SPIRITUALITY AND RACE IN CAREER DECISION MAKING: PERSPECTIVES OF BLACKS WHO RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial and spiritual identities influenced career decision making among a select group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the southwest region of the US. This study used career decision making, Black racial identity, spiritual development, and career calling concepts as its conceptual framework. Semi-structured life story interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed for nine Black individuals, who recently graduated from college and identified themselves as being spiritual. Interview data were analyzed using performative analysis. Two themes, Black racial identity and spiritual identity, emerged from the analysis of the data as the most prominent influences of career decision making. Familial relationships, purpose, values, passions and gifts also emerged as bi-directionally influential to Black racial identity and spiritual identity. From the participants' perspectives, racial and spiritual identities served as a guide in influencing the participants' ways of making sense of and interacting with the world. As a result of this study, a career purpose framework was proposed for use with Blacks as they work through life and career. The findings from this study imply that given the importance participants attributed to Black racial identity and spiritual identity in their decision making, the intersection of these identities should be considered for inclusion in career approaches. Recommendations for further research involve studying Blacks through constructivist career approaches, career concepts of mattering, and examining the proposed career purpose framework are provided.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to my parents (Mr. Warren E. Turner and Mrs. Uneeda Hubbard Turner), husband (Mr. Keith Jackson), and children (Jordan, Jadyn, Kamron, and Kadyn). To my Mother and Father who provided me with the best examples of perseverance, hard work and responsibility, thank you for teaching me the value of who I am and whose I am. At a very early age you instilled the value in me to be grateful to God for the gifts for which I have been blessed. I only hope my life and contribution to this world illustrate your unparalleled influence on my life. Thank you for all of your hard work and sacrifice to be the best parents possible and compel me to only set my sights on excellence. To my Husband, you are the one I have waited for all my life. I am so grateful for your love, encouragement, and patience throughout this process. I wake every morning looking forward to being and growing with you. To my Children, I never thought there would be four of you, yet I was blessed with you. I have and always will do what I can to be the example children should grow up witnessing. I hope I have accomplished this feat thus far. Thank you for hanging in there with me, already being so great and for making me more proud than you can imagine. I love you all.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Career development is considered a component of the Human Resource Development (HRD) profession which has been minimally represented in the research literature (Egan, Upton, & Lynham, 2006). Established approaches to the study of career behavior have been based on generalized development models and characteristics for describing vastly diverse individual experiences and realities (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). Existing research has focused on performance and organizational productivity at the individual level, process level and organizational level, as opposed to the identity and spiritual levels of the individual. As such, the racial and spiritual identity career decision making influences of Blacks have remained underexplored in literature.

Although some existing research (Bloch, 2000; Fairholm, 2001; Lips-Wiersma, 2002) supports the need to incorporate spirituality and race in professional practice, the most widely accessed approaches continue to stem from traditional frameworks focused on the White male population (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). While there appear to be relationships between spirituality and career decision making (Bloch & Richmond, 1998; Gull & Doh, 2004; Lips-Wiersma, 2002) and racial identity and career decision making (Byars-Winston, 2010), there is limited research exploring the intersection of these relationships. Further, the literature contributes very little to understanding the lived experiences of Blacks in the US and how these experiences influence career behavior.

Considering the minimal evidence regarding the role of Black identity in career decision making, there could be missed developmental opportunities in HRD practice.

Background of the Problem

Byars-Winston (2010) stated, "Race is a strong predictor of labor market position", which is the place one finds themselves in the available supply of labor in comparison to the demand for it (p. 441). In December 2013, the U.S. labor force consisted of more than 150 million individuals who were actively employed or seeking work. Within this labor force, 33.6% held racial minority status: 16.1% Hispanic, 11.9% Black, 5.6% Asian American (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). For the population of study, 11.9% represents approximately 60% of all Blacks (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). The Black labor force, while growing at a smaller rate than other racial minority populations, is expected to grow by 1.6% annually to reach 12.0% of the labor force by the end of 2014 and to approach 15.0% by 2050 (Toossi, 2006). To illustrate growth rates for these populations, in December 2013 the labor force for Hispanics was 15.8%, Blacks was 11.8% and Asian Americans was 5.3% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). To create a full picture of the employment situation for Blacks, this population comprises 21% of all those unemployed in the labor market, up from 14% in December of 2012 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012, 2013). Approximately 11% of Blacks age 20 and older are unemployed: 12% of Black men and 10% of Black women (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). This number has historically been twice the number of unemployed Whites (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012, 2013). Future economic and social success will most likely hinge on adjusting to and addressing the individual

developmental needs of racially diverse groups who will be increasing in the labor market.

Before exploring racially diverse groups in the labor force in greater detail, it is imperative to examine the changing demographics of student populations in colleges and universities. In 2009, the National Center for Education Statistics projected a 9% to 17% increase in the approximately 18 million students enrolled in colleges and universities through 2018. These projections are materializing as 21.8 million students were estimated to be enrolled in college in Fall 2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These record college enrollments are attributed not only to more people enrolling in college, but also to increases in the traditional college-age population of 18 to 24 year-olds. With these increases in college student enrollment, there will most likely be an increase in college-educated workers in the labor force.

Regarding racial and ethnic diversity in the labor force, the National Center for Education Statistics projected the labor force will continue to grow more diverse in light of the increasing numbers and percentages of Black, Hispanic, and Asian American students attending college and entering the labor force (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Between 2000 and 2011, the percentage of Blacks enrolled in college rose from 11.7% to 15.1% (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Also, the percentage of Blacks ages 18 to 24 enrolled in college increased from 30.5% in 2000 to 37.1% in 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These increases in college attendance are attributed to larger numbers of traditional college-aged Blacks, as well as higher college enrollment rates. More Blacks will be entering the labor force from college with traits and

characteristics specific to their race. Therefore, these individuals are likely to be subject to treatment by others based only on the fact that they are Black (Byars-Winston, 2010). The need for minority populations to be understood in the working world will grow as these populations continue to enter the labor force in greater numbers from America's colleges and universities.

Racial Identity Challenges

Considering race has been identified as a labor position factor, the experiences of Blacks in the labor force have been a focus of research. A review of relevant literature suggested discrimination toward Blacks to be a continued reality. Watkins (2011) outlined a study in which 88.5% of Black respondents across all age ranges and of both genders acknowledged being victims of work place racial discrimination at some point in their careers. Various disciplines have conducted scholarly studies recording Blacks' continued discrimination experiences in hiring practices (Riach & Rich, 2002; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003), disparities in salary (Castilla, 2008; Heywood & O'Halloran, 2005), prejudicial supervision (Elvira & Town 2001), as well as barriers to referral, hiring, and promotion (Bayer, Ross, & Topa, 2008). Waldinger and Lichter (2003) contended companies are skeptical about employing Blacks due to negative stereotypical typecasting in relation to reliability, honesty, people skills, and intellectual aptitude. Race has continued to play a prominent role in Blacks' work experiences (Pager & Quillian, 2005). According to Byars-Winston (2010) being Black in the workplace has an impact on how individuals are treated and exchange with and relate with others in the workplace. Since these experiences are self-reported, it is challenging

to ascertain the degree to which experiences are a result of perceived or actual racial discrimination. Considering the history of race relations in the United States and the intangible nature of racial discrimination, perceptions may be as likely to manifest as reality to the Black worker as would actual discrimination.

When acknowledging the impact of race on labor market position, there is minimal career development literature specifically addressing the significance of being Black in the labor market (White, 2009). There has been discussion of Blacks learning to cope and negotiating identity in the work environment (Alleyne, 2004; Johnson, 2011), being offered positions at less than half the rate offered to equally qualified Whites (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Pager, Western, & Bonikowski, 2009), developing a sense of identity through cultural norming (White, 2009), and having issues with upward mobility (Johnson, 2011). Studies have identified higher education as a resource for assisting in recognizing the social context in which Black employees must operate and the underlying workplace messages that lead many to question certain aspects of their racial identity (Alleyne, 2004).

Considering race has been noted at the center of work experiences for Blacks (Byars-Winston, 2010), and racial identity is linked to career decisions (Fouad & Arbona, 1994), it would be beneficial to focus research on understanding aspects of Black identity. For Blacks, the process of learning about societal roles and development is critical to being conscious of identity (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Herndon, 2003; Okech & Harrington, 2002). According to Dubois (1965), Blacks must balance two cultural worlds, not only by viewing life through their own cultural eyes but also

from the perspective of the majority culture. Therefore, in order for Blacks to tap into their identity consciousness, there must be a reconciling of the experience of living dual-minded lives (DuBois, 1965). For Black people, "the integration of identity shapes coherent models of understanding concerning existence, and is supported as a concept related to the commitments made to certain roles, relationships, and notions deeply relevant to individuals" (Stewart, 2007, p. 165). Understanding how the layers of identity contributing to self-concept help Blacks make sense of, and connect to, the world around them could aid in explaining behavior.

Spiritual Identity Challenges

In unveiling the identity layers for Blacks, it is important to note the role of spirituality as intrinsic to development and central to well-being (Wheeler, Ampadu, & Wangari, 2002). A person's spirituality or spiritual identity is comprised of the "goals, values, and beliefs to which an individual is unequivocally committed giving a sense of direction, meaning, and purpose to life" (Waterman, 2004, p. 209). It has been studied and recognized as important to the career development process (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Covey (2005) agrees, noting that in order for individuals to thrive at work they must move beyond just a focus on performance to states of satisfaction, impact, and importance which engage their spirituality. Engaging spirituality helps individuals tap into self-concept and self-awareness, as they ask questions such as "who am I", "where am I coming from", and "where am I going". Answers to these questions help unearth their purpose in life and move their ability to perform beyond just technical competencies, to the development to personal and social competencies (Baron & Byrne,

1997). Waterman (2004) suggested the heightening and lessening of spiritual career motivation is reflective of identity.

According to Fry (2003), in order to nurture employees and their collective aspirations, there must be a greater understanding of and incorporation of identity. This identity encompasses individual values, attitudes, belief systems, and behaviors, inducing stimulation and making people more committed and productive (Fry, 2003). Identity and the activation, interaction, and engagement of identity are essential in inspiring people by connecting to who they are and giving them a sense of purpose and meaning (Waterman, 2004).

A growing number of college students are pursuing collegiate educations with specific interests in spirituality (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Astin et al. (2011) described college students as being on a spiritual quest—one of five spiritual qualities discovered in their longitudinal study of college students' search for purpose and meaning. This spiritual quest was characterized by Astin et al. (2011) as the level to which a student aggressively seeks purpose and meaning in life, as well as pursuit of understanding of self-concept. There is growing literature on people who are spiritually-developed and in the exploration and organizational entry stages, as they seek to fulfill spiritual needs through work and have their work lives possess meaning (Astin et al., 2011; Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Lindholm, 2007).

Considering the growing body of research focused on individual desires to satisfy spiritual needs at work (Neck & Milliman, 1994), the role of spirituality in the lives of Blacks could contribute to the literature by explaining their career behavior. While

scholarly research offers some insight into the behaviors of Blacks in the US, it says little about how people in this racial demographic make decisions in the labor market. Accordingly, this study aimed to fill this gap by examining how racial and spiritual identities guide career decisions among Blacks in the US labor market.

Views of Career

To understand career decision making, an exploration of the terms associated with career and exploration of the field with the most contributing literature is provided. The term *career* is defined as the "individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life" (Hall, 2002, p. 12). Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997) referred to a career as a job, profession, or calling. The term *job* connotes a role of concern for quantifiable benefit and satisfaction, inferring personal fulfillment to occur outside of the work place. There is a focus on compensation for work performed; opportunities for better salary or security typically result in a job change (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Those who refer to their occupation as a *profession* have a more profound investment in their work and a stronger connection between work and self-esteem. The pride associated with a profession is connected to endeavoring to obtain monetary rewards and advancing in a specific field. People who identify their work as a profession change their type of work at very low rates due to a commitment to a specific field (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

The term *calling* closely relates to the subject of this study. According to Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), people who refer to their work as a calling rarely differentiate who they are from their work. Dik and Duffy (2009) defined *calling* as

> a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation. (p. 427)

There is typically not a focus on power, status, dominance, or compensation (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Work is viewed by these people as self-fulfilling and self-sustaining. The abilities and capabilities of these people are believed to be specifically focused on the purpose of completing their work. There is also minimal concern for the physical, emotional, or mentally consuming nature of work commitments.

