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Goodwin, Jeanne E. *The Impact of Spirituality on Nursing Education Experiences of African American Registered Nursing Students*

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of African American registered nursing students enrolled in a post-secondary proprietary Career and Technical Education (CTE) institute. The objectives of this study were to determine how spirituality impacted the nursing education experience of African American Registered Nursing students in post-secondary CTE institutions of higher education and identify African American Registered Nursing students' perceptions of spirituality and their spiritual well-being. Through thematic analysis six categories emerged within three broad perspectives: sociological, psychological and theological. Findings suggest for African American nursing students spirituality is much more than an aid to coping with stressors as indicated in a dearth of literature, or even as one study suggest a way to relinquish the use of active coping strategies. Spirituality is evidenced by spiritual actions and spiritual actions is evidence of active faith. The qualitative results demonstrated the importance of spirituality in the participant's personal life, nursing career, and in their college experience. Findings supported many similarities from current literature with a few notable differences regarding how participants felt spirituality influenced learning and whether it should be included in curriculums.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God my spiritual Father, my closest family, especially my mother who dedicated over 50 years of her life to the field of nursing and although now retired, she still continues caring for others, imparting her knowledge and wisdom, and keeping me lifted in prayer; my sister who has dedicated 30 years of her life to teaching in secondary education and who has also sacrificed beyond measure to make sure my daughter and I did not go without, my beautiful daughter who is my air and my heir, she and I journeyed through undergraduate and graduate school together, and together we sacrificed many years of having a social life while in pursuit of higher education, my brother who I admire as the type of person who takes initiative to get things done without complaint and without thought of reward, my sister-in-heart who has stood by my side through it all. I am ever so grateful also for my nieces and nephews, other close relatives, close friends, co-workers and colleagues for their unwavering support, prayers, and faith in me throughout my personal and professional journey.

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still was for me to complete my studies while battling cancer and undergoing treatment.

Computer labs were available on site and at the hotels where I continued to do my work through it all. This organization truly understands and consistently practices a holistic approach to medicine. I needed caring, and a healing for my mind, body and my soul – all my needs were met there. I never give up and neither do they, that's why I'm a survivor today and have been able to continue my mission.

Most importantly I would like to thank all of the adult learners over the decades to whom I have had the pleasure of facilitating their learning and establishing a genuine connection. My passion for teaching and learning and my desire to improve the quality of education continues to exist because student concerns and student success continues to matter.

Last but not least, a very special thank you to my mother, my attorney and my first cousin who contributed to this study. I am most grateful to the college administration who approved and supported me in this study, and especially to all of the registered nursing students who participated in this study, without your participation this research could not have happened. I am honored to have been given the opportunity to document a significant part of their nursing school experience with great hope that their experiences as registered nursing students will become better understood, and with great hope that the formal learning experiences of future registered nursing students will show a more genuine connection, greater caring and a stronger school support system for all three entities of their being; mind, body and spirit.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In the field of education incorporating spirituality in teaching and curriculum has presented an increase in expectation and challenges. Educational and spiritual experiences are subjective in nature, and caring should be at its core. If we can understand how complex and intricate, indeed how subjective caring is, we shall perhaps be better equipped to meet the conflicts and pains it sometimes induces (Noddings, 2013).

This qualitative study is aimed to explore the experiences of underrepresented minority student nurses who attend predominantly Black nursing programs. The experiences minority student nurses share when attending nursing programs at public historically Black colleges or universities, or predominantly White colleges and universities, or through post-secondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) institutes of learning present different types of learning environments that impact retention and attrition rates of underrepresented minority student nurses in nursing programs. Efforts to increase diversity in nursing programs have resulted in increased admission of minority students...however, high attrition rates have been a significant concern (Loftin, Newman, Dumas, Gilden, & Bond, 2012).

This paper will address spirituality in nursing education, and the problems with minority and non-minority faculty understanding how to genuinely and deeply connect with minority students in order to keep them fully engaged and help them reach their full academic potential. Nursing programs are certainly rigorous, but when taught correctly and caringly, it is a degree that can be attained by more minorities. In effort to do so it will first be necessary to understand why the common saying, ‘nurses eat their young,’ has held so much truth historically and presently. Having this type of thought and action is unethical, very disheartening and should not be tolerated, especially in “caring” professions. The spiritual care of student nurses is just as

important, if not more important than the spiritual care and spiritual assessment they are taught to give their patients. Many people in caring professions will suffer from “caring fatigue” and leave their professions early, and many others will become numb to caring and stay in their professions forever. And although the former is very important as it serves only to create an even greater shortage in the nursing profession, it is the latter that concerns me most because it creates such cannibalistic behavior of seasoned nursing faculty towards their young vibrant students. Nel Noddings (2013) addresses this issue of “an ethic of caring” well when she states, “My concern is for the ethical ideal. Ideally, another human being should be able to request, with expectation of positive response, my help and comfort...” (p. 101). She has produced a very useful and informative book on Caring and its relational approach to ethics and moral education.

This need to have an educational experience that integrates spirituality in registered nursing programs that is truly student-centered, and one can expect student nurses to learn from receiving great guidance and care, how to give great guidance and provide excellent patient-centered care. A culturally sensitive learning environment should not violate the spirit of African American students; yet it does when the teacher does not know, or does not care to know how to enhance their spiritual development.

Discussion and Antidotal Evidence

The impetus for this study originated from the discussions and experiences of my mother, a retired nurse supervisor having served over 50 years in the healthcare field and nursing profession, who have shared with me her story regarding her pursuit to become a nurse, and her work in the field of nursing. Throughout our discussions it was evident that she strongly believes her spiritual connection to others and spiritual connection to God was paramount to her

actions and accomplishments in her personal and professional life. She makes a most profound statement very relative to my study, “Most importantly we must believe, we must at all times believe that we are a victor, and being a victor is because that we believe in action influenced by the power of the spirit and we must *not* succumb and become a victim, influenced by doubts of the spirit.” My attorney shared his views on spirituality in education, “It was important through law school and other schools I attended...because you know you’re not alone, you don’t have to succeed by your own strength, there is a power greater than you that you can draw upon to help you succeed...I think it’s important in nursing, more so than other fields because of the contact that nurses have and the care that they are charged with providing to persons in vulnerable situations and those concepts all deal with spirituality.” In the final family discussion with my first cousin, who completed her BS in Business Administration as a non-traditional student, she shares how her spiritual expression as an African American woman comes from the struggle of so many things, many generations back. She states, “When I express spirituality mine is inward, so mine is coming from who I am as an individual, what I’ve gone through as a person, the different things I have learned over the years about being an African American woman and the struggle. So when I holler, “Halleluiah” or “Thank You Jesus,” mine is not just about that one moment in time that I’m speaking of at that point, mine brings everything together...” Sharing the experiences and views of these three professional African Americans provided valuable insight as to why spirituality ranks with such high importance and renders such high satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

Efforts to increase diversity in nursing programs have resulted in increased admission of minority students. Historically, however, high attrition rates have been a significant concern (Loftin et al., 2012). The national shortage of nurses and the underrepresentation of racial and

ethnic minorities in nursing has dominated discussions in higher education for health professions and in the healthcare industry. Many federally funded initiatives have proven to be successful in meeting its goal to increase recruitment of minority nursing students, yet many of these efforts have proven to be in vain when retention initiatives and strategies have failed, resulting in high attrition rates of minority nursing students or low National Council Licensure Examination – Registered Nursing (NCLEX-RN) passing rates of minority nursing student graduates attending historically black colleges and universities, which is still a significant concern.

Although nursing leaders are calling on educators to diligently work increasing the number of racial and ethnic minorities entering the nursing profession, it appears that without further understanding, high attrition rates will continue, contributing to the lack of minorities in the workforce (Gardner, 2005). According to a 2013 survey conducted by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) and The Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers, nurses from minority backgrounds represent 19% of registered nurse (RN) workforce, comprised of 83% White/Caucasian; 6% African American; 6% Asian; 3% Hispanic; 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native; 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; and 1% other nurses (American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 2015).

Given the unity of spirituality and African American culture, womanist theory includes spiritual focus and has been appropriated by theologians to describe the tendency that “moves the individual towards knowledge, love, meaning, hope, transcendence, connectedness and compassion” (“Summit Results in Formation of Spirituality Competencies,” 1995, p. 30) that is central to African American culture. Spirituality permeates all aspects of life for many African Americans, and African American women in particular are connected to one another, their

culture, their past, and their future through a broad understanding of spirituality (Williams & Wiggins, 2010).

There is a plethora of research that report common barriers to underrepresented minority student nurses' success (i.e., financial challenges, no school support, feeling isolated or singled out by faculty and patients, having to work and go to school, no transportation, no daycare, no college preparation, dealing with expectations of their achievement to be higher or lower than their White male or female counterparts, and dealing with conflicting expectations from family). Families of Hispanic female students did not consider it as important for them to complete their education as they did for male family members (Loftin et al., 2012).

Research Questions

This study is aimed to assess how spirituality affects African American students in post-secondary nursing programs. In general this research seeks to answer how holistic educational experiences are created and the role of spirituality in creating meaningful educational experiences. The specifics of this research answered the following questions:

- 1) How does spirituality impact the nursing education experience of African American Registered Nursing students in post-secondary CTE institutions of higher education?
- 2) How do African American Registered Nursing students perceive spirituality and their spiritual well-being?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine how minority nursing students perceive spirituality and their spiritual well-being, and to identify influential spiritual factors in nursing degree attainment based on minority student nurses' perspectives of their experiences in predominantly Black postsecondary nursing programs. Few studies have explored spiritual

factors influencing retention and attrition rates of minority students in higher education in health professions. By understanding the educational and spiritual experiences from a minority nursing student's perspective in a predominately black educational institute, this may increase awareness and promote changes to teaching and learning in a way that will better meet educational needs holistically and reduce minority attrition rates.

Assumptions of the Study

Findings will show institutional, race/ethnicity, gender, and class status in the nursing program are predictors of the quality of student-faculty relationships, the level of student satisfaction with the nursing program that strongly impacts student confidence and academic performance.

Definition of Terms

The following terms below are relevant to this paper and are defined conceptually and operationally to furnish understanding and clarity in communication between the researcher and readers:

Coding. Defined as the process of reviewing notes and discovering common "themes."

Holistically. Defined as dealing with, or treating something [or someone], as a whole system and not as individual parts.

Persistence rate. Defined as first-time, first-year students who enroll in the fall and remain enrolled the following spring. The term persistence is also referred to as retention.

Phenomenological research study. Defined as a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation (or phenomenon).

Retention. Defined as a process of ensuring student success or graduation. Retention relates to students who remain enrolled full-time each semester until graduation; or students who

remain enrolled on a part-time basis; or students who leave the college at some point and then return, or transfer students who begin at one institution of learning and then transfer to another. This term is also referred to as Persistence.

