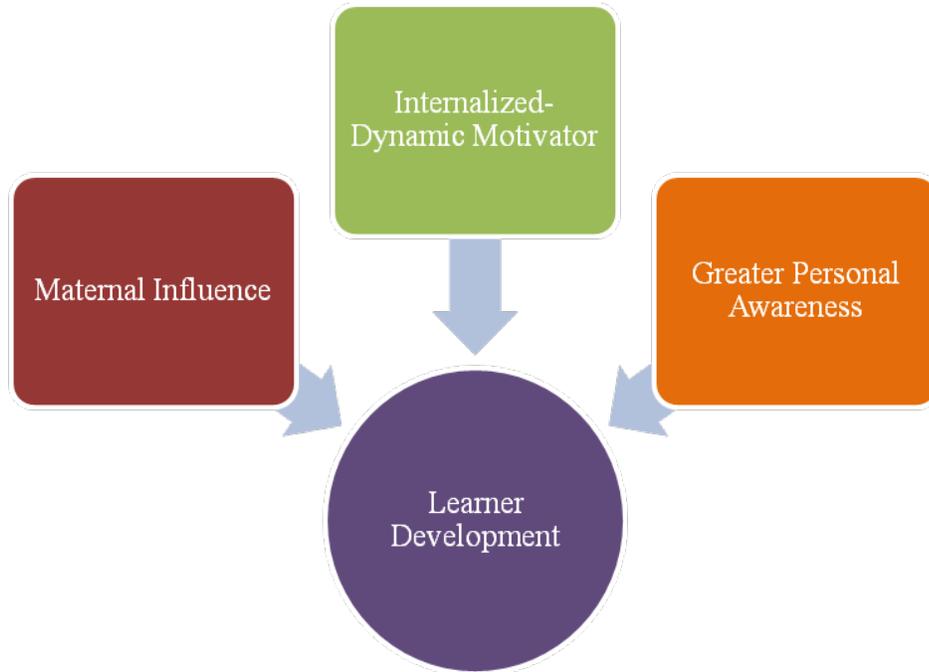
### Influence of Spirituality on Development

Three key findings, relative to the second research question, were identified: 1) Maternal influence; 2) Beyond the dichotomy; and 3) Beyond meaning making. These findings are discussed further in this section. The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of spirituality in lives of African American, female adult learners.

Spirituality is more easily described than defined. The definition that was used in the beginning of this research was that spirituality refers to a process that involves the pursuit for discovering direction, meaning, and purpose in one’s life through a connection to a higher power (Love & Talbot, 1999, Mayhew, 2004; Tisdell, 2003). This research indicated that spirituality was influenced early on by the assimilations of the doctrines, values and beliefs of a mother or grandmother. The maternal influences provided the earliest introductions to God or a higher power. The combination of maternal and Godly influences become blended in the unconscious and contribute to the driving thoughts, ideas and inspirations that became internalized by the participants. (Aiken et al., 2001; Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1991).

Astin (2002) suggests that the unconscious is the resting place of inspiration, intuition and the sense of spirituality. Over time, spiritual experiences such as intuitive moments,

unctions from the Holy Spirit, and overcoming life challenges become the foundation for greater personal awareness and spiritual development that result in a spiritual intelligence. The influence of spirituality on development is pictured in Figure 4.



*Figure 4.* Influence of Spirituality on Development

#### *Maternal Influences*

All of the participants referenced a strong familial influence or early church/religious experience that they related to the beginning of their spiritual awakening. Each participant spoke of a mother or grandmother that was extremely influential in introducing them to religion or enforcing their participation in church and educational activities. Mezirow (1991) attributed these early religious experiences with spirituality.