Having a calling conveys having meaningful purpose through daily interactions within work (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). A calling is not about exercising a mere personal passion or preference, but about engaging a relationship with one's life (Parks, 2000). Hall (2002) contended a calling stems from a deep understanding of oneself in the world, where congruency of self and purpose make identity and adaptability competencies congruent, thus aiding in navigating the "complex career terrain" (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 157).

As Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) noted, the term *calling* is not included in prominent career development literature. However, these scholars identified Super's (1990) theory of career and life development as being linked to calling. According to

Duffy and Sedlacek (2010), Super's theory, considered to be one of the most commonly recognized theories of career decision making "may provide the most useful framework for conceptualizing the potential role of a career calling" The description of calling is most closely descriptive of spirituality in the workplace, where people seek to find purpose and meaning in their work (Fry, 2003). It is this description of career, for people ages 15 through 24 who are actively exploring their identities, at the center of this study.

Process of Developing A Career

Since career terminology has been established, understanding the developmental process of the career will now be explored. The planning and management of careers have grown in importance as work place changes have influenced individual careers at greater levels (Baruch, 2006). The employee is considered to be a valuable resource in contemporary organizations, "and providing [the employee] with a long-term stable career is a win-win situation for both organizations and their employees" (Puah & Ananthram, 2006, p. 112). The responsibility for developing a stable career should fall with the individual, not the company. "Employees have to take the initiative to manage their careers by identifying the type of work they want, their long-term work interests, and the skills they would like to develop" (Noe, 2002, p. 365). Stable careers involve alignment of individual uniqueness with long-term satisfaction with work. Cohen (2003) indicated career satisfaction and stability can be achieved when there is alignment between work and the authentic meaning work can provide. Yet the field is

limited in literature investigating the congruency of career satisfaction and the authentic meaning of work.

The process of developing individual alignment needs is best addressed through career development theory, research, and practice. Career development is one of the three areas of HRD that affects the work and life roles at the individual, group, process, and organization levels with intent to enhance learning and performance (Chermack & Lynham, 2001; Ruona, 2000; Swanson & Holton, 2001). McLagan (1989) defined *career development* as development "assuring an alignment of organizational career management and individual career planning processes to achieve an optimal match of individual and organizational needs" (p. 6). Career management is more employer or organization directed, and career planning is more directed by the individual.

The process of career management, where "employees (a) become aware of personal interests, values, strengths and weaknesses; (b) obtain information about job opportunities within the company; (c) identify career goals; and (d) establish action plans to achieve career goals" (Noe, 2002, p. 366), involves organizational planning and managing employee careers (Baruch, 2004). However career planning, described by Hall and Associates (1986) as first in the career development process, involves becoming self-aware in an effort to reach a particular career goal. In the career planning process, people exercise personal control over their careers through informed choices about their occupation and organization choices. Accordingly, this study explored individual career planning processes.

Career development has core traditional approaches focused on the performance of organizations. According to Preskill and Donaldson (2008), traditional frameworks were "centered on quantitative and objective methods, focused on performance and organizational productivity, and potentially void of diversity of research participants" (p. 105). The field has witnessed a trend shift calling for the incorporation of contributions of the individual (Herr, 2001). Bloch and Richmond (1997) suggested the shift in career development trends has made two sets of concepts relevant: one explaining the development of career behavior across the life span and one increasing the need for expressions of identity in the individual career development process. The shift in career development trends to the need for meaning and identity is not being addressed by traditional frameworks describing and explaining career behavior (Fenwick, 2004). Thus, the career experiences of Blacks are underexplored. As suggested by Hite and McDonald (2008), career development professionals should redefine how the field describes and explains career behavior by "surpassing the limiting nature of empirical data to more contemporary frameworks" to encourage multiple meanings and variation of identity (p. 4). To investigate the meaning associated with identity in this research study, I examined how aspects of individual identity guide career decision making.

Problem Statement

People wish for their personal and professional lives to incorporate their identity into their work (Fairholm, 1996). While identity is noted as essential to understanding the process of developing a career, there is limited research concerned with how people

form or foster their identities at work. Dynamics of identity, such as values, goals, beliefs, religion, culture, and principles, merge to form ways in which people relate to the world (Waterman, 2004). According to Waterman (2004), this identity, as well as activation, interaction, and engagement of this identity, ignites, sustains, and provides purpose for the individual in the workplace. This intrinsic motivation for purpose falls outside of the mundane tasks of the day-to-day job and organizational goals, initiatives, and outcomes, but lies within being committed to making life better (Fairholm, 1996; Fry, 2003). As Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) explained, not only must one learn how to deal with forming one's identity at work, but one must also consciously learn how to define work in alignment with one's individual identity.

Various positions have been taken connecting intrinsic motivation for making meaning out of day-to-day work lives, and how an organization's success is contingent on this connection. As McLean (1999) pointed out, spirituality linked to purpose and meaning-making literature (Fry, 2003; Gull & Doh, 2004; Lips-Wiersma, 2002), is "increasingly finding its way into the discipline of HRD" (p. 7). Lee (2007) contended people are looking to their daily professional lives as a means of fulfilling spiritual needs for expression of identity. Lips-Wiersma (2002) stated "spirituality influences the individual's beliefs of what are worthwhile purposes, and these purposes in turn influence career behavior" (p. 514). Fairholm (2001) described organizations as "a group of people in voluntary relationships—where the essential spiritual needs of each are considered and insofar as possible made a part of the group experience" (p. 43) within the organization. These spiritual needs are a result of growing desires to

"increase personal satisfaction, enlarge levels of personal commitment to corporate goals, and allow others in the organization maximum freedom to function in harmony with their self-identity, values, memories, sense of humor, and so forth" (Fairholm, 2001, p. 43).

The career development field has traditionally focused on organizational career management, not needs for spiritual or identity fulfillment (Gull & Doh, 2004). Hite and McDonald (2008) stated the field must "move beyond the controlling design, delivery, and documentation of traditional HRD to a broad-based tactic encouraging multiple means of career development" (p. 4). With recognition of growing desires to connect spiritually with work lives, career development should utilize critical approaches to "reexamine not only the role of career development", but also the role career development can play in developing abilities to plan careers effectively (Hite & McDonald, 2008, p. 4). These critical approaches could inform examination of individual development by focusing on the aspects of the career motivating the individual on a spiritual level (Stewart, 2007). Being critical of traditional practices involves "recognizing the messiness, complexities and irrationality of dominating norms, understandings, and practices" in the field (Sambrook, 2004, p. 614).

Even deeper layers of identity affecting people in the workplace involve issues of race. After a review of the career development literature on identity in the workplace, the recorded research was found to offer significantly less about race (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Traditional career theories do not consider the experiences of diverse racial identities, for example, individual experiences with racial discrimination, the meaning of

work from a cultural perspective, or historically limited availability of racially diverse career guidance or information (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). Career development leaves much room for improvement in its scholarship and practice on the grounds of power, privilege, and social justice (Fenwick, 2004). Therefore, minority populations in the United States, including Blacks, have been noted to be underrepresented in practice. Hendricks (1994) asserted most traditional theories to assume (a) equal opportunities exist for attaining career goals, (b) career theories and models involve the generalization of concepts and constructs based on the behavior of the majority racial demographic, and (c) many theories rest on the assumption that an occupation provides a person with intrinsic satisfaction and opportunities for expression of self.

Although assumptions are made about equal opportunity and generalizability of concepts, Byars-Winston (2010) suggested career development is situated within a cultural context. This identification of career development through a cultural lens is not supported by traditional career theories (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008) and the impact of racial identity is underexplored (Brown, 1996; Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). Preskill and Donaldson (2008) and Hendricks (1994) contended career models have been heavily influenced by White, middle-class American culture. Hayes and Way (2003) expressed:

> Cultural career models comprise people's everyday theories about their world . . . shaped by and varied according to the socio-cultural groups to which we belong . . . cultural models are partial and inconsistent . . . influenced by institutions, media . . . espoused by dominant groups . . . linked to power and privilege . . . used to influence groups with less power in society. (p. 364)

To illustrate the limitation of these models, Sue and Sue (1999) posited White culture (associated with the dominant group) emphasizes verbal communication, individualism, linear approaches to problem solving, adherence to time schedules, a focus on long-term goals, and a nondirective orientation to counseling.

The more multicultural characteristics of individuals were outlined by Boykin (1983): person-to-person focus, response to whole or units, emphasis on emotional expressiveness or affect, interdependence and communalism, heightened awareness of nonverbal modes of communication, valuing of personal distinctiveness, flexible time perspective, and preference for oral and auditory modes of communication. Suggesting even further diversity among individuals, Gardiner (1991) contended individuals to have multiple intelligences causing them to acquire, recall, produce, and comprehend information in varying ways. These multiple intelligences are engaged in every area of their lives, including work and career. Investigating career behavior through racial and spiritual lenses could inform traditional approaches by revealing voids in representation of individual diversity in an increasingly diverse labor force (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). To investigate career behavior, Hite and McDonald (2008) suggested critical exploration of the central elements of racial identity is warranted, "not only reexamining the role of career development" (p. 4), but also examining the role career development can play in engaging racial identity.

Critical research involves approaches designed to "represent the culture, the consciousness or the lived experiences of people living in asymmetrical power relations" (Quantz, 1992, pp. 448-449). Stewart (2007) noted individual identity, specifically

racial and cultural, has gained prominence as a focus for career development. Although recent research supports the value of individual identity, the most widely accessed theories describing and explaining how people form work identities was not formulated with Blacks as research participants (Gainor, 2006; Hendricks, 1994). Few career development theories exist that "appear relatable to the role of individual identity elements" (Stewart, 2007, p. 31), such as race and culture, on career development. Conventional theories fail to incorporate racially discriminatory experiences, cultural viewpoints of meaning, or gaps in career guidance of historically marginalized racial groups (Cheatham, 1990). The prevalent existing theories do not address issues of individuals and environments as they relate to race.

With the Black population's projected increase in the labor force, continued feelings of being marginalized, and spiritually centered nature, it will be critical to incorporate this population's perspective into career development practice (Wheeler et al., 2002). By focusing on holistic methods, career development could broaden its role in supporting people to manage their careers effectively (Hite & McDonald, 2008, p. 4) and could provide more relevant approaches in such areas as "career assessment, career interest inventory instruments, career counseling, success planning, mentoring programs, job rotation, on-the-job training, and performance management" (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008, p. 105). If developed with an increased understanding of variations of identity, specifically spiritual and racial, on career decision making by Blacks as they enter the labor force from college, these considerations could have positive effects on career planning.

According to Luzzo and Severy (2009), career decision making—the process of career choice—is constant, continuous, and engaged by every person over the course of life. "People you meet and experiences that happen to you as well as the way you respond to those experiences and integrate them into your life contribute to your career development" (Luzzo & Severy, 2009, p. 1). For this reason, it is imperative to be cognizant of decision making processes so people can take greater responsibility for their career decisions.

Although not the focus of this research study, *career readiness* has been defined as the "ability of a person to successfully engage . . . and reach a well-founded career decision" (Hirschi & Lage, 2007, p. 167). This study informed the process of career exploration, established by Super (1990) as a stage of early life development from teenage years through mid-twenties, and the influences informing what Blacks who are spiritually-developed and in the exploration and organizational entry stages are anticipating and desiring for their work lives. From these positionalities, people begin to form, specify, and implement career choices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial and spiritual identities influenced career decision making among a select group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the southwest region of the US. Only by investigating and incorporating central identity layers, making the field more cross-cultural, cross-racial, and cross-ethnic in practice,

will the career development field grow in understanding of identity's impact on career decision making (Hite & McDonald, 2008; Leong & Brown, 1995).

Research Questions

The fundamental research question was: *What are the impacts of spirituality and race on career decision making among a group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs and joined the work force?* The following specific questions guided the study.

Research Question 1: How does spirituality influence career decisions by this group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs as they prepare for the work force?