Spirituality. Defined as a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions.

Themes. Defined as a way to describe the patterns/phenomenon as results.

Transcribing. Defined as the process of converting audio or video data to text for analysis.

Limitations of the Study

Many studies have been conducted that examined factors influencing retention and attrition rates of minority students; however, little research has been done to determine how spirituality influences academic performance and attrition rates of minority nursing students in higher education. This research open doors to a deeper understanding of minority student's educational and spiritual experiences, which can equip nursing faculty to better meet their educational and spiritual needs.

This study is delimited to the evaluation of African American's educational experience with spiritually related factors. The focus of this research is to show what role spirituality plays in the overall educational experience of African American nursing students. By using a small sample size and a phenomenological research method, generalizable data is not produced. If participants lose interest or are unable or unwilling to share experiences this will limit the breadth of the discussions and content analyses.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will present a review of literature and several personal memoirs of the researcher tied to the literature that provides support and substance to the study.

The Muddy Areas of Spirituality in Education: Distinguishing Between Spirituality and Religion

Many authors have defined the concept of spirituality and religiosity. The definition of spirituality as adopted by the Royal College of Psychiatrists states, “Spirituality is a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions’ (Cook 2011). It may be perceived as having both ‘inner’ personal elements (‘immanent’-within self and interpersonal relationships) and ‘other’ aspects (transcendent – outwith or beyond self). Ultimately, spirituality is concerned with “matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values’ (Cook 2011)...Religious practice has sometimes been used as a substitute because it is easier to ‘measure’ but it is an imperfect surrogate for the breadth of meaning in the term ‘spirituality’ (Prentis, Rogers, Wattis, Jones, & Stephenson, 2014), but it is in religion that spiritual experience finds its most profound and objective articulation. Religious teachings provide us with the insights into the nature of human spirituality for both religiously and non-religiously minded alike (Radford, 2006).

Natural spirituality is inborn, foundational. It is in our nature to seek and perceive transcendence, a connection to a larger universe. If supported, this capacity and drive work together to develop the most essential protective component of spirituality: a person, felt relationship to a higher power (God, Spirit, the Universe, Allah, Hashem, etc.) or nature itself as a source of guidance and soulful connection (Miller, 2015). Spirituality involves a sense of

connecting to a higher power that is bigger and greater than one's self from which divine intervention and quest to a more purpose-driven is sought. It is defined as the degree to which individuals endorse a relationship with God or a transcendent force that brings meaning and purpose to their existence (Patton & McClure, 2009).

Patton and McClure (2009) conducted a qualitative study to explore spirituality of 14 African American college women while in college. The findings suggest PWIs could enhance the spiritual development of African American collegiate women if they had better resources and mentoring programs that focused on spirituality.

It is hypothesized that increased levels of spiritual awareness and development has a positive impact on educational experiences, supporting spiritual practices as an effective way to assist with efforts to cope with various types of difficulties and stressors specific to the African American college student's experience in their pursuit of higher education. However, findings in a study conducted by Constatine, Wilton, Gainor, and Lewis (2002) suggest otherwise, asserting African American college students who might be considered "highly religious or spiritual" may be less likely to use active coping mechanisms for fear that doing so reflects a lack of faith in God to help solve their problems. My argument and findings strongly suggest just the opposite; highly religious or spiritual beings are not passive, their spirituality is evidenced by spiritual actions and spiritual actions is evidence of assertiveness and "active" faith. And although Christians believe God is a problem-solver, they also believe in God's word, and biblical scripture James 2:26 KJV says, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Therefore believers who don't "step out on faith" and put forth action would more so reflect a lack of faith in God to help solve problems. True believers are doers, and although God doesn't need anybody's help, He still works in and through ourselves and others to

fulfill His purpose. This is consistent with the findings in a research by Greer and Brown (2011) in which coping mechanisms of African Americans differed based on the type of school attended; HBCU students reported higher mean use of problem-oriented strategies and spiritual efforts than students at the PWCUs. According to the study by Greer and Brown, African American students at PWCUs have been found to use denial, distraction, and other avoidant strategies (e.g., alcohol use) to address race-related difficulties, whereas their counterparts at HBCUs have been found to rely on social support and spirituality (e.g., Fleming, 1981). In both types of colleges studies have found AA students experience stressors related to their race, culture, and expectations.

Levels of Spirituality

There is a dearth of literature on the high importance of spirituality in the African American culture. Research shows that African Americans tend to report higher levels of spirituality and religious participation than do European Americans. African American college students reported higher levels of spirituality on the Spirituality Scale than did European American students (Walker & Dixon, 2002).

The Importance of Faith in Education

Faith is generally and biblically defined as “the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen” (NKJV Hebrews 11:1). It is understood that Education, however, establishes credibility on that which is evidence based, such as theories and practices. Yet, if education is to truly be person-centered and concerned about the retention of teachers, students and staff then it must concern itself with what makes people steadfast. In my view, faith is the catalyst that spiritually moves you to continue, and it is a soulful reminder that despite hardship, adversity and even life altering experiences you never give up because you wholeheartedly

believe *your purpose is greater than you pain*. Yet there will always be certain situational deterrents with certain students that creates an uncontrollable amount of doubt and fear that forms an absorbing occupation in their mind, hindering these students from reaching their full potential. Without ways and means to resolve conflict, hopes and aspirations and dreams cannot be restored; this type of spiritual homeostatic imbalance, if you will, leaves a disconnection and incongruence between the mind, body and spirit. If the student makes it to class, their contribution at best would be just a body in a seat, at worse would be a seat with nobody in it; the thought of dropping out then becomes actualized. As educators, often times we will find retaining students come from saving students from themselves.

Professor Alan Block (2009) identified similar expectancies and rewards from most effective and gratifying teaching and learning processes based on the six satisfactions of teaching noted in an article written in a 2006 issue of *Educational Leadership* authored by Elliot Eisner, a professor at Stanford. A most thought provoking statement is made when Eisner concludes “the satisfactions of teaching extend beyond the academic...indeed, the most lasting contributions come from saving lives, rescuing a child from despair, restoring a sense of hope, soothing discomfort. We remember these occasions longest because they matter” (pg. 31).

Memoir insert 1: A spiritual warfare between hope and despair. I recall a most profound spiritual awareness and connection that forever changed my life and that of an extraordinary student. Although this encounter happened over 10 years ago, I remember it as if it were yesterday, and every time I relive this experience I can clearly see Susan’s face and hear her words, and I clearly understand how external, internal, and eternal compelling forces influences actions. There was definitely no denying that it wasn’t just me behind the lectern that day, there was a stronger force behind the scene.

Exams were to be administered the next day, so it was a review day. I kept thinking of all the things I needed to do that day; make sure homework was collected, graded, reviewed and returned, make sure content was covered and the critical thinking & clinical application questions were discussed, I needed to feel comfortable that everyone had what they needed to be well prepared for their assessment. However, comfortable was the last thing I was feeling, I woke up with flu-like symptoms, when I managed to roll over and check the time on my alarm clock, it was 8:45am and my class begins at 9am – yes, I was alarmed alright! I jumped out of bed and could only muster enough energy to climb back under the covers. With all of my sneezing, coughing, fever, chills and muscle aches, I knew it would be best for me to stay home. I called my department chair to let her know I was sick and needed to report off of work. I could tell she was having a stressful morning already, she shared with me that she had accreditation reports to complete, a conference call, externship site visits, and payroll to submit by noon, there was no way she could cover my class and meet all her deadlines, and I did not leave her enough time to find another instructor to cover my class. As I respectfully listened and understood her concerns, I responded, “Under the circumstances, what would you like me to do?” And she nicely asked if there was any way I could show up for my morning class and then leave. That would give her enough time to meet her deadlines and find an instructor to cover my two afternoon classes; of course I agreed. I had the best supervisor ever, who over the years always did what she could to arrange my teaching schedule to work around my demanding school schedule as a nursing student. So I told her I would be there shortly, the school was only 15 minutes from my house. As I stepped out of the shower and began to get dressed, I began to feel even worse. I reached for my phone, and had decided to call my supervisor back, let her know there was no way I could make it in and apologized for any inconvenience. Something that very

moment got a hold of me, slowly but surely restoring my strength and all I could feel was a sense of urgency, a need to get from my bedroom to the classroom.

Teaching adult learners brings a different set of experiences and challenges to the classroom. This was my 4th or 5th module in which I created a 10-15 minute discussion forum before lecture, I shared motivational and inspirational messages along with coping and critical thinking strategies, and the students were open to share their experiences and stories as well and talk about any issues or concerns they were having. It wasn't long before the excitement was shared amongst their peers how they had to get to class in time because they did not want to miss out on what they referred to as "Ms. G's forum". It was our own version of the Oprah Winfrey show, and as long as it didn't turn into a Jerry Springer show I would continue to include it in our course. It brought awareness of issues, great discussions, and opportunities to explore, examine, learn and connect through shared experiences. However on that day there was absolutely no time to do a discussion forum. I entered the classroom, apologized to my adult learners for being late, informed them I was under the weather and therefore would be keeping my distance as I kept hand sanitizer and disinfected wipes in arms reach. I asked them to get ready to go over their homework and to have their questions ready for our review. And then right before I was getting ready to announce there would be no forum today as I was feeling rushed, a calmness overcame me, I proceeded to call out names to record attendance and then I stood behind the lectern, and something inside of me was saying, "Do...the... Forum!" and then I just began to speak from my heart; the topic and the time eluded me. After class I went straight to my office so I could create and print out the assessments for the students in all three classes for the next day, print out homework answer keys, test review sheet and a lesson plan for my substitute who would be covering my two afternoon classes. Then came the knock on my door,

it was Susan. Susan has never come to my office before, she rarely speaks in class unless I call on her. She is a straight A student, and her work always exceeds expectations. I always found myself wondering about Susan and the reason she chose to attend a technical institute instead of enrolling into a traditional college. She was definitely well prepared for college as an honor student and a high school graduate, she was unmarried, raised in a middle class family, strong family support system and didn't have any children. She was an exception to the general demographics of the student population most technical institutes serve. When Julie came into my office, her sweet pale face was flushed to red, and her blue eyes were welled up with tears. I handed her a tissue, and then gently laid my hand on her hand and asked her, "What's wrong?" She never told me what was wrong, she just kept thanking me for the inspirational message I shared that day. She told me she had decided to kill herself when she went home after class, and my words saved her life. She never told me why, she just thanked me for changing her mind, and changing her life and then she got up and left my office. I remember being in shock, and then crying the entire drive back home and just thinking about everything; all the different compelling forces that effected my choices that day, thinking about the spiritual war I was experiencing with one spirit trying to push me back in the bed and the other spirit trying to pull me out of the bed, and thinking about the "what ifs," what if I decided to just not come to work? What if my supervisor would have covered my class as she normally does, or found another instructor to substitute for me? What if I decided to not go directly to my office immediately after class? What if I decided to not have the forum that day? What if I would have never thought about implementing or executing the forums at all? What if I didn't listen to my inner voice? And what if I would have allowed myself to be moved by the wrong spirit? So yes I concur with what Eisner so eloquently stated how the most lasting contributions truly do come

from saving lives (sometimes literally), rescuing someone from despair and restoring hope. This is a very big part of the work done by educators who care about the students and who are committed to the success and total well-being of students. It is a sad truth that these duties are

“...not read anywhere in the standards promulgated by a single state agency an objective that aims to achieve a single one of these most lasting contributions. They have clearly nothing to do with the annual yearly progress of any single school, and because they are immeasurable, they are also immaterial (Block, 2009, p. 31).”