“ I was the type child that wanted to please my teachers as well as my mom and the people around me.....I was with my mom and my father at the time and school came first so always focused real hard on that and made sure that that was taken care of. I did not know that what I was doing was forming abilities and forming my patterns of what I would be as an adult.”(Sasha)

“but even though my mom didn’t per se, graduate, she had so much sense-so much smarts. Just teaching us-always go back to your word is your bond. She had good, solid values. Simple but she was dedicated and had a ministry of helping.”(Evelyn)

“My mother was a real big advocate. I can remember from always, my mother saying, “You are going to college.”.....” but my mother’s aspirations were even higher. She always had quotes like “ Reading is the key to all knowledge” Even if we read a comic book, she didn’t care as long as you read something.” (Molly)

“Since, I guess, early childhood, I was taught a lot from my grandmother. She was basically the one that influenced me about education. She was an educated person for that time. She went, for her time, to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and that was extremely rare during those times. And my grandmother read a lot....she would pick up the paper and she would see news clipping or something and she would pick it up and she would read it. She would always say, “You never know what you might find.” And to read, read, read. She used to love books. She would read all of the time..... She instilled that in me.”(Lisa)

The theme of interconnectedness is prevalent in the research on spirituality. The maternal influence, experienced by the participants in this study, could further be explained through examining the effect of gender on adult development. Women tend to be relational, men tend to be individualistic. Ross-Gordon (1999), in her studies, suggest that women form bonds with their mothers early on due to the nature of the caregiving relationship. This time of bonding may include the transference of religious and spiritual beliefs and doctrines. The relational aspect of women’s development may factor into the theme of interconnectedness often seen in women’s descriptions of spirituality.

### *Beyond the Dichotomy*

Current research presents motivators in a very dichotomous way. Motivators are described as either internal or external. Internal motivators include desire for a sense of

purpose and meaning making, increased self-esteem and self-concept, and spiritual growth. External motivators include job demands, life changing events, and sources of support. Much of what is believed or assumed becomes ingrained early on through the relationships formed with family and community. These beliefs and assumptions become a part of our mental model. Senge (1990) described “mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (p. 8). The mental models held by these participants influenced their description of motivations for returning to school. A mental model is similar to an individual’s world view. The way the women distinguished between internal and external motivators is heavily influenced by their world view or mental model. The findings from this study suggest the existence of another category for these six participants: Internalized-dynamic motivator.

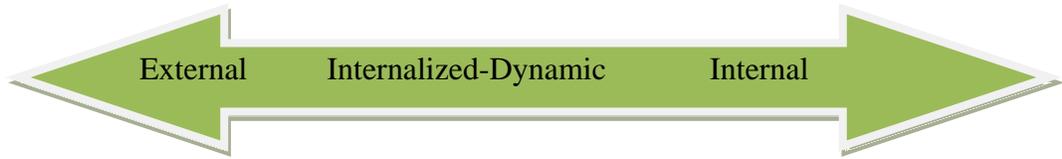
Due to the pervasive nature and role of spirituality in the lives of adult learners who participated in this study, it became clear that another category of motivator had emerged. It suggests the influence of spirituality is strong enough to warrant an additional category. This category is termed by this researcher as an internalized- dynamic motivator. Motivations that are derived from external sources, such as desire for a better job, are clearly classified as external. Those that are derived from internal sources such as an improved self-image or personal goal attainment are classified as internal. Whereas these categories are consistent with some of the findings of this research, they did not seem to adequately describe all the motivations/inspirations that influenced the educational pursuits of these participants. It appeared what existed, initially, as an external motivator, become internalized-but not necessarily deriving its source from an internal motivation.

Participants viewed God, or a higher power, as an external source of guidance and motivation. The promptings and urgings from this external source became internalized and manifested as a choice or decision that was no longer external, but now is a part of their new sphere of consciousness. The motivations now become a part of the participants through a process of internalization. This category is further described as dynamic in the sense that the motivational state can change. This means that it can change as the perceived internal or external needs are negotiated and influenced by the interplay between the learner, God (higher power), and their spirituality. For example, even the participants that reported they were highly self-motivated and goal oriented still viewed their motivation to return to school as a shared-decision making process that flowed along a continuum (see Figure 5) beginning with God and ending within themselves. The data suggest internal and external motivators are not mutually exclusive. Instead, there is a constant interplay between internal motivators, external motivators, and spirituality that result in this internalized-dynamic motivator (see Figure 6).