Research Question 2: How does race influence this recently employed population's career decisions?

Research Question 3: What major life events influence these Black individuals' career decisions?

Research Question 4: How do personal passions, talents, and values influence career decisions by this group of recent college graduates?

Conceptual Framework

Research for this study was informed by four bodies of literature. The first was theory and literature informing career decisions based on life stage, the second was Black racial identity literature, the third was spiritual development literature, and the fourth was concepts focused on career calling. These four areas assisted in positioning this study by making exploration of spirituality and racial identity central to career

decision making by Blacks who have recently graduated from college and are in the organizational entry stage.

Theory and Literature Informing Career Decision Making

According to Super's (1990) Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development, five life and career stages explain career decisions as a product of changes in self-concept over time. Super's theory includes basic components such as self-concept, life space, life span, and role changes in life informing career decisions. Super suggested career choice and development is a process of developing and applying one's self-concept. According to Huitt (2004) and Slavin (2003), self-concept is the product of how one views oneself, informing one's identity and fostering perceptions of one's strength, weakness, state of mind, and value in society. Baron and Byrne (1997) contended that self-concept is self-identity, which includes a set of beliefs and feelings that one has about oneself. Myers (1993) described self-concept as a sense of who one is, a sense of one's identity.

Understanding self-concept was significant to this study because it is central to Super's theory. Fouad and Arbona (1994) proposed a relationship to exist between racial identity and career behavior due to the interconnectedness of racial identity and self-concept. Super's theory stages are categorized by age range and associated characteristics, including growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. This theory provided a frame for studying career decisions for individuals in the exploration stage or ages 15 through 24, which includes the traditional age range of recent college graduates. The process of exploration, as described by Super, involves

engaging identity in seeking self-awareness and finding purpose as various roles are tried and various vocational options are explored before finding a stable and appropriate fit. The exploration stage provided foundation for incorporating identity to inform the study.

Super's (1990) life-span development was expanded and incorporated in the conceptualization of Savickas' (2005a) Career Construction Theory. This theory provides explanation for how people construct identity to make career decisions. Savickas (2005a) informs this study by purporting identity to be central to making career decisions because identity layers cause people to fit work into their lives in certain ways.

In addition to Super's exploration stage and Savickas (2005a) career construction work, the organizational entry stage described by Greenhaus and Callanan (1994) also helped to frame career decision making in this study. Greenhaus and Callanan described five stages of career lives: (a) occupational choice, (b) organizational entry, (c) early career, (d) midcareer, and (e) late career. The organizational entry stage, which includes ages 18 through 25, encompasses the primary objectives of obtaining job offers from desired organizations and selecting the most suitable job. In this stage, people are on the verge of establishing and achieving a career, which made studying career decision making by Blacks in this stage appropriate.

Black Racial Identity

Psychosocial theory and revised frameworks based on seminal psychosocial work provided insight into the formation of racial identity for Blacks (Cross, 1971; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). Spickard (1992) proposed that racial identity has

biologically constructed and socially constructed dimensions. In the biological dimension, noted by Spickard to have been constructed by Europeans, race is hierarchically derived from physical features, genetics, and presumed morality, with Whites as the pinnacle, followed by Asian, Native American, and then African people. Spickard (1992) described the second dimension of racial identity as socially constructed; Helms (1990) proposed people internally sense a common heritage in a particular race. External to the individual, Chavez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) contended this dimension has been used to categorize and label people for the purposes of developing in-group and out-group power dynamics as a means of social stratification. Further relevant to this study, Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley and Chavous (1998) defined racial identity as the part of an individual's self-concept connected to membership within a racial group, and when examined provides opportunity for insight into career identity. Since identity, as well as the engagement of identity layers of self-concept such as race, intrinsically motivate an individual in the workplace (Waterman, 2004), this literature guided this research study on identity intersections and career decision making.

Spiritual Development

Fowler's (1981) faith development theory established a "framework for understanding the evolution of how human beings conceptualize God, or a Higher Being, and how the influence of that Higher Being has an impact on core values, beliefs, and meanings in their personal lives" (Fowler & Dell, 2005, p. 34). Fowler (1981) outlined six stages of development: (a) pre-stage or undifferentiated faith, (b) mythic or

literal stage, (c) synthetic or conventional stage, (d) individual-reflective faith stage, (e) conjunctive faith stage and (f) universalizing faith stage. The work by Fowler (1981) is foundational to spiritual development literature (Love & Talbot, 1999). Love and Talbot (1999) presented five propositions in relation to developing spiritual identity, purporting this identity to "span a range of belief systems, . . . focus on connectedness to self and others . . . center on deriving meaning . . . and involve traditional psychosocial and cognitive development theory" (p. 364). The Fowler (1981) individual-reflective faith stage, including people in their early to mid-twenties reflecting and examining belief systems, and Love and Talbot's (1999) spiritual development propositions informed this study.

Career Calling Concepts

One of the terms used to describe a career is *calling*, a term that connotes feelings of meaningful purpose carried out through work (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Haworth, McCruden, and Roy (2001) developed career calling concepts, illustrated by Dahlstrand's (2010) dissertation, providing a possible foundation for analyzing how spirituality works to construct career decisions. The concepts identify seven influences on a person's view of a vocation or call through a compilation of literature from various scholars.

1. Faith and spirituality examines faith commitments and alignment with career calling (Fowler, 1981; Palmer, 2000).

2. Interpersonal relationships recognize the impact of close relationships in shaping one's understanding of a career calling (Leider & Shapiro, 2001; Palmer, 2000; Parks, 2000).

3. Encounters with others explores how experiences inform a career calling (Coles, 1993; Daloz, Keen & Parks, 1996; Parks, 2000).

4. Personal values, including familial, social, cultural, occupational, economic, and intellectual values, are examined for understandings about a career calling (Bolles, 2001).

5. Critical life events contributing to self-definition are explored to uncover self-reflection on life meaning and purpose (Baxter-Magolda, 1999).

6. Understanding of passion, gifts, and talents examines desires to link abilities to serving others (Bolles, 2001).

7. Developmental issues examine the capacity to construct and deconstruct knowledge and meaning, engage in relationships with others without losing identity, and construct identity regardless of external influences (Baxter-Magolda, 1999; Kegan, 1994).

Career decision making, Black racial identity, spiritual development and career calling literature worked collectively to frame this study and examine the problem expressed in the fundamental research question.

Significance of the Study

According to Bloch and Richmond (1997), traditional career-related HRD theories are instrumental in examining career choice, job satisfaction, and work

motivation but limited in investigating the deeper meaning associated with elements of identity. Investigating the intersection of spirituality and career decision making processes is warranted (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). Further, considering the increasingly diverse workforce, this study's intent to explore how a Black person with a spiritual identity embraces and makes sense of their career decisions (Savickas, 2002) is relevant and timely.

Significance for Research

For several decades, human resource development and career development research focused on White male models and characteristics to describe and explain individual career decision-making in the labor force. However, racial diversity has increased in the labor market, with projections for continued increases long-term (Toossi, 2006; U.S. Department of Labor, 2012, 2013). In addition to the most widely accessed research being focused on the White male population, human resource development and career development research has also typically studied individual performance and organizational productivity (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). According to Bloch and Richmond (1997), traditional career theories are instrumental in examining career choice, job satisfaction, and work motivation, but limited in investigating the deeper meaning associated with individual perspectives, realities, and positionalities.

Although there appears to be relationships between spirituality and career decision-making (Lips-Weirsma, 2002; Gull & Doh, 2004; Bloch & Richmond, 1998) and racial identity and career decision-making (Byars-Winston, 2010), research investigating these intersections is limited. The most widely accessed research utilized

traditional methodology limited in its ability to capture individually constructed realities of people (Fenwick, 2004). Specifically, as Lips-Weirsma (2002) discussed, the Black population, and how they engage identity in the workplace, is an underexplored area of research. Considering race has been recognized as central to the identity of Blacks, focusing on the intersectionality of race and spirituality could allow opportunities to grow in the field's understanding of this population (Stewart, 2007). Therefore this study will contribute to the gap in career literature about the intersection of racial and spiritual identity.

Significance for Practice

Considering traditional research in the human resource development field, describing and explaining career decision-making continues to inform the field, minority populations in the United States, including Blacks, are underrepresented in practice (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). Practical applications with Blacks, such as career assessment and resource centers, career interest inventory instruments, career counseling, career success planning, and job rotation, have not included individual experiences with racial discrimination, the meaning of work from a racial perspective, or racially diverse intrinsic motivators (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). The career development field has provided the case for attack of its practices on the grounds of power, privilege, and social justice (Fenwick, 2004). Considering the minimal evidence on the role of Black identity on career decision-making, how Blacks are represented by practice is insufficient (Stewart, 2007).

The results of this study should have significance for the human resource development career development practitioners who provide career counseling, career education, career guidance, and other career interventions. Shedding light on these needs will provide insight into the development of standards of training for practitioners, the establishment of educational programs, and increased understanding of career motivation and satisfaction for this population. In addition, by providing education and opportunities to explore career decision-making, Blacks in the labor force may seamlessly rationalize and establish career identities and yield long-term career satisfaction across their career life stages.

Significance for Policy

Even though research studies have examined Blacks in the workplace, few have included exploring the lived experiences of Blacks as a source for identifying influences on career decision-making. Further, potential influences as a result of intersections of identity for Blacks have not been extensively explored for policy development.

The results of this study will assist human resource development administrators and faculty in higher education institutions to develop policies supporting Black students and other racial minorities. Additionally, this study could provide foundation for the development of partnerships between higher education institutions and career intervention agencies for experiential and high impact learning, as well as the creation of policies ensuring diversity and the intersection of identities are sufficiently represented in degree programs prior to graduation.

Definition of Terms

The findings of this study should be considered within the context of the following definitions of terms.

Calling: A transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation. (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427)

Career: The "individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life" (Hall, 2002, p. 12).

Career development: Development "assuring an alignment of organizational career management and individual career planning processes to achieve an optimal match of individual and organizational needs" (McLagan, 1989, p. 6).

Career happiness: The "sense of individual well-being that comes about through congruence among individual beliefs, individual behaviors, organizational policies, and organizational practices" (Bloch, 2000, p. 71).

Career identity: Self-identity or the element of an individual's self-concept that authentically connects to work (Meijers, 1998).

Career intervention: Numerous practices to assist in the process of career development, including career assessment and resource centers, career interest inventory instruments, career counseling, success planning, mentoring programs, job rotation, on-the-job training, and performance management (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008)

Career management: A process whereby "employees (a) become aware of personal interests, values, strengths and weaknesses; (b) obtain information about job opportunities within the company; (c) identify career goals; and (d) establish action plans to achieve career goals" (Noe, 2002, p. 366); it involves organizational planning and managing employee careers (Baruch, 2004).

Career motivation: The energy levels of employees to "invest in their careers, their awareness of the direction they want their careers to take, and the ability to maintain energy and direction despite barriers they may encounter" (Noe, 2002, p. 366).

Career planning: Involves the intention to become self-aware in aiding efforts to reach a particular career goal (Hall & Associates, 1986).

Identity: A person's sense of self (Erikson, 1968).

Job: A term that connotes a role of concern for quantifiable benefit and satisfaction, inferring that personal fulfillment occurs outside of the work place. There is a focus on compensation for work performed; opportunities for better salary or security typically result in a job change (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Profession: A term used by people with a profound investment in their work and a strong connection between work and self-esteem. The pride associated with a profession is connected to endeavoring to obtain monetary rewards and advancing in a specific field. People who identify their work as a profession change their type of work at very low rates due to a commitment to a specific field (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Racial identity: The sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that one shares a heritage with a particular race (Helms, 1990).

Spiritual identity: The sum of "goals, values, and beliefs to which an individual is unequivocally committed giving a sense of direction, meaning, and purpose to life" (Waterman, 2004, p. 209).

Spirituality: A process of individual spiritual identity development, where personal beliefs, values, and philosophies (to which an individual is unequivocally committed) enact desires for life meaning and direct behavior (Waterman, 2004; Mattis, 2000; Love & Talbot, 1999).