In my decades of teaching and learning I have come to realize faith is important in education because endurance is important in educational attainment, one begets the other. Faith is the opposite of doubt, faith is unwavering confidence and a belief in what is to come in the future. Education is built on promises for a better future and a productive life, if you are ready, willing and able to put the work in, and stay the course. There is a biblical scripture from James 1:2-4 (KJV) that reminds me of this:

“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.”

I am also reminded of a conversation I had with a dear family member and friend of mine, Dr. Charsie Randolph-Sawyer, a renown opera singer, and a professor in the music department at Calvin College. Her worldwide travels would also bring her to the Hampton roads area at least once a year for the annual Hampton Universities Ministers' Conference. She would always find time to visit my family and me, and we would talk for hours on end about many things that centered on spiritual, musical and educational experiences and projects. The last time she came

to visit, I had the honor of being able to listen to musical pieces that were going to be included in her book released in 2015, “Gospel Vocalises & Warm Ups: engaging the mind, body and spirit. My favorite gospel vocal warm up is “Yes, Yes, Yes (Surrender)” I felt the spirit moving in me, and my heart opening, and the heightening of my emotions every single time I listened to this piece. I shared with her my journey and my educational goal to one day earn my doctorates. She encouraged me to continue and said something that has always stuck with me, “the biggest test is the test of endurance.” I started back on my educational journey as a non-traditional student in 2005 to date, I can attest to the importance of having faith and endurance in order to achieve academic goals.

Memoir insert 2: The little black girl in the middle of a big white world. In 1972, as far back as I can remember I have always been one of few, and in a picture of me in kindergarten being placed standing in the middle, you will see I was the only black female in a predominately white classroom setting. And although I cannot recall any particularly bad or good experiences while in kindergarten, still the little girl inside of me cries when I see this picture. Therefore in my spirit I seriously doubt if my first formal learning experiences was mostly positive. Without initially sharing my thoughts and feelings about this picture with my mother, I showed it to her and asked if she recalled anything about my kindergarten experience. She remembered how I complained of a stomach ache practically every morning before having to go to school. She said there were often times when the school would call her at work to come pick me up early from school due to my complaint of illness. I wonder what or who in my kindergarten class kept making me sick! I also wonder about my parents’ thoughts, conversations, and actions regarding what I was experiencing. Was it that they were only able to remedy the symptoms of my pain, and not the cause? Maybe my actual or perceived illness was of an unknown etiology, then

again maybe it was not. Maybe despite my little discomforts, this picture represents a bigger battle that was won. For I was the little black girl who was accepted in this school, and then positioned to stand in the center of my class for pictures. This accomplishment made my parents proud I'm sure (although it seemed to make me sick) because I was not bussed to this school for desegregation purposes, my family lived in this area called Galloway Township. This township however was separated by a highway in which on one side black families lived, and on the other side were white families; the latter is where my family lived, on the other side. The high school principal was one of our white neighbors, his son and my brother were high school friends. At times I would follow my older sister across the highway to play with our one and only black friend, named Mary Anne. And although racial discrimination existed, it was in deed more subtle here up North, than what I am sure Blacks experienced down South. However, separation by socioeconomic status was evident. Even in my memory of joining my sister to play with her best friend Mary Anne, I remember our physical differences, she was dark skinned, I was brown skinned; her clothes and shoes were very worn out, my clothes and shoes were not; her hair was short and "untamed," mine was long and tamed by a hot straightening iron. And although for a moment we noticed external differences that showed distinction within our race, and between the have and have nots, to us it mattered not; what mattered most was between the three of us, who got the most kisses from Johnny? Although there actually was no Johnny and no kissing going on, yet it was an important part of the jump rope rhyme that determined who could jump rope the longest as we would chant together: "Down in the valley – Where the green grass grows – There sat Jeanne – Sweet as a rose- She sang, she sang, she sang so sweet – Then along came Johnny – Who kissed her on the cheek – How many kisses did she get this week? – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5..."

I can't help but to wonder if I had that same experience with any of my peers in Mrs. Nolan's class, or with any of my white friends on the side where I lived. Clearly the tables were now turned, it was my skin that was darker, my clothes that were different, my hair untamed, but after noticing our differences, were my white class mates able to get pass it, be friends, and jump rope together? I wonder what Mrs. Nolan did or failed to do to promote harmony and cultural sensitivity. I wonder who was making me sick every day and I'm sure as a child I wondered back then how they would feel if someone made them feel the same way. I wonder why even now as an adult, I can only remember jumping rope with my sister and Mary Anne on the other side of the road?

The child has a special capacity for love. Long before the capacity for sustained reasoning develops, there is the capability of tenderness, of feeling, and reciprocation...But the child, I think, is responding to natural inclination, and that inclination is encouraged by the caring that nourishes him. The early years of a child's life...establish the host of concrete situations, the memories, and the ground against which things are later thought through. So far as is possible, the words and acts of those caring must confirm that they do care, for when the message is ambiguous, the child has to entertain the thought that either he is not cared-for or it is permissible to hurt those we care for. So he looks for reasons and tries things out. Perhaps he even wonders whether others are hurt by the kinds of things that hurt him. (Noddings, 2013, p. 120)

This picture was evidence that my mom and dad were moving up in life and doors of opportunity were being opened for their children. My father worked his way up to the position of a supervisor for Lennox China (which is why my siblings and I in honor of his memory and work dedication we still buy our mother Lennox China collection pieces on special occasions),

my mother worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant and furthered her education to become a nurse. Though the early 70's was a period defined by sex, drugs and rock-and-roll for many; for my parents it was time defined by hard work, continued studies and achievement.

Now here I sit 44 years later, looking back on my past and reflecting on how it has had an impact on my life. As I stare at this slender brown skinned little girl in a bright floral dress, small pearl drop earrings, and hair styled with a bang and two pony tails filled with banana curls held together by matching hair bows. Thoughts roam through my mind of what I would say to the little black girl in the middle; what lessons have I learned and what advice would I give to my younger self?

Life's lesson #1. "Lil' Jeanne, just like that dress you were wearing in your kindergarten picture, you are pretty, bright and colorful, three very strong and wonderful traits that will always make others either like you, resent you, or wish they could be you."

Life's lesson #2. "Never let *anyone* make you feel less than. Never think you are better than. And know you can do more than you think you can through Christ that strengthens you."

Memoir insert #3: My acceptance... only in a letter. I remember my childhood with my mother in a most special way, sitting on her bed as a child and enjoying watching her either get dressed for church with her custom made suits complimented by the most beautiful hats and shoes or boots imaginable. If it was cold outside she would wear the softest leather coats, or mink stole, or one of her finest genuine fur coats. We were always dressed in our Sunday best. Oh how we loved going to church, listening to the preacher deliver the Word, singing with the choir, and praising the Lord. It didn't matter how sharply dressed a member or visitor was coming into the church, if they were as we say, "hit by the holy ghost," their attire mattered not. Then when she would dress for work she would put on her girdle as she maintained her girlish

figure even after giving birth to three children, and then she would put on her white opaque stockings, and then step into her crisp clean white nursing dress with her white polished shoes topped off with her white nursing hat. My mother was seven months pregnant with me when she walked across the stage to receive her nursing degree. Four decades later now I was enrolled in nursing school and my mother was so proud of me returning to school to become a nurse, and she shared this information with everyone, to include her co-workers in the healthcare setting where she worked as a nurse supervisor. And our neighbors were medical doctors and nurses who are like family to us, they watched me every morning get up and go to school, and gave me encouragement and support while I attended nursing school. My mother, sister and I lived together, and together we raised my daughter and supported each other in our personal and professional journey. Our family dynamics was not traditional, and at times the makeup of our household would be questioned, or if having to disclose information of our household I would often times get “that look,” and even at times a slick comment such as, “oh you still live with your mother” then of course I would take the time to clarify and simplify the understanding of my family dynamics by using the sitcom “The Golden Girls” as a lifestyle comparison. Because we were African American women living in a multi-generational home, it was often times presumed or statements would imply our living arrangement was need-based or that we likely lived in an economically depressed area, which was furthest from the truth. We referred to ourselves as the Black Golden Girls because we were much like the characters in that sitcom. They were four career-oriented mature women living together by choice in Miami, we were four career-oriented mature women living together by choice in Virginia Beach. They were experiencing the joy and angst of their golden years, as were my mother, sister and I. In aligning characters, my sister was considered more like Dorothy, since she was strong willed and a

teacher. My mother of course was the matriarch of the family honest and spunky like Sophia, however not as old and still actively overworking as a nurse supervisor until retiring in her late 70's. Then there's me, out of the two characters left, it was unanimously voted that I was definitely more like Blanche and far from being spacey like Rose. I was okay with that somewhat, having character traits of being free-spirited, having a boisterous personality and being fashionable, but then there's the heavy drinking and promiscuous side of her personality that is unlike me; In over the past decade, I could not experience such a wild side even in my wildest dreams; because in order for me to perform my best in both roles as a facilitator of adult learning and as a full time adult learner it necessitated trading in my social butterfly status and becoming a social recluse instead. "Short term sacrifice for long term gain," a saying I would remind myself, my adult learners, and tell others. However, in all honesty for me it has truly been a long term sacrifice for what could very well be a short term gain. Nevertheless I wouldn't change a thing because I simply love teaching and learning, and don't regret committing my life to it.

While in nursing school, the bond between my mother and I became even closer as we talked about nursing cases and discussed nursing care plans. While I attended nursing school I was also still working in the evenings as Medical Assistant adjunct instructor and had worked in this capacity with various proprietary for profit learning institutes back and forth for over ten years. My goal was to complete the registered nursing degree and become a nurse educator, it would have been the perfect blend of the two fields I was most passionate about.