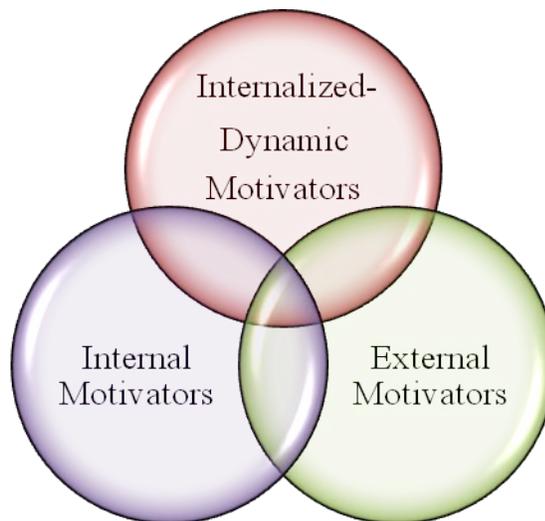
“ He [God] could help me in college and by being prayerful, he[God] pushed me to excel.” (Jasmine)

I didn't give up on that because I knew that I was intelligent. I sought God and I prayed a lot and studied a lot and just had the sure will and determination that God gave me and I meant I was going to graduate and I did”. (Sasha)

I would get bored..... So, God allowed me to go back to school (Lisa)



*Figure 5. Motivation Continuum*



*Figure 6. Mental Models/Internalized Dynamic Motivators*

*Greater Personal Awareness*

Spiritual development is a combination of cognitive, emotional, and other intangible factors. As these adult learners develop, they continue to move towards a greater personal awareness and increased spiritual intelligence. Spirituality is tightly interwoven into their entire being. It acts as a built in Global Positioning System (G.P.S.), moral compass, and personal life coach. This study supported the findings of Fowler (1981), Mayhew (2004),

and Tisdell (2003) that spirituality is a source of meaning making and can be relied on to overcome barriers (Coker, 2003; Herndon, 2003; Isaac et al., 2001). Spirituality, for the participants, serves as a vehicle to make meaning of life events and challenges. The participants view the challenges or obstacles as events that God has allowed to happen for various reasons in their life and they trust that the ultimate outcome or lesson is for their good and will be revealed in time. The life event or circumstance may be disorienting or what Mezirow (1978, 1991, 1997, 2000) terms a disorienting dilemma. For these participants, the disorienting dilemma was divorce, divorce of their parents or just real life. It was this disorienting event that caused them to question assumptions, analyze their current standing, and make choices based on their meanings that were constructed from the event. This process of meaning making helps propel them to the next level or stage in their life, spiritual growth, or faith development. Though prevalent in existing literature, meaning making was not the prominent description of spirituality reported by participants in this study. Their description of spirituality moved beyond meaning making into more of a personalized encapsulation of everything that they are. It was described as the essence and foundation for everything else in their lives.

Several investigations have highlighted spirituality as a major component of African American women's identity, influencing every aspect of their daily lives and experiences (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2004; Frame et al., 1999; Thomas, 2001). Spirituality as a major component of identity seems to be the more salient theme, even overriding that of meaning making.

Similar to the findings of Mayhew's (2004) study, the participants in this study reported that spirituality influenced their decision to return to school, the type of program

they selected, and their choice of educational activities. Findings also concurred with Tisdell's (2000, 2003) study that indicated spirituality influenced what they choose as a vocation, and how they interact in the world. However, the findings do indicate a dissonance. The existing literature focuses on meaning making and little on the essence of who the participants are, as found in this study. With this in mind, more attention should be given to assisting individuals in developing their inner selves and a greater personal awareness. This development will impact other emotional and spiritual aspects. Dirkx (2006) states, "when we take seriously the responsibility of developing a more conscious relationship with the unconscious dimensions of our being, we enter into a profoundly transformative, life-changing process" (p. 19).

#### *Developing Emotional and Spiritual Intelligence*

Self awareness and self-understanding are necessary requirements to our ability to understand others and resolve conflicts and deal effectively with overcoming divorce, religious conflicts, crime and poverty" (Astin, 2002, p. 2). Developing self awareness is a key skill in both emotional and spiritual intelligence. An individual's spiritual intelligence is one of the four levels of self: the physical, the mental; the emotional and the spiritual" (Rogers & Dantley, 2001, p. 591).