Delimitations

Identified delimitations of this study involved the population of study, which is delimited to recent college graduates who identified as members of the Black race. The study was not intended to include races outside of the Black race, non-college students, or college graduates who were more than 2 years post-graduation. Considering the growth rate of racial and ethnic diversity in the United States, the growth rate of graduates from colleges and universities, and the limited career development literature with Blacks as the population of interest, this was a viable group to study.

Limitations

The first limitation was the potential impact of career decision making related to the recession that began in Fall 2008. People could be making decisions to minimize the impact of the unstable job market on their graduation from college, thus making career decisions they would not normally make. This limitation was identified and isolated through the interview protocol.

The second limitation was the altering of story structural and content dimensions through participants' remembering. As McAdams (2008) suggested, as the researcher, I should probe for evidence of inconsistencies in memory related to personal development and growth.

A third limitation is I could have been acquainted with some of the study participants. However, the potential for coercion was minimal, as I used confidential data collection methods, and peer debriefers contributed to privacy, confidentiality, and accuracy.

Chapter Summary

Blacks will continue to increase in the workforce, given the increase of Blacks in the working age population. In addition, Blacks with career development plans will increase, given the increase in college enrollment by Blacks. This population has been noted to experience work through the lens of race, although there are work place challenges related to race. Along with experiences in the work place due to racial identity, people are seeking connections to their spiritual identity at work. As identity needs increase in the work place, a greater understanding of how to address these needs is recognized. This study contributed to understandings of spiritual and Black racial identity influences on career decision making by a group of Black recent college graduates from a tradition rich PWI in the US southwest, where they represent 3% of an over 50,000 student body.

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I outlines the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions and conceptual framework. The

second chapter provides a review of literature relevant to the study. Chapter III details the study's methodological framework. The fourth chapter is a presentation of the findings and results of the study. Lastly, Chapter V provides a summary and discussion, as well as offers recommendations in response to the study's findings.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial and spiritual identities influenced career decision making among a select group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the southwest region of the US. The review of literature is presented in three sections. The first section contains a review of theories that influence career decision making; the second section contains a discussion of spirituality and career decisions; and the third section presents literature relevant to Black racial and Black spiritual identity. The dynamics of identity merge to form ways in which people relate to the world (Erickson, 1968). This research is a study of identity within the constructs of race and spirituality. Each section presents an examination of studies relevant to the role of race and spirituality in career decisions.

Theories of Career Decision Making

Theories and research concerning career behavior provide concepts explaining and describing where, when, and for what purpose career counseling, career education, career guidance, and other career interventions should be implemented. Patton and McMahon (2006) acknowledged Parsons as the "founder of vocational guidance", given his "work has had a profound influence on career theory and practice" (p. 3). Parsons' (1909) career theory detailed three components of an individual's career decision: (a) understanding themselves; (b) understanding the job requirements; and (c) choosing a

career based upon knowledge and logic. Numerous career theories have developed from these career decision factors, and are generally categorized into one of two distinct philosophical standpoints. Savickas (2000a) identified these two philosophies as objectivist and constructivist. According to Chen (2003), "these two camps are formed by: (a) theories that are rooted primarily in positivistic or objectivist beliefs; and (b) theories that are derived from social constructivist ideology," (p. 203). Objectivist theories focus on rational coherent methods for creating knowledge (Savickas, 1995b; Zunker, 2002). Through the constructivist approach, there is an "emphasis on holism" with a focus on "the individual as central to the construction of their lives and careers," (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 13). The following section presents how both theoretical bodies have been used to explore career behavior.

Objectivist Theories

The most referenced and utilized career theories are strongly influenced by the objectivist perspective (Chen, 2003). Patton and McMahon (2006) included the following as widely utilized theories within the objectivist category: (a) Parsons' (1909) Trait Factor Theory; (b) Holland's (1973) Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments; (c) Super's (1990) Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development; and (d) Krumboltz's (1994) Social Learning Career Theory.

Parsons' (1909) concepts of career behavior, including choice of vocation as dependent on accurate knowledge of oneself, thorough knowledge of job specifications, and the ability to make a proper match between the two, led to his development of trait and factor theory. Trait and factor theory (Parsons,1909) is based on four major

assumptions: (a) each individual has a unique pattern of traits, impartially recognized and outlined, made up of interests, values, abilities, and personality characteristics; (b) occupations are comprised of factors required for positive performance; (c) it is possible to identify a fit or match between individual traits and job factors using a problem-solving or decision-making process; and (d) close matches are positively correlated with job success and satisfaction.

Parsons' work laid the foundation for more specific trait and factor theories, such as the Holland Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments. Holland (1973) suggested the best work environments are those which are most compatible with an individual's personality. His theory is based on four assumptions of personality types:

1. Personalities fall into six broad categories: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional; each individual has elements of all six categories, but one element is usually evidenced most strongly.

2. Since certain personalities are attracted to certain jobs, the work environments then reflect this personality and can be clustered into six populations: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional.

3. People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable programs and roles.

4. Behavior is determined by an interaction between personality and environment; the closer the match of personality to job, the greater the satisfaction (p. 2-4).

Zunker (2002) examined Holland's theory and observed it put "emphasis on the accuracy of self-knowledge and career information necessary for career decision making," (p. 49). While self-knowledge related to identity, Holland's (1973) assumptions focused on the personality layer of an individual's self-concept.

Objectivist theories also provided the foundation for concepts describing behavior and attitudes over the course of a lifetime that influenced decision-making processes (Arbona, 2000). According to Arbona (2000), Super and other life-span theorists recognized the changes people experience as they mature and posited career patterns to be determined by socioeconomic factors, mental and physical abilities, and personal characteristics. The value of personal characteristics and experiences of exposure within life span theories informed this study on being Black and having a spiritual identity.

Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development (1990), originally developed in 1957 as life stage theory, suggested people seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves, as well as implement and develop their self-concepts (Swanson & Holton, 2001). His theory included basic tenets related to self-concept, life space, life span, and role changes in life. As Super (1990) explained: (a) *self-concept* is developed over the course of life; (b) *life space* is a joining of work and nonwork roles to create a balance that changes over time; (c) *life span* describes a sequential series of five stages of life: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline; and, (d) role changes in life explaining how self-concept changes as life roles change, yielding changes in career to realign life roles with self-concept. Since

identity traits are central to self-concept, Super's view of the importance of self-concept informed this study on racial and spiritual identity. Super's theory suggests stages, age ranges by stage, and behavioral characteristics for each stage to track development from birth through old age. These stages and characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Super (1990) Theory Stages and Behavioral Characteristics

Stage	Age	Characteristics
Growth	0–14	Development of self-concept, attitudes, needs, and general world of work
Exploration	15–24	Experimentation through classes, experiences, hobbies, personal traits, and so forth
Establishment	25–44	Entry-level skill building and stabilization through work experience
Maintenance	45–64	Continual adjustment to improve position
Decline	65+	Reduced output, preparation for retirement

Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) identified people in the exploration stage, who were also traditional college students and recent college graduate age, to be exploring and tapping into identity when they make decisions about careers. Similarly, Astin et al. (2011) described college students who were entering the labor force as being on a spiritual quest to find their purpose in life and discover self-awareness and personal enlightenment. The process of exploration, seeking self-awareness, and finding purpose

communicates a need to involve and engage identity. Super's exploration stage informed this study regarding recent college and university graduates as they made decisions about careers. However, it ignored the influence of race in the process of career exploration.

Super's theory incorporates life roles that occur across lifetime. The tenets of his theory are:

1. Every person has potential. People develop skills through various life roles, making them capable of a variety of tasks and occupations.

2. Each person expresses understanding of self and self-concept through vocational choices. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and implement and develop their self-concept. Self-knowledge is key to career choice and job satisfaction.

3. Career development is lifelong and occurs through the previously mentioned five major life stages. Each stage has a unique set of career development tasks and accounts for changes and decisions made from career entry to retirement.

4. These five stages are not just chronological; they are cyclic as each person experiences career transitions.

5. People assume various roles through their lives. Job satisfaction increases when self-concept includes a view of the working self as integrated with other life roles.

As Herr (1997) noted, Super's theory greatly influenced how career practices are viewed, from the evolution of work roles to an acknowledgment of functioning in multiple environments where individual roles are diverse. Understanding the age and

time frames related to career behavior establishes an interconnection of life roles that inform and influence career decisions. Relevant to this study, Super (1990) developed concepts which support the interconnection of identity and self-concept with career decisions. As individuals with Black racial identity and spiritual identity seek career satisfaction through career roles, they would express, enact and develop their self-concept. According to Super (1990), the awareness of identity layers is central to career decisions and career happiness. If identity layers are central to career decision making, then exploring the influence of Black racial identity and spiritual identity on Black spiritually-identified individuals is essential to understanding their career decisions.

Delving further into the impact of environment on career decision-making, Krumboltz (1979) developed a theory of career decision making and development based on Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory. According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, learning is acquired through observation as part of a cognitive process in a social context. Krumboltz's (1979, 1994) theory of career decision making or Social Learning Career Theory, posits career decisions as a result of an individual's unique learning experiences over their life through encounters with people, institutions, and events. Social Learning Career Theory takes into account the impact of four categories of influential factors:

1. Genetic endowment and special abilities, including race, gender, and physical appearance and characteristics. People differ in the ability to benefit from learning experiences and to get access to different learning experiences because of these types of inherited qualities.

2. Environmental conditions and events, including social, cultural, and political factors, economic forces, and natural resources. These are generally considered to be outside individual control.

3. Learning experiences, where each person has a unique history which impacts career choice. The two main types are: (a) influential learning experience, which consists of previous conditions, behavioral responses, and consequences; and (b) associative learning experience, in which people perceive a relationship between two sets of motivations in the environment.

4. Task approach skills, where interactions among learning experiences, genetic characteristics, and environmental influences result in the development of task approach skills, including personal standards of performance, work habits, and emotional responses.

Social Learning Career Theory (Krumboltz, 1994) differed from earlier theories in its practical application of providing a technique for making career decisions. Accordingly, this theory informed this study through its tenets focused on individual learning through encounters with people, institutions, and events. Based on Krumboltz (1994), Blacks experience learning over the course of their lifetimes due to their race. Encounters and exchanges with other individuals, systems and processes occur as Blacks engage with the world around them. While this theory provided a lens for viewing genetic factors such as race, it was not as useful in addressing the intersection of racial identity, spiritual identity and career decision making.

The cited theories span decades of traditional approaches in the career development field and were critical to understanding the field's theoretical foundation (Swanson & Holton, 2001). While trait factor, personality, life span and social learning theories have contributed significantly to career decision-making approaches (Arbona, 2000; Patton & McMahon, 1999), some authors have expressed apprehension concerning their practicality in current practice. For example, while Super's work is considered seminal, Brown (1990) and Scharf (1997) argued Super's theory does not effectively address challenges to career decisions resulting from the impact of race and ethnicity. Over several decades, research has indicated career life stages to prove inadequate for categorizing individuals (Mann, 1988; Stumpf & Rabinowitz, 1981), specifically for the stage of decline which is synonymous with retirement age (Gould & Hawkins, 1978). Through sustained engagement in cognitively demanding work, Park, Lodi-Smith, Drew, Haber, Hebrank, Bischof, and Aamodt (2014) recently found significant learning and reasoning abilities through a study of 259 older adults ranging from 60 to 90 years old, making Super's stage theory out of date with today's realities.

Brown (1996) indicated modern practice involved engaging a labor force with more cultural and racial diversity than at any earlier point in history, making the use of linear and rational theories limiting. Although objectivist theories have provided the groundwork for theorizing the career decision-making process and have gained mainstream exposure, these approaches proved insufficient with respect to racial diversity (Stewart, 2007). Therefore, an isolated focus on these theories was inadequate for this study exploring the career decision-making of Blacks with spiritual identities.

As such, a second set of theories explaining an individual's career behavior from the constructivist perspective is provided. These theories provide space for the multifaceted intricacies of contemporary career development needs (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). A review of constructivist career theories is presented in the next section.