It was close to graduation, and I was in my third year of nursing school, having completed the first year of prerequisites and the following two years of nursing courses and clinicals in an Associate Degree Registered Nursing program at a Historically Black College and

University. My experience as a non-traditional nursing student showed me a part of an academic world that was uncaring, unsupportive and unprofessional. It was an extremely unpleasant experience for me every step of the way. I joined the Honors program that was not affiliated with nursing to satisfy my desire to be intellectually challenged, valued, and strengthened. And although I enjoyed being a distinguished student member of the Honors Program and on the executive committee of the Virginia Collegiate Honors Council where I was able to co-chair a conference, present my scholarly work publicly and engage in colloquial conversations with peers and faculty members from various colleges throughout Virginia, I was still criticized for not joining the “nursing” honors program instead. It is my strong belief that I became the head of the departments target for destruction from day 1 of acceptance into the program. As everyone knows getting into a registered nursing program is highly competitive and for many schools there’s a waiting list with students who have been waiting for years. I had received a grant from Opportunity, Inc., and I was very excited about being afforded the “opportunity” to return to school and complete my education. There were contingencies with this grant, one being that the program selected had to be a 2-year educational program that leads to a certificate or degree. I did my homework and knew immediately the best choice for me was to attend a 4-year college and complete its associate’s degree nursing program with the grant I was awarded. I knew I wanted to attain my bachelor’s degree, and I did not want to be stuck with 2 years of credits from a school that would not transfer to a university. I had my career plan all laid out. I had committed myself to my studies for my freshman year, completing all pre-nursing and prerequisite courses with a 3.8 GPA. Shortly afterwards I was accepted into the honors program and was subsequently elected as a student official in the Virginia Collegiate

Honors Council. My academic goals were clear, to become an exceptional non-traditional student and to get accepted into the nursing program.

It was summer, the nursing department was chaotic, staff and faculty were extremely busy processing applications and preparing for the start of the new year. Fall quarter was soon approaching. Acceptance letters had gone out, many of my peers had received theirs, and I had not. I would run to meet the mailman at my mailbox every day, and still no letter.

So I drove to the school to meet with the nursing staff member who was responsible for processing applications. I respectfully introduced myself, and shared with her that I had met all the expectations and completed the pre-nursing courses with a 3.8 GPA, and wanted to know if I was accepted into the program. With a stern face she turned and looked at me and said, "I don't care if you had a 4.0 GPA that don't mean you will be accepted into the program!" I was in shock and confused, I didn't know what to do, all I could do is walk away like a sad puppy. All I could think about was that I had 72 hours left to present an acceptance letter to my case worker or else I would lose my \$10,000 grant and the opportunity to go back to school. I began praying and wandering aimlessly on campus from one building to the next. I ended up passing a classroom of one of my former instructors. I must have looked totally distraught. She called my name, asked me to come in and sit down and tell her what's wrong. I began to explain. She suggested that I speak with the Dean of the department of science and technology. I didn't understand why I would go there, I didn't understand the hierarchical organizational structure of universities. She explained how the nursing department falls under the department of science and technology. So I followed her suggestion, went to that building and department. I remember the aesthetics were quite lovely. Nice carpeting, pictures, plants and elegant executive office furniture. The administrative assistant at the front desk pleasantly greeted me. I asked if I

could meet with the dean and explained I didn't have an appointment however I needed to speak with her. She picked up the phone to intercom her and then escorted me to her office. She opened the door to this huge beautiful office, the face on this woman was angelic, and I immediately felt a sense of peace. She gestured for me to come in and have a seat. Tears began to well up in my eyes. She handed me a tissue and said to me, "tell me your name and what's wrong." I shared with her that I was prospective nursing student who had completed my 1st year of pre-nursing courses, meeting all the requirements for entry into the program. I further explained, I was awarded a grant, however I now have 72 hours to present an acceptance letter or I will lose my grant and opportunity to continue my education. She listened, gave me her undivided attention, and then entered my information in the computer, looked over my transcript and complimented me on my performance. I shared with her I was also in the honors program and elected student vice-president of the Virginia Collegiate Honors Council. She looked up, smiled and said to me, "so you're the reason our school will be hosting the upcoming VCHC conference." Through the sniffles, I said, "Yes, ma'am." She then looked at me so caringly, told me to go home, and said, "It's never as bad as it seems." Two days later I received my acceptance letter. One of the happiest days of my life, I was overjoyed, my mother was overjoyed and all of my family and friends who were supportive. I quickly took it to my caseworker at Opportunity Inc. who placed it in my file and told me when I receive my schedule of courses and credits for that semester to bring it in and she will write a check for the tuition. I was so happy, I had a second chance to complete college and I vowed to commit myself wholeheartedly to excelling in my studies.

My happiest days on campus changed really quickly. It wasn't too long before I began to notice snares, sarcasm, and feeling backlashes from faculty members and nursing administration.

It didn't matter how nice or respectful I was to the faculty and staff, many of them showed unkind verbal and non-verbal gestures, or if I asked a question the answer would be short and in a sharp tone. At first I didn't understand what was going on, then as I thought about it, it all began to make sense. I stepped on the dean of the nursing departments toes by going over her head to speak with the dean of the department of science and technology, and there was hell to pay and I was in her house now. On one particular occasion I will never forget. I had to drop off a document to go into my nursing student file. I went to the front desk administrative assistant, who was a nice older lady. We would always smile at each other and extend pleasantries. During this time both the Associate Degree Registered Nursing program and Bachelor of Science Registered Nursing program offices were together. Therefore she handled the student files for both. The Dean of nursing office was two doors down from the reception area. So, I came in all bubbly and the administrative assistant and I were engaging in small talk. I had handed her a document that needed to be placed in my file. The administrative assistant simply asked me if I was in the BSN program. Before I could say no, the dean of nursing comes marching around the corner and says to her, "Oh please, don't make her any more than what she think she is!" And then she proceeded to drop something on her desk, glared at me, turned her head and then returned to her office. It was a very awkward moment for the both of us as we just stood there. The administrative assistant gave me this very apologetic look, shaking her head. I smiled at her and said it's okay, you didn't do anything wrong, and let her know that I was in the ADN program, and thanked her for filing my document. Those words from that dean have been etched and repeated in my mind for a decade now. "Don't make her any more than what she think she is!" It bothered me terribly. As an instructor, I based my success on the success of my adult learners. And my goal was to build learners up and prepare them to be successful in their

perspective careers, and encourage them to do more and become more than what they think they can. Well, that was confirmation enough for me. So what does a nursing student do when they are disliked by the head of nursing, and many of the faculty and staff followers, just follow suit? Well, I stayed focused, remained respectful and displayed confidence and an eagerness to learn whatever was to be taught. I began to form study groups, make study guides, and find ways to simplify complex concepts and content to help my fellow peers gain a better understanding, I shared test taking strategies that would help with their test performance. Unlike many students, I wasn't concerned with being at the top of the class, I cared about the performance of my classmates and our entire class as a whole. I cared about the reputation of the school and the nursing program I was now affiliated with, and despite the negative public views and the low NCLEX-RN pass rates reported, I still wanted to believe in the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) spirit, the HBCU mission and the ability to rise above challenges and to achieve with excellence despite any negativity or adversity.

We made it, graduation is almost here. Only three months left out of three years. Unfortunately, a few students dropped out from the program along the way, but those of us who were left we created a bond that made us even closer, stronger, wiser and better. With that being said, it should have come as no surprise that Marvin Sapp, "Never Could Have Made It" song became our anthem song. So many of my peers expressed gratitude to me for helping them throughout the program. I thanked them in return for helping to make my nursing experience amongst peers a positive interaction, and I was grateful to them looking out for me as well. We became each other's wingman, we became like family to each other, and we were counting down the days until our pinning ceremony and then the day we walk down the aisle with our cap and gowns together. We had endured many years of all night long studying and writing nursing

process papers, then having to get up early in the morning to meet at our clinical site by 7am, and then return to campus for more lecture, testing and simulation labs. It was a rigorous never ending cycle of demanding work.

It was the last summer before graduation. All we had left to do was complete a clinical assignment. Everyone was given a different clinical procedure to learn and perform on the mannequin. You had to be able to recite each step in order, perform each step on the mannequin and provide the rationale for everything you do. My clinical procedure was a catheter insertion. I had practiced this procedure countless times in the clinical lab, simulations, and watched videos, read the textbook, and reviewed it with my peers and my mother until I had it down pack. All students were given a day and time to come back to campus and perform their clinical procedure. For some reason I had confused the dates and was a day late of my assigned date. When I realized it, I went to see my clinical instructor (who everyone knew she didn't particularly care for me) she managed the clinical lab and was one of the few full time clinical instructors left, there was a high turnover of instructors. When I apologized and explained to her my oversight, asking if she would please allow me the chance to perform the skill for her. She refused, as she returned to her office to finish eating. The clinical lab and campus was empty given that it was summer break. I asked her again if she could reschedule me for any day and time that would be convenient for her so that I can perform my 15 minute clinical procedure. I even expressed my willingness to perform two clinical procedures for her if I must be penalized and take accountability for missing my clinical lab date. Again, she refused. I asked her, "Well, what am I supposed to do?" She got up from her chair, looked me straight in the face and with a slave-like grammar use and tone and in a mocking manner, she says to me, "What weeze gonna do? What weeze gonna do?" and then she looks at me sternly and says, "I don't know what

you're going to do, but I'm going to give you an F and email it to the dean." Then I went to the Dean of nursing's office with some hope that she would fairly evaluate the situation and make some sort of concession, bearing in my what I had accomplished and contributed to the program and school over the past three years. She supported her decision and explained to me I would be pushed back, the class would be audited and I would graduate with the next class. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I couldn't believe the look of "check mate" that was on both of their faces. I couldn't believe none of this was happening. The news spread quickly around campus that I wouldn't be graduating with my peers I had been with for 3 years. Two mean-spirited people made a decision that changed the course of my life. I was angry, I was disappointed, and I was hurt beyond repair. I couldn't imagine robbing a student of the opportunity to graduate at the anticipated time with their classmates over something that could be easily corrected. That was it for me, I was no longer going to just accept whatever mess is douched out until you get the degree in your hand and never look back, it was about so much more for me as an adult learner, and an educator of adult learners. I believed college students should receive the type of quality education and care that makes graduates not only want to look back, but as alumni want to give back. I wanted to see change. My faith in the educational system and in nursing needed to be restored. However, I knew that was not going happen any time soon, so I withdrew from the school. Even with the thought of being so close to completion, just the thought of hanging a degree from that nursing program and putting it on my transcript made me ill, for it only would serve as a constant reminder of the things effective and caring educators are to avoid doing at all cost. And this was my nursing school experience, a most painful and unforgettable memory.

From that point I transferred out and completed my undergrad at Virginia Wesleyan College where my faith in teaching and adult learning was restored, then I completed my

graduate studies at Virginia Tech where my teaching and learning experience blossomed even more, and now I am finishing my post-graduate studies at University of Wisconsin – Stout, which has been another greatly satisfying learning experience. The intellectual and spiritual connection I have made with faculty and colleagues at all three of these institutions is outstanding and consistently exceeded my expectations. What all three schools had in common was that irrespective of race, culture, religion or creed, they cared about my individual needs on every level, constantly evaluating, guiding and strengthening my knowledge, skills and abilities in order to intellectually and spiritually build me up to be more than what I thought I could ever be. All three of these schools are predominately white colleges and universities, however it was the best fit for me because the connection was genuine, and the type of growth fostered was all encompassing, and lifelong. It not only made me a better adult learner and educator, it made me want to continuously strive to attain an even higher degree of knowledge in the field of education in order to make systemic change.