Astin suggests spirituality can include aspects related to individual experience such as intuition and inspiration. All of the participants spoke of relying on God-given intuition and unctions from the Holy Spirit to lead them and guide them throughout life's situations. Goleman (1995) proposes time spent in practices such as prayer, meditation and internal reflection strengthen the four areas of emotional intelligence. He states, "but it is time alone when you reflect on what is going on inside-we give ourselves a better

chance to hear that small murmur within, the voice of wisdom” (p. 147). Sisk (1999) states that inner experiences represent the essence of spiritual intelligence. To develop or raise spiritual intelligence, a number of methods can be utilized including an emphasis on connectedness, and service to others. Spiritual and emotional intelligence are elements of an overall personal awareness by individuals. Once a greater personal awareness is reached, individuals are better able to assess their ability to overcome challenges and their status as related to their beliefs and value systems.

### *Faith Development*

It is reasonable to consider stages of faith when exploring development of these participants within the context of spirituality. However, it was not evident whether new stages of faith development were reached by the participants based on the experiences captured in this study. There are similarities in Fowler’s (1981) and Parks’ (2000) faith development theories, yet they also have differences. Parks and Fowler have developed models that allow for the examination of issues of faith and the spirit as they relate to developmental experiences of individuals. Both Fowler and Parks addressed the importance of integrating cognitive and psychosocial developmental theories into a more comprehensive faith developmental theory. Similarly, both presented their theories in a stage model.

Figure 7 depicts a faith continuum. Faith is an ongoing continuum of construction, where meaning is made of life events or circumstances; negotiation, where a situation or conflict causes disorientation; deconstruction, where old assumptions and previously held beliefs are questioned and/or rejected; and finally reconstruction, where new roles,

assumptions and beliefs are integrated into the life of the individual. This process continues throughout life (see Figure 7).



*Figure 7. Faith Continuum*

Parks (2000) and Fowler (1981) differ in their description of how people move through this continuum. Fowler presents his progression through stages as a linear, sequential move towards greater complexity until the final stage is reached. Parks' presentation is non-sequential and vacillates between stages as the need or event dictates. Another area of dissonance occurs in the populations that serve as the focus for each of the theories. Fowler's work focused on humans at every stage of development. Parks' work focused primarily on traditional-aged college students in young adulthood.

Similarly, in both theories, transitions from stage to stage are typically preceded by an event, internal or external, that causes disorientation. This is where the negotiation and

deconstruction begins on the continuum. Following this progression to the next stage, a relearning and reconstruction of new beliefs and assumptions occur. There are significant similarities between Fowler's (1981) and Parks' (2000) events that precipitate transitions and Mezirow's disorienting dilemmas which can trigger transformative learning.

It was unclear from the findings not only if there was movement but also whether this movement along the faith continuum was linear (Fowler, 1981) or non-sequential (Parks, 2000). However, it did result in an acceptance of new roles and action that are indicative of andragogy (Knowles; 1980, 1998) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 1997, 2000). The lack of opportunity to observe faith development is a limitation of the data that were collected.

In conclusion, the answer to the research question, "What role has spirituality played in the pursuit of educational goals of African American female adult learners?", is that spirituality served as the essence of who they are. It was the core, the foundation, from which all of their major life decisions stemmed. Spirituality served a source of motivation encouraging them to continue striving for a better life and future for themselves and their families through education. Spirituality served as a source of guidance during their decision to return to school and their matriculation through their individual programs. Spirituality served as their source of strength to overcome all of the obstacles that interrupted or potentially interrupted their educational goals. And finally, spirituality served as their connection to God, their fellow man, and nature. All of the major themes combine into this overarching statement: Spirituality is the essence of who we are. We are but the sum of what motivates us, what guides us, what strengthens us, and what connects us to others. And God is right there in the midst of it all.