Constructivist Theories

According to Chen (2003), constructivist career theories have assumptions which describe career decision making as "a socially constructed process" where "language functions as the primary way of communicating meanings and understandings, rather than objectively measuring and assessing a person's traits…" (p. 205). Among the constructivist theories are: Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (2000) Social Cognitive Career Theory; Pryor and Bright's (2003a) Chaos Theory of Careers; and Savickas' (2005a) Career Construction Theory.

Lent et al. (1994, 2000) expanded Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory by incorporating a focus on career behavior, resulting in the Social Cognitive Career Theory. Brown and Brooks (1996) noted, "Theories are made up of constructs that are often borrowed from other psychological theories. Although different theories may employ exactly the same terms, they do not have the same definition," (p. 10). Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, an expansion of his Social Learning Theory (1977) previously discussed, provided a more holistic representation of an individual's cognitive ability through social learning and offered a framework for understanding, forecasting and shifting an individual's behavior. Based on this theory, Lent et al. (2000) developed Social Cognitive Career Theory with the following assumptions: (a)

people can eliminate possible careers because of damaged self-efficacy beliefs or outcome expectations; (b) the more challenges one perceives in obtaining a career, the less likely that career will be pursued; and, (c) altering damaged self-efficacy and outcome expectations can assist in obtaining new positive experiences and careers. Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2000) offers exploration of interests, attitudes and values, gender, race and ethnicity, career choice, and performance. Moreover, Hackett and Byars (1996) noted Social Cognitive Career Theory to be "one of the more promising career theories that may prove satisfactory in accounting for ethnicity in career development," (p. 322). This theory provided a lens for viewing race and values, such as spirituality, for this study. According to Social Cognitive Career Theory, racial identity and spiritual identity are factors with increasing influence on career decisions as individuals have positive experiences when engaging those identities in society. The more these identities are valued and validated, the more individuals will explore career interests related to these identities. The next theory provided space for more diversity and less objectivity.

A second constructivist theoretical approach, Chaos Theory of Careers, was developed by "integrating notions of complexity, connection, change and chance," (Pryor & Bright, 2014, p. 5). Chaos Theory of Careers has concepts based on the interaction between organization and disorganization, consistency and inconsistency, and certainty and uncertainty (Pryor & Bright, 2004). According to Pryor and Bright (2014), Chaos Theory of Careers has introduced and integrated several career theory concepts and terms, including:

- *Emergence* which is the incidence of organization from a sequence of arbitrary actions (Leong, 1996; Pryor & Bright, 2012b)
- *Fractals* which are patterns of multifaceted processes, such as individual traits and skills, labor market trends, family influences and employer prejudices causing individuals to construct career based on their understanding of these processes (Pryor & Bright, 2007b)
- *Attractors* which are the characteristics of the multifaceted processes mentioned in fractals, that are drawing individuals closer to certain careers (Bright & Pryor, 2007b; Butz, 1997)
- *Chance* which is the uncertainty and impact of unforeseen events in individuals' lives and careers (Chen, 2005; Pryor & Bright, 2014).
- *Spirituality* which aligns with concepts such as purpose, meaning, intention, mattering, values and ethics, has become more prominent as a basis for career development (Bloch, 2000; Pryor & Bright, 2007b).
- *Narrative* where individuals' stories are considered important for gaining information about career behavior (Pryor & Bright, 2007b; Savickas, 2005a).

This study was informed by the Chaos Theory of Careers through its integration of career choice concepts, including attractor thinking, spirituality, and use of narratives.

According to Pryor and Bright (2004), through the use of attractor thinking, the Chaos Theory of Careers has incorporated constructivist career decision-making components, such as accidental careers, purpose and meaning, spirituality, and career construction. For this study, spirituality and the use of narratives in understanding career

decision making was relevant. Concerning spirituality, Pryor and Bright (2007b) explained the Chaos Theory of Careers provides a framework for unearthing the characteristics of spirituality and identity that matter to an individual and attracts them closer to certain careers:

> Spirituality has become an increasingly important issue in the career development literature in recent times. Attractors can be understood spiritually as visions of reality—what gives sense and purpose to living. Thus attractors can be seen to reflect individuals' values, sense of worth, identity, meaning making and sense of mission. Attractors are the expression of what matters really matter to individuals (p. 382).

This study was further informed by this theory's use of narratives to glean insight from individuals concerning their decision-making based on what matters to them. The concept of mattering, considered to be fundamental to constructivist thinking in career decision-making, was also central to the third constructivist theory presented.

The third constructivist theory, Savickas' Career Construction Theory (2002, 2005a), has concepts supporting the development of identity in determining how an individual functions in the workplace (Amundson, 2005). According to Savickas (2005a), "The theory of career construction explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behavior," (p. 42). Savickas built upon Super's theory, Holland's theory, and Savickas' (1997) Narrative Psychology to conceptualize Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2002, 2005a).

The concepts of Career Construction Theory utilize three perspectives to explain career behavior: differential, developmental, and dynamic. From the perspective of individual differences psychology (Savickas, 1997), the basic concepts of the theory provided insight into career personality types and *what* individuals prefer in relation to work (Savickas, 2005a). From the perspective of life-span development (Super, 1990), the theory examined psychosocial adaptation and *how* individuals deal with the tasks associated with career development, transition, and work stress (Savickas, 2005a). From the perspective of work narrative psychology (Savickas, 1997), the theory examined behavior associated with life roles and *why* this association causes people to fit work into their lives in certain ways (Savickas, 2005a). The three perspectives, taken comprehensively, provide an explanation for how people construct identity to make career decisions, adapt to career changes, and shape career adjustment (Savickas, 2005a). This work by Savickas informed this study by purporting identity to be central to making career decisions. With race and spirituality as identity elements for Blacks, Savickas offered an explanation for career preferences, association, and fit.

Furthermore, Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989) asserted the evolution of socially constructing frameworks was reflected in careers as more than occupation, but "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (p. 8) and Nicholson & West, 1989 (p. 181) suggested they are "reserved for the sense people make of them". How Blacks who have recently graduated from undergraduate programs make sense of their experiences sheds light on how they make career decisions. To illustrate, Miller-Tiedeman (1988, 1999) proposed the concept of life career, which links career with other

aspects of life. Collin and Watts (1996) posited career to be subjectively constructed reality, and Herr (1992) suggested that careers are not jobs but creations by individuals. Guichard and Lenz (2005) outlined three fundamental characteristics in recent career theory literature: "(a) emphasis on contexts and cultural diversities; (b) self-construction or development emphasis; and, (c) a constructivist perspective," (p. 17). The process of contextualizing diversity as a personal construction allowed the opportunity for studying the perspectives of Blacks in the exploration life stage as they make career decisions.

With a number of career theorists engaged in a multiple-reality perspective and expanding research, this study was positioned to incorporate the multifaceted identity through constructivist methods (Guichard & Lenz, 2005; Savickas, 1997). Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer, and Scott (1994) suggested that the social constructivist perspective contended that people construct what they know through social engagement with others. The approach also incorporated culture in how people make sense of and talk about the world (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). By being socially engaged with the world, this perspective provided an explanation of how a group of Black recent college graduates have built knowledge about their identities and established career fit based on this knowledge. Bruner (1986) explained that constructivist perspectives allowed people to experience reality through their personal construction and illuminated opportunities for individualism over traditional career development practices. Approaches that work to understand the personal interaction between a Black person with a spiritual identity and that person's career should be embraced (Savickas, 2002). In addition, theory with assumptions addressing the wide range of needs of the increasingly diverse labor force,

to which Blacks are contributing in greater numbers, should take into account the impact of individual identity traits, such as race and spirituality. How career development theories have been used through relevant research studies provided insight into the design of this study on career decision-making. The following studies focused on varying approaches and informed this research through purpose, framework, methodology, and/or findings.

Duffy and Klingaman (2009) informed this study through their exploration of the relationship between ethnic identity development and career decision-making, using Super's (1990) framework focused on self-concept. Although the study highlighted ethnic identity, the population of participants included White, Black, Asian American, and Hispanic people. Using quantitative methodology, the researchers studied 2,432 first-year college students through their completion of assessments based on Super's (1990) theory and Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. The Phinney measure targets ethnic identity, considered to be a critical component of self-concept (Duffy & Klingaman, 2009). Findings revealed a statistically significant correlation between ethnic identity and career decidedness, choice comfort, indecisiveness, and choice importance. The study also found race to mitigate the relationship between ethnic identity and career decidedness. Black students with higher levels of ethnic identity recorded significantly higher levels of career decidedness. While the study informed this research by suggesting ethnic identity has a meaningful impact on the career decisions of first-year students, this study focused on recent college graduates and used a qualitative approach.

Another study by Grier-Reed, Skaar, and Conkel-Ziebell (2009) focused on career constructivism and racial identity. The purpose of the study was to investigate constructivism as an empowerment vehicle for culturally diverse college students. The quantitative study used a pretest/posttest design to research 75 undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university. Participants (45% Asian, Black, or Hispanic and 55% White) completed the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale and Career Thoughts Inventory. Findings suggested that a constructivist career development might be a practical vehicle for empowering culturally diverse college students by increasing the career self-efficacy associated with decision-making confusion and commitment anxiety. The study informed this research through a focus on how career constructivism and racial identity impacted career decision making for a group of diverse college students. However, the quantitative study did not allow space to study individual perspectives and experiences, was not limited to Blacks, and did not study recent college graduates.

A third study by Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfeld and Earl (2004) used concepts of the Chaos Theory of Careers to quantitatively research the role of contextual and unplanned factors on career decision-making for 600 college students. Data on career intentions, influence of family, friends, teachers and the media, and the role of chance events were reviewed, resulting in a finding that students perceived family and teachers to be significant influences on their career decisions. Unplanned and chance events were found to influence career decisions. This study's focus on the constructivist school of thought to examine the career decisions of college students informed this study.

In another study, Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, and Platt (2010) used the narrative approach to study career decision making. The purpose of the study was to explore the career decision-making experiences of ten recent college graduates. Findings suggested that the role of social support, expectations, and optimism in adaptability and resilience to college to career transition was significant. While the study used qualitative narrative approaches to study recent college graduates' career decision-making experiences, this research used a qualitative approach and focused on the influence of race and spirituality.

Bloch and Richmond (1997) contended traditional career development theories were valuable in the examination of career choice, job satisfaction, and work motivation, but deficient in investigating the deeper meaning associated with elements of identity. With career development as a primary focus of this study, it was important to present the foundational principles of traditional theories, as well as the more contemporary approaches, for a deeper understanding of the career development literature. Therefore, this section presented theories from the objectivist career theory and constructivist career theory perspective, as well as their role in informing this study.

Spirituality and Career Development

Spirituality has been identified as a dominant characteristic of a person's whole identity (Tisdell, 2003) and developmentally connected to the career process (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Exploration of the role of spirituality in career development has suggested that spirituality is positively associated with desired career decision, self-efficacy, career maturity, and job satisfaction (Duffy, 2006; Duffy & Blustein, 2005;

Duffy & Lent, 2008). Bogart (1994) suggested that the concept of career has a spiritual calling or work central to how a person may construct a career and make sense of individual existence. According to Bogart (1994), having a calling fulfills three essential needs: (a) meaning for social participation; (b) actualization of individual potentialities; and, (c) receiving mandate and guidance from some higher intelligence or will. Similarly, Hunter, Dik, and Banning (2010) posited that calling is finding meaning and purpose through work, thus integrating spirituality and career. This conceptualization of career and calling being directly connected to spirituality laid the foundation for the literature reviewed in this area.

Multiple definitions for spirituality were noted: for example, a pursuit for discovering direction, meaning, and purpose in one's life (Love & Talbot, 1999); a personal journey toward discovering answers to questions about life, meaning, and relationships (Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004); and the desire to find definitive purpose in life and to live in alignment with that purpose (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Fairholm (2001) described spirituality as:

> evident in emotional or intellectual activities or thoughts that transcend normal physical and biological needs. Spirituality is the intangible, life-giving force in self and all people. It is a state of intimate relationship with the inner self of higher values and morality. (p. 43).

Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) discussed that the literature contained multiple definitions and perspectives of spirituality, with three of the most popular being the "intrinsic-origin view of spirituality originating from the inside of an individual . . .

religious view of spirituality specific to a certain religion . . . and . . . existentialist view of spirituality involving searches for meaning and enrichment," (pp. 154-156). Lindholm (2007), on the other hand, stated there was a sense of negotiation within the understandings of spirituality, involving "self-reflection and internal conversation" (p. 12) between the individual and how that person related to the world.