Promoting a holistic educational experience for minority students necessitates a genuine connection with minority students and understanding the concerns and issues that may be unique to them as minorities. For example, repetitive experiences of being looked over, devalued, disrespected and stereotyped. As educators and leaders in education, we must be aware of the discomforts, fear and stress our students face. If we cannot eradicate it, we must at least minimize it. We can do this by creating an environment that promotes kindness, confidence, respect and cooperation in order to create a caring environment conducive to learning. As educators we must show that we are competent and caring individuals who link our success to the success and total well-being of our learners. A holistic educational experience factors the psychological, physiological, and spiritual entities of the individual. It is not total well-being

unless the mind, body and spirit are nurtured and cared for with understanding that minority populations can benefit from care and practices regarding circumstances and conditions that are unique to them to help them reach their full potential.

This is to not to say such barriers and conditions are always the commonly perceived obstacles to success of minority students, such as lack of financial and moral support, inadequate college preparation, no child daycare, and no transportation. As in my case, returning to college and entering a 2-year RN program at a Historically Black College and University as a non-traditional student with many years of experience working as an allied healthcare instructor. I had a strong family support circle, I continued my employment as an instructor, my only child was a Sophomore in college so needing childcare was not an issue, I had two cars so transportation was not an issue, and I think college prep began in Kindergarten for me, if not then, it definitely occurred throughout the rest of my years of Catholic education up to the 12th grade. As I moved from one predominately white school to the next, I began to wear my plaid skirt and white shirt with pride. I began to perceive being a product of Catholic education, as a privilege afforded to me through the sacrifice and hard work of my mother (my father was deceased during that time, and my mother never remarried). She raised three children as a single parent working two jobs as a nurse, one income to double shifts as a nurse to pay household expenses and the other to pay my school tuition. Education is a value in my family. I learned at an early age that quality education cost, however ignorance cost most.

Summary of Discussion Amongst Family Members

This study was discussed, interviewed and transcribed from the views and personal experiences of the following three family members. The first family member is my attorney, the second family member is my first cousin who completed her undergrad in Marketing and works

in the accounting field, and the third family member is my mother who is a retired nurse having served 50 years in the healthcare field. There were new themes that emerged.

Knowing You Are Not Alone

The first family member shared: I believe everything comes from the spirit, meaning your creator. I think that you draw all of your power from that relationship.

It was important through law school and other schools I attended, including undergrad, it was important because you know you're not alone, you don't have to succeed by your own strength, there is a power greater than you that you can draw upon to help you succeed.

The second family member shared: From day 1 I was taught to be a spiritual person first, and so being a spiritual person again allowed me to believe that you know I can do anything by having faith, you can do all things through God who strengthens you. So all things from a little girl starts with going to school and knowing that you can get good grades and knowing that if you apply yourself and if you believe in yourself through your faith in God that will pull you through.

The third family member shared: With the problems and situations that I experienced in nursing, that was many, but at the end of the day it was all to my good and to God be the glory because the problems were resolved. I end up in my nursing career became a floor nurse, to a charge nurse to a supervisor, even with them changing some of the rules that were mandated years and years ago because of the potential they saw in me. I became the nurse of the month and I became the nurse of the year. All the accolades were awarded simply because of my devote belief in God being a super natural power, leading me, instilling the power within me to energize my mind, my body and my soul, believing that He would guide me, that He would empower me, and that He would protect me.

Spirituality and Moving Onward

The first family member shared: In law school it was more prominent, my spirituality that is, because I did go to a private Christian law school and I felt liberated for the first time in my life as a learner who had the ability to use my spirituality unabashedly and unashamedly in an academic environment. So I thought my spirituality was a great asset as well as other spiritualities of my classmates, we were all able to pray and encourage each other in a spiritual manner, to support each other in a spiritual manner, it wasn't a offense to pray for each in class, after class, before class, study and pray together for different courses and classes, so in law school my spirituality definitely helped me proceed and matriculate

The second family member shared: When I express spirituality mine is inward, so mine is coming from who I am as an individual, what I've gone through as a person, the different things I have learned over the years about being an AA, about being an AA woman and the struggle. So when I holler Halleluiah or Thank You Jesus mine is not just about that one moment in time that I'm speaking of at that point, mine brings everything together, it's more of a cohesive thing about who I am as a person, what my struggle has been and how it's brought me through. So when I say it, I'm talking about everything of who I am in addition to that moment in time because I'm very thankful and y I'm very grateful, instead of it just being aligned with religion, where I noticed some of the non AA people, when they say it they're only speaking of that one particular time, so if they say Thank you Jesus, they are literally thanking Jesus for getting them through that particular instant versus a life long struggle of I had hardship, and I've had problems, and I've been discriminated against I've had struggles, so when I holler it, it's very emotional and it's very heart felt and it comes from deep within from generations and generations of people who had to rely on faith just to make it through the next day.

The third family member shared: In education your mind and body must believe beyond your circumstance. Specially in the AA and minority races because of the undermine of society dating back to our forefathers higher education was obsolete due to our circumstance, finances, race, family and etc. I found that because of spiritual value, I visualized beyond the circumstance, beyond the race, finances and family obligations and etc.

Most importantly we must believe, we must at all times believe that we are a victor, and being a victor is because that we believe in action influenced by the power of the spirit and we must *not* succumb and become a victim, influenced by doubts of the spirit.

My Mother's Nursing Experience and Implications to How Financial Obligations of Non-traditional Students Can Be Met While Attending School Full Time

I was ever so honored and privileged to be able to interview a dedicated, compassionate, highly respected nurse who served in this field over 50 years...my mother. The following is parts of her response to questions I presented to her in our interview. I will treasure this always.

If spirituality wasn't incorporated in my journey, I wouldn't have accomplished what I did in this life. I recall back when I was nurse's aide and I then had a vision of one day being a nurse. And I continued to believe in that vision even in the hard times with my family and growing up and then after I became an adult with my own family and children. I was successful because of my spirituality belief that my director of nurses saw the potential in me. She called me to the office and said that I should be a nurse. And I explained to her again my circumstance, my financial problems, my being obligated raising a family, etc. but she enabled me to, strengthen and believe in my belief the vision that I can look beyond my circumstances. She written out a resume, and she written an application and sent it to the school of nursing. Still in the back of my mind it was little doubt that I wouldn't be accepted before I got to that part of the

stage of my life I would have doubted I would be accepted because that had happened to me as a teenager when I applied to the school of nursing and I was denied entry. At the end the day I found it, it wasn't because of the exam that I took, but it was because they had a certain percentage as far as racial that they had to meet, a quota. And I just so happen at that time by me being a minority, they had already reached their quota, so I was eliminated. That was back in the 50's.

But because I had grown in wisdom in knowledge of the spirit of God and the power of God, as when I became an adult and got to this stage where this DON with me being an adult, wanted to send a resume and recommendation, my faith was stronger to believe that I would be accepted because I had always experienced the circumstances and had experienced what the power of believe in a super natural power can give. So I did receive the letter that I was accepted and after I received the letter that I was accepted not only was I overjoyed and my director of nurses was overjoyed she still knew I had a problem because of the other circumstances, financial obligation and raising my family, I had two kids at the time. But mainly because of my financial obligations I couldn't just quit work for school. So the director of nurses arranged my work schedule so I can continue to work and receive the same pay, my finances would remain the same and I continued to work but what she done was that she placed me on a floor where there was hardly no patients and a quiet atmosphere where I would be able to study at work, and that was how I was able to go to school and complete my nursing and receive my nursing degree.

Years later, I was working at another place. I still wanted to elevate and become an RN, and this place that I worked at was a Veterans place and so years after working there, they developed and implemented a program where you can work and they would give you a full scholarship to attend college for a 4 year nursing program and you would stay on the pay roll.

Your only obligation was after you completed your nursing program you had to commit to working at least two years for that company. And that is what so many nursing corporations need to implement particularly for the minority students, and there would be more non-traditional attending the nursing program if there were programs like that implemented.

So I went on with the problems and situations that I experienced in nursing, that was many, but at the end of the day it was all to my good and to God be the glory because the problems were resolved. I end up in my nursing career became a floor nurse, to a charge nurse to a supervisor, even with them changing some of the rules that were mandated years and years ago because of the potential they saw in me. I became the nurse of the month and I became the nurse of the year. All the accolades were awarded simply because of my devote belief in God being a super natural power, leading me, instilling the power within me to energize my mind, my body and my soul, believing that He would guide me, that He would empower me, and that He would protect me.

Yes, I believe that spirituality should be incorporated in the education curriculum in particular nursing, for one reason for a nurse to continue with the problems of the day, the problems that she is going to encounter with the nursing staff, and with the medical staff and with the patients and their families, if you don't have that spirituality really really embedded into your mind, you may end up like many nurses I've seen throw their hands up and go into another field. So you must have a belief that there is power beyond your power that will help you to endure and sustain you and lead and guide you in the path of doing your work.

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to examine how minority nursing students perceive spirituality and their spiritual well-being, and to identify influential spiritual factors in nursing degree attainment based on minority student nurses' perspectives of their experiences in predominantly Black postsecondary nursing programs. Few studies have explored spiritual factors influencing retention and attrition rates of minority students in higher education in health professions. By understanding the educational and spiritual experiences from a minority nursing student's perspective in a predominately black educational institute, this may increase awareness and promote changes to teaching and learning in a way that will better meet educational needs holistically and reduce minority attrition rates.

The research questions of this study were:

- 1) How does spirituality impact the nursing education experience of African American Registered Nursing students in post-secondary CTE institutions of higher education?
- 2) How do African American Registered Nursing students perceive spirituality and their spiritual well-being?

Questions presented in the individual interview were open-ended in nature in order to promote discussion, reflection, and sharing of experiences. In the data collection process discussion sessions were audio recorded and transcribed. The content from the interviews/discussions were used to identify and categorize common themes. All participants were reminded that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by the researcher, all participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and without any penalty.

At the heart of phenomenology lies the question of how we relate to others (Goldsmith, 2010). This phenomenological qualitative study explored the experiences of being minority SN enrolled in a predominantly black nursing program in a post-secondary proprietary for profit institute of learning. In this qualitative descriptive study conducting interviews (individual or group) as a research method will be used. Interviewing is the primary way that qualitative researchers gather data (Brown, Lyndsay, & Durrheim, 2009; Roulston, 2010)...there are a variety of methods used by qualitative researchers to gather data, individual interviewing (on a continuum from high structure to low or no structure), focus group interviewing (again on a continuum), and online interview (Lichtman, 2013).