Through analysis of the interviews, song lyrics and field notes, three key findings relative to the second research question were identified: 1) Maternal influences significantly played a role in early experiences with spirituality and education; 2) Another category of motivator exists for the participants beyond the existing dichotomous internal and external categories; and 3) There was a movement beyond meaning-making into a personal awareness and understanding that spirituality is the essence of who they are. This awareness is a manifestation of spiritual intelligence.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter includes two major sections. The first is an overall summary of the study, which reviews the purpose of the study and the procedures utilized. The second section discusses the implications for higher education institutions and individual instructors and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this interpretivist, qualitative study was to examine the influence of spirituality in the lives of six African American female adult learners. Each participant was either in school or contemplating returning to school following a hiatus of at least 5 years. Two participants returned to school briefly but dropped out of their Master's level programs. One is currently enrolled in a Master's program. One is enrolled in a special education teacher certification program and two of the participants are enrolled in Doctoral programs.

A constructivist perspective was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The research questions that informed the study was: 1) What role has spirituality played in the pursuit of educational goals of African American female adult learners? and 2) What influence has spirituality had on the development of these adult learners? The data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, timeline and song lyric elicitations, and field notes. Inductive analysis was the primary form of analysis. A form of Moustakas' (1994) data reduction technique, memoing, member checks and peer debriefing were also used to ensure in-depth analysis, credibility, and trustworthiness. An arts-based re-presentation of the data offered an additional perspective on the data.

The findings revealed, not only the role of spirituality, but also yielded a definition of spirituality relevant to the participants. The definition revealed that spirituality was: 1) the essence of life; 2) differs from religion but is still; 3) heavily influenced by a Christian worldview. This definition was useful in framing the analysis, determining the themes, and answering the research question. Spirituality served in four ways to help participants achieve their educational goals: 1) a source of motivation/inspiration; 2) a source of guidance; 3) a source of strength; and 4) a source of connection.

A salient aspect of the participants' definition of spirituality, spirituality as the essence of who they are, offered insight into the overall purpose of the study. Three key findings relative to the influence of spirituality on development were identified: 1) Maternal influences significantly played a role in early experiences with spirituality and education; 2) Another category of motivator exists for the participants beyond the existing dichotomous internal and external categories; and 3) There was a movement beyond meaning-making into a greater personal awareness or spiritual intelligence.

### Implications

Spirituality has not been traditionally acknowledged as an important part of higher education. Institutions that foster both cognitive and affective learning environments will prepare graduates better for diversity and rapid changes in the future (Astin, 2002). Astin proposes that higher education must devote adequate attention to student spirituality as a “holistic approach to student development and learning” (p.19). Understanding adult participation and how to structure educational programs to maximize retention and completion of programs is a commonly researched topic in higher education (Aiken et al., 2001). Literature on adult learning has begun to reflect ways in which many factors

affect learning. However, the research on ways in which spirituality influences adult learners is limited.

It is important for adult educators to create an environment that fosters learning and spiritual growth (Wickett, 2000). Wickett also encourages educators to consider ways in which spiritual dimensions can be included in their work (p. 41).

Exploring meaning making is important in the milieu of higher education because part of the goal of higher education is to engage students in making meaning of their lives.

Parks (2000) states,

at its best, higher education is distinctive in its capacity to serve as a mentoring environment in the formation of critical adult faith.... It is primarily to this institution that young (and older) adults come to be initiated into critical thought and must make meaning in new ways on the other side of this discovery. Thus every institution of higher education serves in at least some measure as a community of imagination in which every professor is potentially a spiritual guide... However the second part is to foster a wholeness focused on the individual. The professor's job is to help students find meaning in their lives. (p. 159)

Educational institutions should foster holistic development focused on addressing issues of meaning, purpose and spiritual growth in conjunction with academic learning in the classroom (Parks, 2000). In order to meet the needs of students, educators need to provide a vehicle to acknowledge the students voice and experiences in the educational setting. Examining the experiences of the adult learner has practical implications for development and implementation of educational programs.

There are studies on faith development in humans and specifically, traditional-aged college students. There does not seem to be in-depth studies that explore the faith development of non-traditional, reentry college students. Although there is much research on spirituality in higher education, it focuses, predominantly, on spirituality as

a source of meaning-making. More research needs to be done to explore how spirituality is more of the essence of who the person is and go beyond spirituality as a mechanism for meaning making.