While strong connections were made to religion in the review of the literature on spirituality, it was most often conceptualized outside of rituals and organized institutional activities (Mattis, 2000) and described more in terms of an individual's identity aligning with beliefs, values, and philosophies guiding behavior. "Connectedness" was seen as the critical element within spiritual identity (Bloch, 2000, p. 72). Informed by Fowler's foundational spiritual development theory, Love and Talbot (1999) presented five propositions in relation to developing spiritual identity. The propositions "span a range of belief systems, . . . focus on connectedness to self and others . . . center on deriving meaning . . . and involve traditional psychosocial and cognitive development theory," (p. 364). According to Love and Talbot (1999), the five propositions are not stages, but interrelated processes that could exist simultaneously:

1. Spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.

2. Spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending one's current locus of centricity.

3. Spiritual development involves developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community.

4. Spiritual development involves deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life.

5. Spiritual development involves an increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing (p. 364-365).

For the purposes of this study, *spirituality* involved a process of individual spiritual identity development, where personal beliefs, values, and philosophies (to which an individual is unequivocally committed) enacted desires for life meaning and direct behavior (Love & Talbot, 1999; Mattis, 2000; Waterman, 2004). This life meaning for the individual was realized when spiritual identity was in alignment with, and connected to, thinking in, feelings about, and interactions with the world, including the working world.

Fairholm (1996) contended careers charged with spiritual identity allowed people to live their values, attitudes, beliefs, norms, and other personal characteristics authentically in the workplace, as well as in any other setting. These practices not only allowed for a seamless work life in alignment with personal principles, but incorporated other attributes that made work meaningful to employees. When an employee can connect personally with the work and see the work as valuable, the employee's needs for making a difference in the organization and the world are satisfied (Fairholm, 1996).

Contrary to a focus on individual worker needs, many organizations were centered on efficiency, productivity, and profit, none of which delivered the desired joy and sense of order that were associated with spirituality (Gull & Doh, 2004; Neal, 2000).

This system of orientation was more concerned with modern organizational management than with aspects of workplace spirituality, such as "personal development, authenticity and genuineness, engagement, managing to a higher purpose, compassion, and community activity," (Gull & Doh, 2004, p. 130). The exploration of spirituality "sheds light on the growing importance of creating an environment encouraging the full utilization of an individual's capability," (Gull & Doh, 2004, p. 129).

Organizations must understand and address spirituality needs, as Fairholm (1996) posited that spirituality existed in organizational commitments to make life better for people and to address individual values and attitudes. "Developing, motivating, organizing, and retaining people to be committed to the organization's vision, goals, culture, and values" was critical to the success of organizations (Fry, 2003, p. 694). When organizations consider people to be a priority, this position was "communicated and reinforced through organizational leadership, culture, policies and work design, among other factors; Sensitivity to and interest in the individual must be priority," (Burack, 1999, p. 280).

Due to the limited research on spirituality and career development, Duffy and Blustein (2005) called for more research to investigate the intersection of spirituality and career process, as well as how each may contribute to decision-making and development. This call for research was timely, as evidenced in a quantitative study by Lindholm (2007) with 112,000 college student participants to determine how they engaged spirituality and evolved spiritually during their college years. Findings suggested that the college students were: (a) searching for deeper meaning in their lives;

(b) looking for ways to cultivate the inner-self; (c) seeking to be compassionate and charitable; (d) emphasizing the importance of enhancing both the interior and exterior dimensions of their lives; and, (e) striving to determine what they thought and felt about the many issues confronting them and their communities. Further, results suggested that the students desired to engage and embrace spirituality in all aspects of life, including work. While Lindholm quantitatively studied spirituality in the lives of college students, this study was qualitative and focused on the intersection of spirituality and race. Furthermore, this research measured how spirituality and race influenced career decisions by recent college graduates.

In another study, Haworth et al. (2001) explored career decisions through a mixed-methods study of 35 college students of various classifications. The purpose of the study was to learn how college students made sense of the concept of career calling, as well as to understand how various events, experiences, and relationships influenced the construction of how they talked about calling. Life story interviews and pre/post questionnaires were administered. Findings indicated that a variety of interpersonal, intrapersonal, cognitive, spiritual, and experiential influences shaped vocational meaning making for college students in their study.

Using a qualitative approach, Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) studied over 5,500 first-year college students to explore how career calling varied across demographics, religiousness, life meaning, and life satisfaction. Results suggested that more than 70% of the participants were either committed to a career calling or were currently searching for a career calling. In a similar study, Dahlstrand (2010) used a qualitative approach to

investigate the life stories of 49 first-year college students to examine how they understood career calling in their lives. Findings suggested both direct and indirect influences on how participants rationalized calling, where the basis of calling originated, and how those understandings evolved over time.

Peng and Chen (2014) used quantitative methodology to study 248 Christian and 356 non-Christian Chinese college students to identify the relationship between spirituality and career decision-making. Findings of this study indicated a significant relationship between spirituality and career decision-making, which confirmed spirituality to be important for career decision-making for Chinese Christian college students. While that study quantitatively focused on the relationship between spirituality and career decision-making for Christian and non-Christian Chinese college students, this research was qualitative, incorporated Black racial identity, did not target a specific religion, and focused on a group of Black recent college graduates.

Race, Spirituality, and Black Identity

Both race (Byars-Winston, 2010; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998) and spirituality (Smith, 2012; Wheeler et al., 2002) have been identified as central to Black identity. Although race was a central element of identity for Blacks, the impact of race "has only recently been included and obliquely expounded upon in conceptual models of human development," (DeCarlo, 2005, p. 36). The identity for many Blacks was also noted to be made coherent through a lens of spirituality (Smith, 2012), yet this connection was underexplored. In addition, some elements of the identity formation process were specific to the college student population (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito,

Patton, & Renn, 2009) and relevant to a study targeting recent college graduates. To investigate and make sense of the identity of a group of Black recent college graduates, it is important to explore literature in areas focusing on this population. In this section, identity, identity from the Black racial, Black spiritual, and Black college student perspectives, as well as studies intersecting these identities with career were reviewed to inform the study.

The Formation of Identity

Identity that is linked to the self-concept referenced in Super's theory is comprised of the "goals, values, and beliefs to which an individual is unequivocally committed that gives a person a sense of direction, meaning, and purpose to life," (Waterman, 2004, p. 209). It is important to understand how identity forms in order to examine the development of racial identity. Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stage theory explained the process of forming identity, wherein a sense of self develops as the person grows in self-understanding, personal differences from others, and social roles. The theory incorporated intrinsic, biological, cultural, and psychological contexts to inform identity formation. Identity formation "involves the processes by which commitments to particular identity elements are formed, followed by activities toward their implementation" (Waterman, 2004, p. 209). DeCarlo (2005) viewed identity formation as "the process of self-exploration and integration of personal changes, societal demands, and expectations for the future" (p. 36). In addition, psychosocial theory posited that identity formation was in constant change from infancy through older

adulthood because new experiences provided a source of new information through daily interactions with people.

According to Sellers et al. (1998), racial identity is "one of the most heavily researched areas that focuses on the psychological experiences of African Americans" (p. 19). It is comprised of self-defined attitudes and belief systems (Evans et al., 2009) concerning the meaning associated with a common racial heritage, which includes shared physical features and shared racial experiences (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Racial identity encompasses "the attitudes and beliefs that an African American has about his or her belonging to the Black race individually, the Black race collectively, and their perceptions of other racial groups," (Decuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 103).

According to Sellers et al. (1998), the literature about Black racial identity that is most frequently cited evolved from Erickson's (1968) identity formation theory. Identity formation or development is a complex process involving inquiry into a person's present, past, and future (Melucci, 1996). This formation process "begins at birth, peaks during adolescence, and continues to develop throughout adulthood, thus allowing an individual to fully negotiate multiple identities," (Decuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 103). Much of the early literature stemmed from the field of psychology (Ortiz & Santos, 2009; Sellers et al., 1998) and evolved from Erikson's (1968) psychosocial identity development theory (Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

Erikson (1968) posited that identity development involved various personal aspects—concrete as well as abstract—that engaged one another to produce associated behaviors. According to the theory, a person's sense of individual identity is a product

of: (a) soma, described as intrinsic nature or biological nature, specifically with reference to personal inclinations, attitudes, and talents; (b) ethos, from a cultural context by which a person receives both positive and negative messages about identity; and, (c) psyche, wherein psychological contributions cause a person to embrace or resist both biological and cultural attributes. The areas work collaboratively to inform the process of identity development.

An underlying characteristic of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stage theory is the development of ego identity, which is the conscious sense of self that is developed as a result of social interaction. According to Erikson (1968), ego identity is constantly morphing due to new experiences and information acquired through daily interactions with others. Erikson contended that competency motivates individual behaviors and actions across eight stages of development, spanning feelings of mastery to feelings of inadequacy.

Stage 1: Trust vs. Mistrust. In infancy, babies develop trust based on the dependability and quality of caregivers.

Stage 2: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. In early childhood, children develop a greater sense of personal control.

Stage 3: Initiative vs. Guilt. In preschool, children begin to assert their power and control over the world through directing play and other social interactions.

Stage 4: Industry vs. Inferiority. In early school (ages 5–11), children begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities through social interactions.

Stage 5: Identity vs. Confusion. Adolescents explore their independence and begin to develop their self-concept.

Stage 6: Intimacy vs. Isolation. Young adults begin to establish personal identity critical to exploring and developing personal relationships.

Stage 7: Generativity vs. Stagnation. Adults build lives with a focus on career and family.

Stage 8: Integrity vs. Despair. Elders reflect on their lives.

According to Erikson (1968), identity was central to the core being of each person. The self-concept described by Erickson should be explored to understand how people align who they are with their career decisions.

Marcia (1966, 1980) and Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, and Orlosfsky (1993) expounded on Erikson's identity theory by positing identity formation involved exploration of, and commitment to, one's identity through four stages of achievement. According to Duffy and Klingaman (2009):

> Individuals who have committed to an identity without self-exploration are in identity foreclosure . . . those who have neither committed nor explored are in identity diffusion . . . those engaging in exploration without yet committing are in moratorium . . . and those who have engaged in exploration and have subsequently committed have achieved identities (p. 287).

Marcia's (1980) literature on identity formation informed this research as it described the process of identity exploration and the need for Blacks to explore and commit to being Black as part of the racial identity formation process.

Black racial identity. Since this research has a focus on Black identity, how this aspect of identity develops informed this study. Erikson's (1964, 1968) identity theory provided a foundation for studying racial identity development (Sellers et al., 1998), with a considerable portion of early research on Black racial identity assuming Black self-hatred and White idealization as significant characteristics of Black self-concept (Cross, 1995; Kardiner & Ovesey, 1962; Thomas, 1970). Black identity research also presumed that Black racial identity was socially constructed (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This was evidenced in Cross's (1991, 1995) model of psychological Nigrescence, or process of becoming Black, which is one of the most cited works on Black racial identity (Evans et al., 2009; Sellers et al., 1998). Cross (1995) used the model to describe how Blacks developed through "a series of circumstances and events, into persons who are more Black or Afrocentrically aligned," (p. 98). The five stages, which are not always linear, are (a) pre-encounter, in which low race salience leads to assimilation into mainstream culture and appreciation of Black culture, or internalized racism leads to an anti-Black stance; (b) encounter, in which events cause conflict and questioning of Black identity; (c) immersion-emersion, in which the person is immersed into the Black culture and becomes pro-Black and entrenched in issues of being Black; (d) internalization and (e) internalization commitment, both where the person seeks resolution of internal conflict related to being entrenched in issues of being Black (Cross, 1995). According to Cross, the model accounted for the ability of Blacks to transform the "salience of race and culture" (p. 114) through the stages by defining and

redefining what was personally significant, having a fresh start with each stage, and becoming more settled about being Black (Evans et al., 2009).