Participant Selection and Description

The target population of this study were African American registered nursing students in a post-secondary CTE academic setting. Participants were reached through recruitment at the school. The researcher was provided a schedule of nursing classes to meet with nursing students in all four levels. The study was explained and students were provided a piece of paper to include their name, age, contact information, program level and race if interested in participating. Based on meeting inclusion criteria 14 students were selected. Out of the 14 students who qualified 11 students were able to be reached, the contact means provided for the 3 other students was with a phone number that was either not in service or the wrong number, or no email was provided. Of the 11 students who were contacted and scheduled for interviews 2 students cancelled, 1 student was a no show, and 1 student interviewed, however the recorder did not record the interview and she was unable reschedule. The study consisted of 7 minority nursing students, 6 females and 1 male, selected at different levels of the nursing program, levels one, two, three and four that would be the equivalent distinction between Freshman, Sophomore,

Junior and Senior status. One of the seven students initially indicated “other” as his race, he and the other participant who was not recorded noted their race is African. By including nursing students from all four levels of the program, this increased the representativeness of the sample population.

Instrumentation

The researcher used individual interviews as an instrument in this qualitative study. Although a set of questions were prepared, the interview was semi-structured allowing the participants the opportunity to share more information in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

The interview questions were first presented to my advisor and modifications were made based on suggestions to better align the interview questions with the research questions. The interview questions were also presented and discussed to a group of four family members from various academic backgrounds and professions, contributor one, my daughter a fine arts major working as an interior designer for colleges; contributor two my attorney, and contributor three my mother, a retired nurse, and the fourth contributor, my first cousin business marketing major working in the accounting field. The last three contributors were actually interviewed and their response to all of the questions were transcribed. The open-ended provided the opportunity for participants to talk and present a wider variation of answers. The questions were considered to be clearly understood and no one indicated or showed any feelings of discomfort based on the questions.

Data Collection Procedures

The study was conducted on campus in a classroom setting with 7 nursing students at different levels of the program (levels 1-4). Participants were provided a copy of the consent to participate form. The information was read by the researcher to each participant before the

statement of consent was signed and dated. The signed page was kept by the researcher.

Confidentiality was maintained by using a coding system instead of the participant's names so that they will not be identified. The coding system was executed by distributing a piece of paper with typed instructions that allowed each student to generate their own alphanumeric code and write the code in a space provided. The instructions were as follows:

Number of places you lived in the past five years, if more than 9 enter 9. First letter of the last name of your high school favorite teacher. If unknown, enter A. How many close friends did you have while completing your nursing program? If more than 9, enter 9. First letter of your mother's maiden name. If unknown, enter A. First letter of the city/town your father was born. If unknown, enter A. Number of siblings of your maternal grandmother. If unknown, enter 1. Enter your code here _____

Through the use of open-ended questions which encourages participants to talk and provide a greater variety of answers, participants were able to reflect and discuss their spiritual experiences and perceptions of spirituality in education. The information shared was recorded and transcribed. Everyone was reminded of confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Methodology and Data Analysis

Content analysis was performed on the data transcribed from individual interviews to identify themes and categories to describe the nursing student's spiritual experiences throughout their educational journey. Each line from the transcription was analyzed to determine the coding, categories and themes from each individual interview. After the categories and themes were analyzed and compared to each other, the results of the content analysis was presented. Key issues that emerged from the categorization of data were then identified as to how or if

distinction was made between spirituality and religiosity, and verification of relationships were examined to find patterns and themes that reveal how important spirituality is in education.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is lack of generalizability due to the sample size being very small (7 total participants). This small sample size will not be representative of the minority population as a whole that is of interest. There was also lack of clarity or understanding in some of the questions with regard to what is meant by “non-minority peers”, and what is meant by the term “spiritual values.” There was also a variety of cultural factors including but not limited to racial, cultural and religious differences of the participants (one participant was African, one participant was Jehovah witness). Lastly, although most participants were able to clearly distinguish between being spiritual and being religious in the beginning, as the interview continued mostly all participants began to intertwine the two concepts of spirituality and religiosity based on their responses to subsequent questions.

Summary

African American registered nursing students’ perceptions and experiences of spirituality presents thoughts and feelings that need to be further explored in order to gain more insight as to how and why spirituality makes a difference in the college experience of African American nursing students. There is a great disparity of African American students enrolled, graduating and working in the nursing field. Career and Technical Education (CTE) institutes play a vital role in adding more minority nurses to the community by offering nursing programs. These CTE institutes can benefit by learning how spirituality influences attrition rates, and using that information to integrate spirituality into school curriculums and add certified spiritual counselors and school psychologist to their nursing faculty and staff team.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter presents the results of a study that addressed the following research questions:

- 1) Examine how spirituality impact the nursing education experience of African American registered nursing students in post-secondary CTE institutes of higher education, and
- 2) Examine how African American registered nursing students perceive spirituality and their spiritual well-being.

Participants were 6 African American and 1 African registered nursing student. The sample consisted of 7 total participants. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Demographic Participation

The sample included seven minority nursing students (6 African American females, 1 African male) enrolled at a community college in the state of Virginia. All participants provided their ages, ranging from 21 to 42, with a mean age of 31.28. From all the participants who provided their age, 6 of 7 participants were older than age 25, which is defined by the university as a “nontraditional student.” Participants were relatively distributed across their level in the nursing program (Freshman = Level 1; Sophomore = Level 2; Junior = level 3; Senior = level 4). Two students were level 1; One student was level 2; Two students were level 3; Two students were level 4. Three of the seven students provided their Grade Point Average (GPA) 3.2; 3.3; 3.4, with an average of 3.3 GPA. The relationships with the age and GPA could not be examined only hypothesized due to insufficient data.

As it relates to spirituality, 6 of 7 of the African American and African nursing students acknowledged or reported believing in God. Only 1 participant did not actually referring to the higher being as God specifically, instead she referred to the higher being as “the Man above.” And another participant acknowledged she didn’t believe in Jesus and the holy bible, however still acknowledged or reported believing in God. Overall, the African American and African nursing students in this sample reported high levels of spirituality irrespective of their level in the program.

Themes from the Individual Interviews

The researcher independently transcribed each individual interview and reviewed the transcriptions of the interview sessions. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the responses to each question. There were six themes that became apparent through this study: (1) The presence of and ability to connect with a higher being; (2) Attributing determining factors of success (i.e. determination, endurance, good guidance, higher level thinking and communication, understanding and strength) to one’s spirituality and/or creator; (3) Confusion separating spirituality from religiosity; (4) Spirituality aids in/strengthens coping and learning abilities; (5) Perceived lack of school support and a well-balanced education; (6) Perceived greater struggle as a minority creates a greater sense of spirituality and a deeper, and more outward expression of praise.

The attribution theory is seen as very relevant to this field study and supports the findings from a minority nursing student standpoint in which participants’ share how they express spirituality, why they feel it is important, and whether they perceive it to have an impact in their pursuit of higher education to obtain their registered nursing degree.

Theme I: The presence of and ability to connect with a higher being. This theme became apparent through the participant's interactions between peers, instructors, patients, and within one's self. Participants shared their spiritual experiences, conversations, and views of how the presence of and the ability to connect with a higher being affected their nursing school decision, nursing school experience and life choices. One student asserted, "there's people who just believe that there is a higher being and just use that belief to help maneuver life." Another student shared, "spirituality for me on a sense is how I connect with other people. You give off energy, I give off energy; so spiritually either I'm going to accept your energy or not...Nature has a spirit..." Another student revealed, "I've been a licensed practical nurse for about 10 years. I'm seeing where people are, with the changes in the world are more geared now going towards old facilities or hospitals needing more registered nurses. I've been praying about it for a long time. You know all my life I wanted to be a registered nurse..." Another student further explained, "...nursing itself is a ministry so you have to be in the right frame of mind, the right spirit. I feel like everybody is a spiritual being, whether they know it or not, and so we operate in different spirits as we go throughout the day...I feel like spirituality is important in nursing, the right spirituality is important in nursing because we are communicating with each other daily, and I can't, I don't want to pass my bad spirit off to you so I have to make sure that I'm in a good spirit which takes a deity...I feel like you have to be in align with God to be able to in nursing to pass the good spirit off to another person, sort of speak."

In summary of Theme I based on what the participants reported:

- Connection with a higher being helps with dealing with life
- Connection with a higher being and with nature connects us to each other

- Spiritual connection is a form of energy that can be positive (good) or negative (bad), and is transferable from one person to another
- Prayer is a means of connecting to a higher being and receiving guidance and confirmation
- Spirituality is especially important in nursing due to the nature of the job which has been referred to as “a calling” or “a ministry.”

Theme II: Attribute determining factors of success such as determination, endurance, good guidance, understanding, deep introspection and communication, and strength to one’s spirituality and/or his or her creator. One student shared, “I think if it weren’t I mean for my belief in God I don’t believe that I probably would have accomplished what I have in life, and it has definitely helped me with my career choice.” Another student suggested, we [African Americans] attribute a lot of our success in life to God because we have to work so hard to attain it...” She further revealed, “I actually was raised by a very spiritual family and God was a very huge portion of our life. We spent three, four days out of the week going to services and everything like that and I think He is very important, and for my success I feel he has been because I feel like he has directed my steps. With school, I don’t know, I would have to just base it on how he has allowed me to be successful.” Another student exclaimed, “I would not be graduating without the Man above. Before any test or exam we always go in with a prayer, especially over a big one we’ll hold hands and I’m telling you with the grace and spirit of love, He helped us by giving us those correct answers, and kept us awake on those late nights to study, I definitely believe He plays a big role.” Another student shared, “I feel that if you put yourself as being the top of everything then you’re bound to fall...it’s always somebody above you, it’s always something that created that mindset for you, and if you feel like you’re the only

one who does that, then I feel like you're bound to go in any direction, instead of having a concrete understanding of what direction you want to go." Another student explained, "I think that's what we lack a lot of in nursing now a days. If you go to the hospital now you see that nurses don't care, doctors don't care. I think that their spirit is broken...When it comes down to nursing, listening to you talk, and how you're doing, about your past life, you take a person in as a whole, and then you look at the picture and what's broken in that whole piece. What piece of that puzzle is missing? And I believe you have to be spiritual person in order to do that because you need guidance from something. It's not just going to come to you. You need guidance from a higher being or somebody that was here before." Another student stated, "I was brought up to believe you know God will make anything you start, will make it able for you to be successful. So I believe in that higher being guiding me either though my studies or guiding my teachers...I believe as an end result...seeking that higher being of God in this case [will provide me with] knowledge to help me with studies."