The findings from this study offer data that could assist in that endeavor. In contrast to other studies, this study was unique in that it not only examined motivations of African American women to learn but did so within the context of spirituality. Future research to explore the faith development of non-traditional African American males could also prove beneficial. More also could be done to explore how the transformative learning experiences that were influenced by spirituality affected faith development in non-traditional, African American women. It is also necessary to mention that future studies that utilize participants that don't describe themselves as spiritual may yield more insight into the multiple dimensions of spirituality. The internalized-dynamic motivator should be explored further for wider connotations and applications.

This study was intended to help fill the gaps in the current discourse that explores spirituality in higher education. It also encourages a movement beyond the current descriptions and definitions of spirituality that exists into a more individual-focused exploration. Findings suggest that spirituality provides a constructive framework for negotiating the multidimensional roles and challenges experienced by the participants. Descriptions and definitions of spirituality varied thus implying that a multidimensional, holistic approach is needed to attend to the individual needs of the learner in the educational setting.

The findings should serve as a guide to assist educators and others involved in student development to develop curriculum that explores and celebrates the experiences of

African American women by having a better understanding of who they are and the role of spirituality in their lives. In summary, this study serves as another source of data that can offer insight into ways to assist African American adult women to continue the journey of spiritual growth, personal awareness and transformative learning in the educational setting.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to help me complete my doctoral research. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of spirituality in the development of six African American female adult learners. The following questions will guide the research:

- 1) What role has spirituality played in the pursuit of your educational goals?

As a participant, you will complete 2 interviews. Each interview session will last approximately 1 hour. The interview sessions will be audio recorded and transcribed. No names will be recorded during the interview processes. You may select a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality. Information and responses will be recorded according to the assigned pseudonyms.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Nakeisha Owens, at 901-644-5400. You may also contact me by e-mail at [Nlowens@memphis.edu](mailto:Nlowens@memphis.edu). For answers to questions regarding the research subjects' rights, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects should be contacted at 678-5071.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. The information that you provide will be kept confidential. If you choose not to participate in the study, you may do so without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also withdraw from the study before the collection of the data is complete and your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Interview sessions will be audio recorded. By signing below, you hereby authorize the use of audio recordings to be used during each interview session with your full consent. If at any time, you wish recordings to cease, it will be done without any penalty.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Nakeisha Owens

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

By signing below, you agree to participate in the above mentioned study.

Participant's

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Interview 1 Protocol

The first set of questions is simply to provide descriptive information. (All questions in italics will serve as prompts that will help facilitate the interview. They are not necessarily questions that will be asked initially.)

*Timeline Activity*-On the sheet of paper provided, I want you to create an educational timeline that shows the “high’s” and “low’s” of your educational experiences. You can begin at any point you think is significant.

1. Tell me about this [high] point. Why was it listed as a “high”? Tell me about this [low] point. Why was it listed as a “low”?
2. What motivated/inspired you continue your education?
3. What are your personal educational goals today?
4. Would you describe yourself as spiritual? If so, in what way; in what areas?
5. What does spirituality mean to you? (What is your definition? What role, if any, does it play in your life?)
6. What role does spirituality play in attaining your educational goals?
7. What support do you have towards the completion of your goals?
8. What factors contribute to your continuing your education?
9. Has participation in educational activities benefited your current job or life status?
10. What has been the most significant result of participation in educational activities?

## Background/Demographics

11. Would you feel comfortable sharing with me your current age?
12. Prior to continuing your education, what was the highest level of education that you received?
13. What is the educational background of your family? Parents? What degrees were earned?
14. How would you describe the educational interests of your parents? What influence did they have on you?

Thank you for your time and your open and honest responses. Do you have any questions for me at this time? I will be sending you a copy of the transcripts from this session for your review, is this alright with you?