The lifespan model of Black identity development, developed by Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) was a revision of the Cross (1991) model which focused on how Blacks moved toward a healthy Black identity. The model suggests those who achieved healthy self-concepts have a solid understanding of Black identity throughout their lives and, over time, traveled through adult cyclic stages at faster paces (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). Self-concept was illustrated as central to Black racial identity, similar to Super's iteration of self-concept.

The work of Sellers et al. (1998) provides notable literature for examining Black racial identity. The researchers' Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) fused ideas from several identity models to explain Black racial identity. The MMRI provides a theoretical foundation for the value Blacks assign to race in their self-definition and membership as part of the Black population. Examining race through the MMRI could provide insight into how Blacks view career identity. As Sellers et al. (1998) explained:

> By explicitly conceptualizing racial identity as only one of many identities within the self-concept, the MMRI provides the opportunity to investigate race within the context of other identities such as gender and occupational identity (p. 23).

Sellers et al. (1998) proposed four dimensions of racial identity for Blacks, including salience of identity, centrality of the identity, regard in which the person holds Blacks,

and ideology associated with being Black. The four dimensions of the MMRI are outlined below.

1. Salience of identity is the extent to which a person's race is a relevant part of her/his self-concept at a particular moment in time.

2. Centrality of the identity is the extent to which a person typically defines her/himself with regard to race.

3. Regard in which the person holds Blacks affective and evaluative judgment of his/her race. Regard consists of a private component (extent to which Blacks feel positively or negatively towards other Blacks, and their own membership as part of the Black racial group) and public component (extent to which Blacks feel others view Blacks positively or negatively).

4. Ideology associated with being Black, where an individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes reflect ways they feel Blacks should live in and interact with society. Ideology consists of four philosophies, Assimilation, Humanist, Minority, and Nationalist.

- Assimilation philosophy is characterized by a viewpoint emphasizing the similarities between African Americans and the rest of American society.
- Humanist philosophy is characterized by a viewpoint emphasizing the commonalties amongst all humans.
- Oppressed minority philosophy is characterized by a viewpoint emphasizing the similarities between African Americans and other oppressed groups.

- Nationalist philosophy is characterized by a viewpoint emphasizing the uniqueness of being of African descent (Sellers, et al, 1998, p. 24-28).

The first two philosophies address the significance of race in the individual's self-definition and the second two philosophies address the meaning the individual ascribes to being Black.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) explained the process of Black racial identity development in three stages across six sectors of an individual's lifetime: (a) Nigrescence Pattern A, which takes place as a result of childhood experiences; (b) Nigrescence Pattern B, defined as a product of adult transformative experiences; and (c) Nigrescence Recycling, described as consistent identity adjustment. Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) identified six sectors of development over the course of one's life:

Sector 1: In infancy and childhood, factors that contribute to Black identity development include families, social networks, and historical events in early socialization of Black youth.

Sector 2: In pre-adolescence, identity development is influenced by family, with identity traits classified as high race salience (Black culture is most important), low race salience (zero emphasis on race), or internalized racism (issues with and hesitancy to identify as Black).

Sector 3: In adolescence, development of a Black self-concept and validation of personal beliefs begin. Self-concept development may be affected by peer group, community, and school environment.

Sector 4: In early adulthood, development is similar to that in Sector 2, where identity traits exhibit high race salience (establishment of peer groups with Black identified culture), low race salience (diverse identity in which race is not important), or internalized racism (negative feelings about being part of Black culture accompanied by movement toward healthy self-concept).

Sector 5: In adult Nigrescence, the following stages are experienced: (a) pre-encounter, in which low race salience leads to assimilation into mainstream culture and appreciation of Black culture, or internalized racism leads to an anti-Black stance; (b) encounter, in which events cause conflict and questioning of Black identity; (c) immersion-emersion, in which the person is immersed into the Black culture and becomes pro-Black and entrenched in issues of being Black; (d) internalization/ internalization commitment, in which the person seeks resolution of internal conflict related to being entrenched in issues of being Black; (e) Black nationalism, in which being Black is the most salient identity and political and social platforms are used to ignite change; (f) bicultural, in which Black identity is integrated with the dominant culture; and (g) multicultural, including identification as Black, accompanied by exploration of other identities as reference group orientation to serve in social justice roles.

Sector 6: In Nigrescence Recycling, an experience or encounter calls Black identity into question and the adult cycle of stages repeats.

Although a review of literature revealed several models of Black racial identity and Black racial identity development, Sellers et al.'s (1998) four dimensions of Black

racial identity and Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (2001) Black racial identity development have been most commonly cited in recent years to explain the identities of Blacks (Scottham, Cooke, Sellers, & Ford, 2009; White-Johnson, Ford, & Sellers, 2010; Williams, Tolan, Durkee, Francois, & Anderson, 2012).

The early adulthood stage, in which the model suggests movement toward healthy self-concept for Blacks, was somewhat relevant to this study. According to Alfred (2001), "culture and identity are elusive phenomena that are socially and contextually constructed" (p. 111). Accordingly, this makes any one life span model limited in its assumptions of Black people. While members of the Black race can have comparable values based on a "shared African history", Blacks have individually distinctive traits, making them even more challenging of a group to depict through life span models alone (Alfred, 2001, p. 111). From this position, the relevance of three bodies of literature—impact of society over time, individual characteristics and traits, and the identity development resulting from the convergence of these areas—informed the collecting and analysis of stories for this study.

Black racial identity for college students. Literature on Black racial identity provided a solid foundation for viewing the socially constructed identities of Black college students (Booker, Turner-Driver, Preston-Cunningham, Survillion, & Stephens, 2011; Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999). In addition, the process of development of identity is further informed by the college student development theory proposed by Chickering and Reisser (1993).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) contended college students develop in seven vectors or directions. The first vector is *developing competence,* demonstrated as confidence in the ability to achieve a goal on intellectual, physical/manual, and interpersonal levels. The second vector is *managing emotions*, in which students develop abilities to identify emotions and express emotions in appropriate ways. The third vector is *moving through autonomy toward interdependence,* described as gaining freedom from needs for reassurance, affection, or approval and increasing in self-direction, problem-solving and decision-making abilities. In the fourth vector, *developing mature interpersonal relationships*, students become more tolerant and appreciative of differences and their capacity for healthy and long-term intimate relationships increases. The fifth vector—the *establishing identity* vector—builds on all other vectors as students begin to develop comfort with body and appearance; contentment with gender and sexual orientation; sense of self in social, historical, and cultural contexts; acceptance of racial, gender, and sexual orientation differences; secure sense of self in response to feedback from others; and stable self-concept, self-acceptance, and self-esteem. In the *developing purpose* vector, students make meaningful commitments to their interests and activities and they develop the ability to establish commitments to personal beliefs and values, make intentional decisions even with opposition, and develop clear career and personal life calling goals. The seventh vector, *developing integrity,* involves development of the ability to balance personal interests with the interests of others, affirm personal core values while respecting the core values of others, and balance self-interest with social responsibility.

Although identity is developing through each stage for college students, the third, fifth and sixth vectors—*moving through autonomy toward interdependence*, *establishing identity* and *developing purpose*—informed this study more than the other vectors for Blacks. Development in needs for reassurance, approval, self-direction and decision-making, described as *moving through autonomy toward interdependence*, comfort with identity characteristics and stable self-concept, described as *establishing identity,* and commitment to personal values, beliefs, and purposeful living, described as *developing purpose,* informed the process of identity development for Blacks. As Blacks are establishing the influence of race on their identity, as well as the intersection of race with other layers of identity, they are developing into how they will view themselves as young adults. How Blacks explore and define their purpose explains the roles that meaning has in their lives.

Black Spiritual Identity

Considering the hundreds of years of racial discrimination in America and across the world for people of African descent, racial identity for many Blacks is viewed through a lens of spirituality (Smith, 2012) and has significant influence on decision making (Constantine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005). According to the literature reviewed in this section, understanding the interconnection of racial and spiritual identity was critical in unveiling the motivating factors guiding learning and behavior for Blacks (Constantine et al., 2005; Falconer & Hayes, 2006; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001; Roberts, 2009). Constantine et al. (2005) asserted there has been a growing body of literature in recent decades focused on the application of career development theories to Black

populations. This is reassuring because investigating the Black experience can assist in comprehending how career decision making manifests from the perspective of spiritually centered persons (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001).

Spirituality has been associated with Blacks as a means and defense for survival and existence; however, the complexity of spirituality's role is underexplored (Smith, 2012). Smith contended that the means and defense mechanism of spirituality was critical to withstanding racial discrimination. Similarly, Sellers and Shelton (2003) asserted blatant and subtle racial discrimination were intrusive in the lives of Black people. This intrusion has implications for physical, mental, and emotional stress (Carter, 2002), psychological well-being (Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004), and concepts of racial identity (Smith, 2012). Historically, Blacks have coped with racial discrimination through their belief in a power beyond themselves (Byars-Winston, 2010; Roberts, 2009; Smith, 2012). Waterman (2004) equated this Higher power to spirituality. Spirituality can assist in adjusting and countering the psychosocial impacts of negative experiences, such as racial discrimination, and it has been offered as a rationale for the inherent spiritual presence in Black culture (Byars-Winston, 2010; Roberts, 2009).

Phillips (2000) investigated the effects of spirituality on adjustment to college among Black students who attended a PWI. Results indicated the spirituality and religious practices of the Black students contributed to their adjustment to college, through prayer, church attendance, and religious community activities. According to Phillips, the case can be made for higher degrees of spiritual exploration and commitment by Black students attending PWIs. This literature informed this study's

examination of how individuals who attend a PWI, with a spiritual identity, view decisions about their careers.

Black Racial Identity, Spiritual Identity, and Career

There is evidence in the literature that supports racial identity and spiritual identity to be central to the self-concept of Blacks. Although limited, studies have found these identities to be influential to career decision making for Blacks. A qualitative study by Byars-Winston (2010) examined the central role of racial identity for Blacks through use of a culturally relevant career intervention model called the Outline for Cultural Formulation. Findings suggested a relationship between racial group membership and career outcomes that indicated career development was situated within a cultural context and that identity was reflective of how Blacks viewed race and how race fit into their self-concept. The study identified three functions of Black identity: (a) to inform a sense of belonging; (b) to provide explanation and coping mechanisms for cultural contexts; and, (c) to recognize interactions with others who are not included in power and privilege structures.

Another study by Falconer and Hays (2006) added to the literature on Blacks' career development through a qualitative study to determine the factors that influenced career choice by Black college students from a PWI. The researchers investigated the career influences among 13 Black college students as part of a larger project focused on seven minority student groups. The findings supported the need for additional outreach, peer guidance, and visible and available career mentors. It also highlighted the need for issues of self-identity and family to be incorporated for Black college students as they

explored options for career futures. As Falconer and Hayes (2006) noted, "This could potentially initiate the introspection and examination that may be required for students of color to explore how their career futures interface with family expectations and their beliefs about themselves" (p. 231).

Constantine et al. (2006) informed this study through a qualitative study designed to investigate Black college student spirituality and career decisions. Study participants referred to the term *calling* in semi-structured interviews when describing the process of integrating spirituality and work. Findings revealed that both religion and spirituality were important to the career development process in Black college students, although spirituality was identified as playing a larger role in the career development process. While that study contributed to understanding the intersection of religion, spirituality, and career development of Black college students, this research specifically focused on career decision-making.

Chapter Summary

Literature on the reviewed objectivist theories was described by scholars as dominating career development approaches over the majority of the field's existence. Constructivist approaches (Chen, 2003) have more of a scope to question and examine individual identity traits more critically. The literature indicated that spiritual identity and racial identity comprise a growing area of interest in career decision-making, even though they are not vastly represented by evidence-based research. The prominent theories were identified as traditionally influenced by White culture under a set of assumptions about the White, male experience in society (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008).

The strong spiritual orientations of Blacks (Herndon, 2003; McAdoo, 1993) and central nature of spirituality in the human development of Blacks (Wheeler et al., 2002), support this study's exploration of career decision making influences among this population.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial and spiritual identities influenced career decision making among a select group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the southwest region of the US. For this study, I investigated how these individuals constructed knowledge to inform career decisions as influenced by their racial and spiritual identity. As Creswell (2012a) suggested, three elements were involved in the design of research: philosophical lens, strategy or approach, and method. When planning a research study, it is considered critical for "researchers to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions they bring to the study, the strategy of inquiry related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice" (Creswell, 2012a, p. 5). For this study, the philosophy was qualitative and approach was interpretive.