Another student shared how having the belief and the faith kind of helps you succeed. She further points out, "it is a difference in the instructors that are more spiritual than others, I have noticed they are a little bit more caring, they go a little bit more out of their way, they want you to succeed...They really care, and a lot of time they talk about their spirituality in class...they had the most influence on me." Another student explains, "we are all spiritual beings I feel if we include spirituality in the curriculum we can all kind of introspect and evaluate our own spirituality, which gives us a broader stance to communicate with other people, if you understand the spirit behind why somebody is speaking or talking to you, you can speak to the spirit and not the actual person themselves..."

And another student acknowledged, “I feel like spirituality kind of helps me to be more open-minded. I cannot understand something, then I can pray to God and be like, Lord please open up my eyes for understanding, and not somehow or another, but I can begin to see things clearly because I have that connection, that spirituality with God.”

Another student perceived her spiritual values as driving forces really between everything that we do in life. She further stated, “I believe determination is one thing I believe you need to have to go forth in a career or any education and I believe...you have to have a spirit to be determined, and spiritual things come from spiritual beings.”

In summary of Theme II based on what the participants reported:

- Giving acknowledgement and thanks to a higher power (God) for personal achievement and success.
- Spiritual values and spiritual connection to God as a driving force to one’s actions.
- Knowledge and understanding, deeper communication, endurance and guidance comes from spiritual connection to God.
- Instructors who are more spiritual are perceived to be more caring and supportive in helping student’s become successful.

Theme III: Confusion separating spirituality from religiosity. This is a significant issue, and is of the utmost importance understanding the distinction between spirituality and religion, it was by design to be 45, the first question to the participants because it sets the stage for subsequent questions. Although most of the participants established a very clear line of demarcation between being spiritual and being religious initially, that line became blurred and points muddy as the concept and terms related to spirituality and religiosity became somewhat intertwined and used interchangeably as the interview continued.

Student one shared, “I think the difference is that there are a lot of people who are religious and follow some type of organized religion (k sound, no I don’t want to say cult) but fraction of society I’ll say, and then there’s people who just believe that there is a higher being...” When asked if this student feels spirituality should be incorporated in her educational journey by integrating it in the curriculum, she responded, “I would have to say not necessarily because there’s so many different religious beliefs...people could become offended, especially those who don’t have any type of spiritual beliefs...”

Another student explained the distinction, “The difference? Spiritual is just believing in a higher being, religious is...going to church every Sunday and do the ritual. Spiritual is definitely believing there is a higher being.” Then when asked if she feels spirituality should be incorporated in her educational journey by integrating it in her curriculum, she responded, “No, because everybody have different spiritual beliefs, so which one are we going to choose, yours or mine? His or hers? No I think it should be separated.” Another student explained the distinction between being spiritual and being religious in that “spirituality is the connection you have one on one with God. Religious is more of a [pause], cause I’m not a religious person, more like a way of getting people together underneath one idea. Should I say that’s what Christianity is about, Buddhism, Hinduism, about one central idea. Whereas spirituality for me on a sense is how I connect with other people. The same thing when it comes down to nature...nature has a spirit.” Further along in the interview the student shared, “we talk about my spirituality and when I speak about it, it seems like a taboo within the classroom because I don’t believe in Jesus or I don’t believe in the holy bible.”

Another student shared, “I think religion is just for knowing a certain [pause] denomination. Spirituality is a relationship between you and your maker, or God in this case

because that's what I believe in." When this student was asked if his expression and awareness of spirituality was different than his non-minority peers, he replied, "Actually I do, most of them, people I have met who say they don't believe in God are of non-minority groups. I mean I have not found anybody I would say African Americans that have said they don't believe in God or that they don't practice some type of religion. But I've met people, like Caucasian community or Hispanics who say they don't believe in God. So I think there is a difference. I see the difference in their spirituality, they don't believe in God so they don't want to be involved in anything that relates to my religion, which I'm not trying to instill on anybody..."

Another student explained the difference, "to me religious is just like when you go to church, you know some people just go to church on a regular basis that's religious, but you don't actually believe in the stuff being taught in church...spiritual is when you have more of the belief." When this student was asked whether they felt spirituality should be incorporated in their educational journey by integrating it in the curriculum, the response was "no, because everybody don't have the same beliefs, I don't really think that would be something they would put into the curriculum."

Another student explained the distinction as spirituality being more of the connection you have with the certain deity and religion is the steps that you take to express the connection you have between the two. The religion is the practice that you have between the deity and yourself, and the spirituality is the knowing that you have that connection." When this student was asked if she feels spirituality has an impact on the way she is taught or how well she learn, she explained how spirituality helps her to be more open minded, and through praying to God she can begin to see things clearly because of that connection, that spirituality with God.

In summary of Theme III based on what the participants reported:

- Spirituality is a connection and a relationship established between you and a higher being or certain deity.
- Religion is a ritual, an organized practice for denominations.
- Being spiritual represents more of a higher belief than being religious.
- There are more African Americans that believe in God than Caucasians or Hispanics.
- Terms and phrases that revealed some level of confusion as they were used in substitution for the term spirituality were: spiritual beliefs; religious beliefs; belief in Jesus; belief in the holy bible; religion; belief; spirituality with God; praying to God.

Theme IV: Spirituality aids in/strengthens coping and learning abilities. Students made such statements that reflect how spirituality helps with coping abilities. One student explained how she feels a belief in a higher being helps people maneuver through life. Another student identified prayer as an important spiritual value in education and in the nursing field. Stating, “I pray every time, all day every day throughout the program and just in general to keep myself sane sometimes.”

Another student shared how she and her peers before any test or exam go in with prayer, especially over a big test. She attributes finding the correct answers on a test, and her ability to stay awake and study late nights to praying to “the Man above.”

Another student stated how he had been praying about it for a long time, about his decision to become a registered nurse.

In summary of Theme IV based on what the participants reported:

- Prayer helps to reduce test anxiety and helps with recall in selecting correct test answers.
- Prayer helps with decision-making.

- Belief in a higher being makes it easier to deal with situations in life.
- Prayer helps to maintain sanity.

Theme V: Perceived lack of school support, resources and a well-balanced education. One student shared, “I believe and feel deeply in my heart that our instructors have our best interest at heart...their ability to not only teach us but share their experiences that they bring to the field help, and they are some of the kindest and loving people I ever met.” She further expressed her concerns of the school having issues with WIFI and states, “our computers are antiquated, our lab is antiquated, they don’t provide the appropriate material we need as far as I’m concerned to be successful in certain areas such as anatomy for instance, if we are discussing like the heart muscles or whatever, and in other schools they give you something to look at and dissect it and whatever, we don’t have that here so we are limited in my opinion.”

Another student stated, “the instructors were very knowledgeable in the areas they were teaching some more than others, but who’s counting.” This student further stated, “We need more knowledgeable teachers with experience, if you don’t know how to make an apple pie and you come into my house to try to teach me how to bake one, I don’t think we are going to get a good apple pie.”

Another student suggested the open door policy of instructors and staff contributed to her well balanced educational experience. She stated, “They [instructors and staff] always had an open door policy...it’s up to you to use it. If you’re not going to utilize the resources that you have, then you’re not going to get it...if I needed help from a teacher they would always set aside time. They made sure that each student if they really needed it could help them grow. And that’s the one thing I do like about this school, it’s other hiccups of course, but no school’s perfect. You can go [to other colleges] you know and they will always have an issue,

somebody's always going to have a problem. But 15 months later I'm here, I'm done. So what don't kill you, make you stronger." This student further noted how resources is "the biggest downhill, or uphill battle actually that we fight every day...we just don't have the resources, we don't have the man power. And once you do get a good teacher, it's always somebody that breaks that good teacher and then you just bring in all the worse of the worse, and they never survive so you know it was a waste of time. When you could have actually worked with that good [teacher] and figured out what is the right placement. And unfortunately a lot of schools will let go of good teachers, and this school is one of them, or they move on you know. And it's kind of sad you know, because we had a lot of good teachers that left that I really believe that the students behind us would really have learned a lot from, and I don't the teachers now, but I know those were really good teachers, really good teachers."

Another student shared views on whether a well-balanced school is promoted by instructors and staff, he states the following: "No I think here is just the mind. It's impacting the knowledge, nice knowing you, have a good day. It does not encompass the mind, body and spirit." This student further stated, "I would say, I probably want the faculty itself to be more involved with the students. I don't see that kind of involvement. I don't see any caring, it's just like, do as I say, don't question me kind of approach. That's what I found in this facility and pretty much I'm here to just get my education and keep it moving. Like today we were doing a survey and I truly said I would not recommend the school, and that's not good you know, just thinking that you're just here to get an education and just leave, you don't feel like the mind, body and spirit is incorporated. You're here to get your education and leave. But I like the school, but it's just that what I seen...that I would not recommend anybody."

Another student shared how a well-balanced educational experience is compromised because she states, “we don’t keep instructors here. It’s nothing for them to come and leave in the middle of the semester, so that’s a big issue, and it has a very big impact on the class. And computers, we need computers that can work. It’s a very big deal especially when you got testing, you don’t want to test on a computer that keeps cutting off on you, and then they still want to count the grade. It took you an hour to take the test because it cuts off on you, and you’re stressed out because of that, plus you already have anxiety about the test as it is...I can’t say the schedule because I knew what I was getting into when I came to the school, it was very fast paced.”

In summary of Theme V based on what the participants reported:

- Feeling instructors are very supportive, caring and student-focused.
- Frustration with inadequate WIFI ability, antiquated and malfunctioning technology equipment, and lack of educational resources, i.e. lab equipment, supplies or specimens.
- Feeling the need to have more knowledgeable and experienced instructors.
- Feeling instructors were always approachable and accessible, and resources were available to use.
- Lack of resources and manpower
- Feelings of sadness due to perceived “good teachers” leaving (at times in the middle of the semester) and being replaced by “the worse of the worse.”
- Lack of faculty involvement with the students
- Feeling educational experience does not incorporate the mind, body and spirit – only the mind which makes the learning environment feel uncaring.

Theme VI: Perceived greater struggle as a minority, thus perceived greater sense and expression of spirituality. One student described her African American struggle for equality in the following, “I’m only subjugated to what, the truth of the matter is white supremacy...I was no more than a slave, no more than this, so it breaks you down spiritually...until I was 32 I didn’t know who I was, and that’s only because I was taught I was nothing less than. And so I started picking up books, and I start reading for myself, and I start realizing that, no not everybody was kings and queens, but we were something. We wasn’t slaves, we didn’t put each other into slavery...” This student further explained how in some of her classes that were more open had a greater impact. She recalls how at times she had her teacher would battle back and forth and debate on the world view of religion and spirituality. Furthermore she states, “I think both me and my teacher grew, we grew because it wasn’t just the spirituality part, it was also to teach them about the racism and the things that’s going on in the world. So I think that my spirit pushed me towards more of being open with it, so that way it can be out there and we can learn from it.”