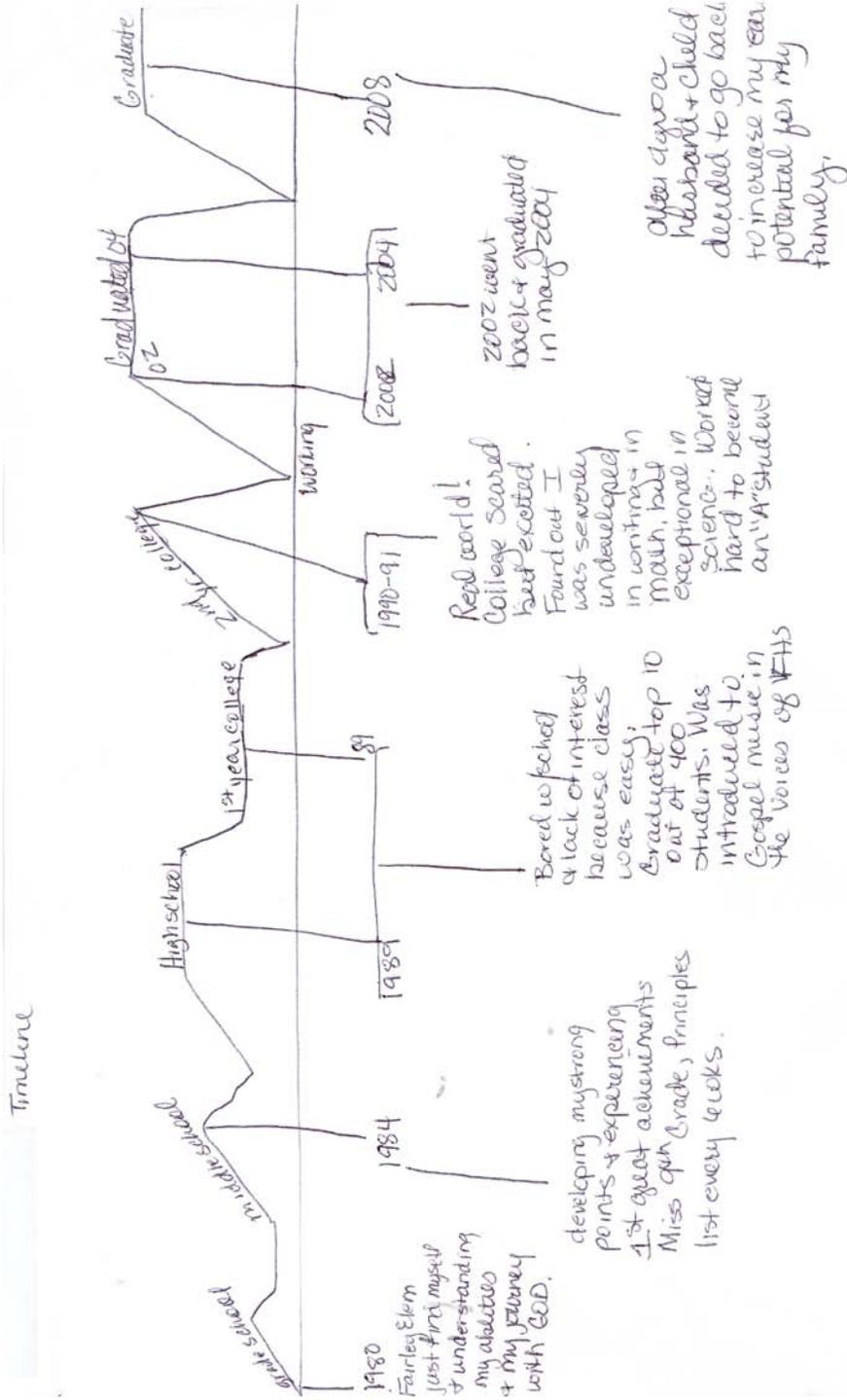
Appendix C  
Interview 2 Protocol  
Song Lyric Elicitation

I am going to have you select a song during this phase of the interview process. The criteria for selection can be any or all of the below:

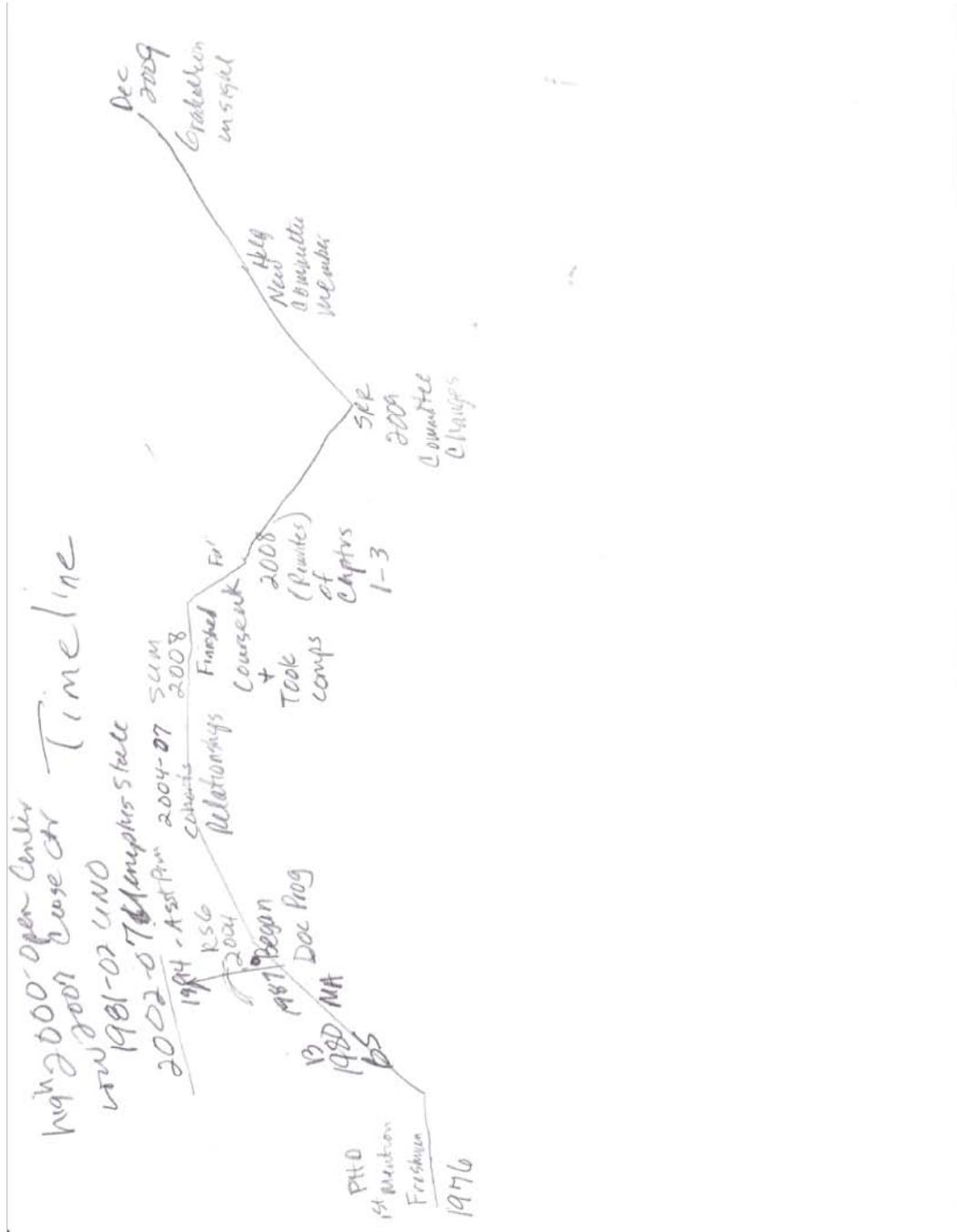
- Your favorite song (gospel, spiritual, secular)
- Explain why this song is so special
- A song that you most related to during the time you returned to school
- A song that you related to during one of the “High’s” or “Low’s” reflected in your timeline.
- A song that reflects some aspect of your experience.

Once you have selected this song, I will ask you to share a few of the lyrics with me and explain your selection.

Appendix D



Appendix E



Appendix F