Another student shared, “I feel like as an African American my spirituality is more a part of who I am...at least in my experience most people that I come across that are not minority, they regard their spirituality as almost a second nature thing, whereas for me it’s a first nature thing. I am my spirituality...I walk in my spirituality and so other people that are non-minority it seems to me sometimes that they walk and then their spirituality is just another thing that walks beside them...”

In summary of Theme VI based on what the participants reported:

- Feelings of inferiority and suffering from identity crisis due to white supremacy.
- Empowerment through gaining knowledge by reading.

- Learning through debating in class about global issues regarding race, spirituality and racism.
- Feeling as if the spirit has the ability to move you into action, especially with issues that bring spiritual unease.
- Feeling a greater oneness with spirituality than what is presumed to be experienced by non-minority peers.
- Feeling that spirituality is a more natural and an inseparable element that is at the very core of being an African/African American.

In addition to the thematic analysis of the interviews, the researcher also answered two of the research questions based on the findings:

1. **What is the nature of spirituality for African Americans enrolled in Nursing Programs?** Nursing programs in general are considered rigorous in studies and it is highly competitive to get accepted into a nursing program. African American culture brings a spirit of resiliency, a spirit to overcome. Through the awakening and connections of the spirit it can restore hope, rebuild confidence, and regain focus. The nature of spirituality for African Americans enrolled in Nursing Programs harness a spirit that is communal, sharing the feelings of community and togetherness.
2. **What is the relationship between spirituality and academic performance of African Americans?** Participant GPA records were not available and therefore a correlation between spirituality and academic performance could not be validated.

Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper introduced the current literature and personal memoirs of how spirituality plays a role in the college life of African Americans in general, and African American nursing students more specifically, by examining the college experiences of African American registered nursing students in a CTE post-secondary setting.

This study aimed to assess how spirituality affects African American students in post-secondary nursing programs. In general this research sought to answer how holistic educational experiences were created and the role of spirituality in creating meaningful educational experiences. The specifics of this research answered the following questions:

- 1) How does spirituality impact the nursing education experience of African American Registered Nursing students in post-secondary CTE institutions of higher education?
- 2) How do African American Registered Nursing students perceive spirituality and their spiritual well-being?

Discussion

Morality and spirituality in education are fields of inquiry in and of themselves, though somewhat given to building walls when the borders beg for permeability (Baurain, 2012). The college experiences of these nursing students allowed them to recognize the role spirituality plays between health professionals and patients (clients), the role spirituality played in their educational pursuit to become registered nurses and in their personal lives.

The presence of and ability to connect with a higher being; (2) Attributing determining factors of success (i.e., determination, endurance, good guidance, higher level thinking and communication, understanding and strength) to one's spirituality and/or creator; (3) Confusion separating spirituality from religiosity; (4) Spirituality aids in/strengthens coping and learning

abilities; (5) Perceived lack of school support and a well-balanced education; (6) Perceived greater struggle as a minority creates a greater sense of spirituality and a deeper, and more outward expression of praise.

Participants in this study reported the presence of and ability to connect with a higher being. This is consistent with the findings. Participants in this study reported higher levels of spirituality than their non-minority peers. This is consistent with findings in Walker & Dixon (2002) and (Blaine & Crocker, 1996; Joseph, 1998; Taylor, 1988b; Taylor et al., 1996) illustrating that African Americans tend to describe themselves as more spiritual than do majority groups.

Participants in this study reported attributing determining factors of success to one's spirituality and/or creator. This is consistent with the findings of (Walker & Dixon, 2002) and Mattis (2000) who reported that definitions of spirituality must be multidimensional...People are often viewed as having a strong sense of spirituality when they have a deep, meaningful connection with God, and people often strive for this relationship. People often make attributions to God that enhance life meaning as well as well-being (Blaine & Crocker, 1996).

Participants in this study reported spirituality aids in and strengthens coping and learning abilities. This is consistent with the findings of (Patton & McClure, 2009) who reported African American women often turn to spiritual beliefs to cope with everyday struggles associated with living in a society and politically oppressive system. Spirituality can serve as a coping mechanism, promoting psychological resistance, and fostering identity development (Watt, 2003). Participants in this study reported the need for spiritual support for African Americans and the desire to have a well-balanced education by including spirituality in their nursing school experience This is consistent with the findings of (Greer & Brown, 2011) who report African

American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been found to rely on social support, and spirituality (e.g., Flemming, 1981).

Participants in this study reported perceived greater struggle as a minority, loss of identity and a need to overcome actual or perceived inferiority promoted by racism and white supremacy. This is consistent with the findings in which Stewart (1997) argued that Black people have been in a constant struggle to live freely under the auspices of living spiritually. African American spirituality has played a more cultural and political role than merely a religious one in Black life. Spirituality has served as an impetus for a lifestyle of African American resistance. This resistance to hegemonic prescriptions of blackness and the crafting of authentic notions of what it means to be Black are vital parts of African American spiritual expression (Dantley, 2010).

Conclusions

If we do not create change in a nursing workforce that reflects the racial and ethnic makeup of the population, it will continue to affect our communities by compromising health equity. If we do not factor conceptualization of spirituality from the minority point of view, and recognize and embrace it in school leadership and develop it throughout curricula it will be impossible to promote a type of education that is both individualized and unified, and the desired outcome to having a holistic approach in education will at best, only be achieved in part when a nursing program operates in a manner in which school administration, faculty and staff do not know, or do not care enough to integrate in the curriculum and show in the classroom just how critical the spiritual component is in enhancing the minority educational experience, and how it plays a very prominent role in the day to day lives of minority students on and off campus.

This research opens the door for understanding African American adult learner's educational and spiritual experiences in order to better meet their educational and spiritual needs

as registered nursing students in a Career and Technical Education setting that ultimately influences the retention and graduation of this population. There are many studies conducted that examined factors influencing retention and attrition rates of minority students; however, little research has been done to determine how spirituality influences attrition rates of African American registered nursing students in post-secondary Career and Technical Education. This sector of education could benefit from federally funded initiatives to increase recruitment and retention of minority nursing students and nursing faculty, spiritual counselors/psychologist, , network administrators, technology upgrade and technical support, and Train-the-Trainer program in effort to contribute to creating a nursing workforce with a proportionate proportion of minority registered nurses who have received basic and advanced training and a well-balanced education.

Recommendations

A more robust size from the African American minority population both numerically and geographically is recommended in order to more accurately assess the perceptions and experiences on how spirituality influences the nursing school experiences of this target group. Expanding the data set to include various types of CTE schools that offer registered nursing programs would increase variability in terms of demographics and the size of the nursing schools. If Africans and African Americans are going to be the target population it maybe beneficial to utilize transcription and interpreting services in the participant's African native language to prevent misinterpretations. It may be of benefit if interviewers or group facilitators have similar cultural backgrounds to the participants to prevent participant censorship or misinterpretation of experiences as well.

Additional suggestions for future research include more in-depth interviews with registered nursing students enrolled and interview students who have dropped out of the nursing program or transferred to another school to discover their reason why, and consider comparing Christian and faith-based schools that have nursing programs to observe and evaluate their retention and attrition rates, student and faculty satisfaction, and performance ratings to determine how their operations, policy, procedure and protocol differ.

Lastly, I would strongly recommend identifying how financial obligations rank as an attrition factor and then conduct further studies on the satisfaction and success of students who receive employer or organization scholarships that pay for tuition, books and living expenses or allow you to maintain your salary while in school full time in exchange for working for them after graduation that might reveal the need to redesign and expand these types of programs if the outcomes are favorable.

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Appendix A: Individual Interview Consent Form

Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

Title: *Doubts of The Spirit and how it Impacts Minority Attrition Rates in Post-Secondary Education in Health Professions: Doubts and Drop Outs*

Research Sponsor: *Dr. Carol Mooney*

Investigator:
Jeanne Goodwin (757) 386-8705

Description:

The purpose of this study is to determine if spiritual factors make a difference in the educational experiences of the student, such as with motivation, attendance, performance, attitude, etc. To participate in this study the student must be a registered nursing student at any level. The student cannot have any cognitive, behavioral, physical or medical condition that would inhibit him or her from answering questions in the interview about their educational experiences or prevent them from sitting in a 15 minute interview session.

Risks and Benefits:

Risk involved in this study include the possibility of being uncomfortable talking with a stranger about educational, spiritual and social experiences. You may feel nervous or embarrassed about some of the questions or issues in the interview. The interview will take place on campus in a private area and the researcher will ask you how you feel several times throughout the interview process. If at any time you feel uncomfortable you are always free to take a break if you like, or to stop participating in the study completely.

Special Populations:

Minority populations (African American registered nursing students in a CTE post-secondary proprietary for profit learning institute).

Time Commitment and Payment:

The interview and short survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time to complete the research. Your volunteer service to this study is greatly appreciated, however there is no compensation for your time and effort.

Confidentiality:

Your name will not be included on any documents. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of this information. This informed consent will not be kept with any of the other documents completed with this project. If the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that will reveal your identity. All audio

recordings and transcriptions will be kept locked on file and then properly disposed of after 3 years, as required by law. Instead of using your name, you will be identified by a code number. The list of code numbers with subject names will be kept in a different locked box. All data in computers will be password protected.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at any time without incurring adverse consequences. Also, the researcher may withdraw you from this research if situations arise that are not in your best interest in such that your health or safety is compromised.

IRB Approval:

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator:

Jeanne
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Goodwin

IRB Administrator

Elizabeth Buchanan, Research Services
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Statement of Consent:

By signing this consent form you agree to participate in the project entitled, *Doubts of The Spirit and how it Impacts Minority Attrition Rates in Post-Secondary Education in Health Professions: Doubts and Drop Outs*

Signature

Date

Appendix B: Participant Code Identifier Sheet

Number of places you lived in the past five years, if more than 9, enter 9. First letter of the last name of your high school favorite teacher. If unknown, enter A. How many close friends did you have while completing your nursing program? If more than 9, enter 9. First letter of your mother's maiden name. If unknown, enter A. First letter of the city/town your father was born. If unknown, enter A. Number of siblings of your maternal grandmother. If unknown enter, 1.

Enter your code here _____

Appendix C: Individual Interview Discussion Questions

Questionnaire

1. What do you think is the difference between being spiritual and being religious?
2. Do you believe spiritual values are important to have in education in general, and in your field of study specifically?
3. Do you feel spirituality should be incorporated in your educational journey by integrating it in your curriculum? If so, how? If not, why?
4. Do you find your expression of and awareness of spirituality as African Americans to be different than your non-minority peers?
5. What and who influenced your decision to attend the college you are enrolled?
6. Do you feel spirituality has an impact on the way you are taught and how well you learn? If yes, explain.
7. Do you feel the instructors and staff promote a well-balanced educational experience for you personally? Explain why, or why not.
8. What do you think can be done to improve your educational experience?

Appendix D: Thematic Analysis Diagram