Qualitative Philosophy

Considering the intent of the study was to explore the lived experiences of individuals and to give life to their stories, qualitative research was the philosophical lens used to study a group of Black recent college graduates and how they perceive, describe, feel, make sense of, and discuss the role of race and spirituality within the context of their career decisions. Qualitative research was deemed most appropriate, bearing in mind the research "attempted to understand and make sense of phenomena

from the participants' perspective" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 6). Merriam and Associates (2002) characterized qualitative research as involving the "search of meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product" (p. 6).

This lens was most appropriate in studying this population; given the career calling concepts provided a set of assumptions to inform the study (Creswell, 2012a). The meaning the Black participants brought shed light on their career decision-making processes. This lens contributed to both inductive and deductive analysis, as well as patterns and themes, in understanding how Blacks talk about influences on their career decisions. The process of report writing included the "voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description of interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature" (Creswell, 2012a, p. 44).

Within the search for meaning and understanding, qualitative research indicates reality is not to be captured or understood but merely estimated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This type of research assisted in getting closer to the perspective of the Black participants in this study as their individual points of view were captured (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). Qualitative research assumes that "the way reality or truth is constructed to be and to work depends on the particular human constructor entertaining the ideas" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. xi.). With the constructor being a group of Black recent college graduates, this research provided space for their reality or truth. Qualitative research questions the assumptions of positivist research and its supporters contend that those ordered and rational

assumptions negate the complexity of lived experiences in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research does not emphasize science and technology; rather, it stresses the importance of symbolic and subjective experience. Through this lens, the complexity of the lived experiences of Blacks and the importance of the symbolism and subjectivity associated with their stories were affirmed.

According to Erlandson et al. (1993), the concept of constructed reality and multiple truths exists within qualitative research and is considered to be context dependent (p. xi.). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research has a focus on process and meaning and, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 8), is not measured "in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency." Qualitative data are categorical measurements that are expressed not in numerical terms but in natural language terms. Considering that qualitative inquiry allows for the notion of multiple identities of the human constructor or individual, as well as context-dependent realities, qualitative research was further validated as appropriate for this study of the constructed realities of two identity elements (Creswell, 2012a).

As qualitative research has increased in value in other disciplines, qualitative studies have been noted as a trend in HRD research for exploring complex human behaviors related to the workplace (McGoldrick, Stewart, & Watson, 2001; Swanson, Watkins, & Marsick, 1997). Merriam and Associates (2002) contended that possible research approaches can be interpretive, critical, or postmodern. For this study, the basic interpretive approach was selected.

Basic Interpretive Approach

In efforts to engage more holistic methods for studying Blacks and their career decisions, this research utilized a basic interpretive qualitative approach from a constructivist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The basic interpretive approach stems from interpretivism, which refers to approaches to studying social life as a method for understanding (Giddens, 1993). Giddens asserted that the approach has been used synonymously to describe all qualitative research, although there are important distinctions. Basic interpretive research seeks to formalize methods of qualitative research through studies of critical social processes, including deviance and social control in society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Given the focus of traditional career development research on dominant groups with power and privilege, this form of research seemed appropriate for a contemporary approach to studying career behavior. According to Giddens (1993), interpretive research assumes that the meaning of human behavior is characteristic of the behavior and that the aim of the researcher is to extract that meaning. Clarkson (1989) stated, "People cannot be understood outside of the context of their ongoing relationships with other people or separate from their interconnectedness with the world" (p. 16); thus, this approach was purported to shed light on the diversity of individual experiences (Kvale, 1996).

Through basic interpretive research, I reconciled the meaning of the lived experiences for Blacks and positioned research in the direction of the lived experiences and interpretation of those experiences (Creswell, 2012b). Although research approaches are not categorized by ethnicity, culture, lived experience, or any other

identifying characteristic, the basic interpretive approach allowed me to focus on an individual's point in time in a specific context (Darnell, 2012). Using this approach to study the context of a time period most associated with individual exploration, which aligns with the organizational entry and individual-reflective faith stages, assisted in unveiling interpretations made by Blacks regarding their career decisions.

Basic interpretive research contends that reality is comprised of an individual's subjective experiences of the world and those who use this framework assert that reality is socially constructed (Willis, 2007). The social construction of reality stems from constructionism, noted as growing more useful for understanding career behavior as it supports perspectives that "careers do not unfold; they are constructed" (Savickas, 2002, p. 154). Using a basic interpretive approach from the constructionist perspective seemed appropriate for this study, considering this study was designed to analyze and understand how a group of Blacks who have recently graduated from a PWI in the southwest "construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 37). According to Klein and Myers (1999) knowledge is acquired through social constructions when using interpretive research. Not only does basic interpretive research focus on the socially constructed nature of reality, it recognizes the relationship between the researcher and the subject matter, as well as situational controls working to define this process (Rowlands, 2005). Basic interpretive research does not predetermine variables or work to test hypotheses, but develops an understanding of the social context associated with a phenomenon and how the phenomenon influences and is influenced by the social context (Walsham, 1995).

Using this approach was further validated, considering the role of socially constructed nature of negotiating multiple layers of individual identity (racial and spiritual) and making it relevant to understanding career decision making (Chen, 2003). Lips-Wiersma (2002) indicated that there is space for social construction approaches in career development research, allowing exploration of the constructed nature of career purpose, meaning making, and coherence. According to Savickas (2002), these approaches assume that there are no fixed meanings; rather, there are multiple meanings, identity is self-constructed through personal interpretations and actions, individuals are different in how they make sense of experiences, meaning is constructed through life experiences, and personal fulfillment is dependent on critical reflection.

Research Process and Design

Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) stressed the research process and design must be appropriate to address the research questions. These scholars further recommended the design be considerate and mindful of the most effectual protocols for participation, processing information, and observation. The use of a qualitative methodological design from a basic interpretive approach aided in examining the perspectives, experiences, and stories of a group of Blacks who recently graduated from college, in relation to the intersection of race, spirituality, and career decision making. The necessary process and design elements included selection of the site, selection of participants, and procedures for conducting the study.

Participant Selection

This study focused on the intersections of spirituality and race, and the consequential impact on career decision making by a group of Black recent college graduates from a PWI in the southwest. The PWI was selected to provide a snapshot of how Blacks' career decision making is framed by attending PWIs where a need to balance two cultural worlds is essential for achievement (DuBois, 1965) and spirituality has been noted to contribute to persistence toward graduation (Phillips, 2000). The PWI included in this study has a total student population of approximately 50,000, including an undergraduate student population slightly less than 40,000. The school is noted to have a tradition rich in cultural norms and practices dating back to the 1800s. The Black student population at this school represents slightly more than 3% of all students, in a state with over 12% Blacks according to the US Census Bureau (2012). In addition, Blacks at this institution graduate at a rate that is 16% less than their White counterparts.

Based on a 2013 campus climate study, the institution is perceived to have a history and reputation for being a conservative, White, male, Christian institution that is not inclusive of minorities, women, homosexual/bisexual students, or international students. In this same study, when asked about whether students felt the need to minimize various characteristics of their identities to fit in, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and international students responded they agreed or strongly agreed at twice the rate of White students. Specifically, Black students indicated they felt the need to minimize their identity at triple the rate of White students to fit in. In the 2008 campus study, minority, international, female and gay respondents indicated that daily or weekly, they

felt uncomfortable at the institution because of other students' reactions towards them. These campus climate results were duplicated from earlier studies conducted in 1998, 2002 and 2004. Considering the consistent campus climate feedback students are reporting about this institution, the consistently low numbers of Black students, there are dynamics at play for Black students in their daily pursuit of degrees at this specific institution that may be greater than those present at other Predominately White Institutions in the US southwest. Black students are reporting needs to minimize their identity and discomfort on a campus where they have not reached over 4% of the student body of an institution founded in 1876. Given the research noting spirituality as contributing to Black student persistence to graduation at PWIs, the contextual factors at work at this institution appeared to be appropriate for this study.

This investigation provided perspective on the meaning related to the identity, beliefs and value systems associated with spirituality and how this meaning informs and shapes career decision making by Blacks. Viewpoints were collected from purposefully selected recent college graduates (not more than two years post graduation) who self-identified as Black. Better understanding of these phenomena provided knowledge about individual meaning making and influences among the group of Blacks in this study, resulting in an enhanced understanding of human behavior. The findings of this study will fill a gap in the literature base in this area and inform practice.

Purposive selection of participants was utilized to identify Black participants who self-identified with spiritual phenomena. There was a targeted sample of nine individuals who were within two years from their graduation from various undergraduate

programs of study. Being intentional in sampling is common when the research focuses on individual perspectives calling for participants to be familiar with a specific phenomenon, such as the impact of their racial and spiritual identity at a specific point in their lives.

The process for identifying recent graduates from various fields of study was conducted via email correspondence. The Email for Prospective Participants (Appendix A) was used during the recruitment process. Former student constituent networks included the Black Former Student Network and Women Former Students' Network. The email invitation included the Information Concerning Questionnaire Participation (Appendix B) and the Consent Form (Appendix C) to guide potential participants in determining their comfort and interest in participating. Prospective participants were given one week to respond, after which a review of prospective participants was conducted to determine whether the first 4 to 5 female and first 4 to 5 male respondents were Black with spiritual identities.

A target for the population sample incorporated efforts to purposively identify a gender-diverse group of participants who self-identified as Black, with high degrees of spirituality, as defined in this document. This selection was achieved via the Prospective Participant Questionnaire (Appendix D) to capture prospective participants' racial identity and views on the contribution of spirituality to their identity. The questionnaire was informed by the College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey by Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2010) and was based on spirituality as defined through literature cited in this

document. These criteria were established to ensure prospective participants were able to respond to interview questions related to the research questions.

A large number of empirical studies have been conducted in the social sciences in the past 20 years, but only a few have focused on Blacks who experience a range of human, social, and cultural dilemmas due to race and even fewer have examined the intersection of race and spirituality. Recent college graduate participants were selected to capture constructed accounts of career decision-making experiences and expected transitions during the exploration stage, as outlined in Super's life stages. Those who were determined to be in the exploration, organizational entry, and individual-reflective faith stages were selected because these stages similarly reflect characteristics of searching and self-discovery (Super, 1990), "feelings of frustration, mortality, and stress" due to life transitions (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2000, p. 220), and reflection (Fowler, 1981). Being in this stage allowed multiple identity and reality stressors to emerge due to an intersection of spirituality, race, and the societal demands of career decision making.

It was challenging to recruit participants who were willing to provide self-disclosing accounts of career decision-making experiences. Invitations were sent across six months to recruit and secure the nine participants. Recruitment was slow, so further invitations were disseminated via social media focused on Black former students of the institution. Sixteen Black recent college graduates indicated interest in participating, of those, five did not meet the spirituality criteria for participation through the questionnaire and two did not respond after the initial communication exchange.

Considerable attention was dedicated to making sure participants were comfortable, assured privacy, and afforded a positive atmosphere for the interviews. An interview protocol (Appendix E) derived from Dahlstrand (2010, p. 221-225) directed the questioning in each interview. Interviews were audio taped, with consent of participants, to guarantee accuracy of responses.

Procedures

Considering this study involved human subjects, it was required to complete the Institutional Review Board approval process. The risks associated with this study were marginal considering the subjects were not from any protected populations and merely participating in individual interviews. Protocols were developed and communicated for approval.

Following approval, research was conducted including an integrated method of interviews, participant review of interview transcripts and data analysis. Protocols detailed the specifics of confidentiality, privacy and anonymity regarding participants' participation in the study. Assurance was communicated that any information disclosed will remain private and the researcher will not disclose any personal information. Participants were aware of their ability to leave the study at any time, without concern for consequences. Information was provided (Appendix B) and a Consent Form (Appendix C) via email following communication of their interest in participating in the study. These documents were provided to outline specifics of the study and details regarding participant rights. After the individuals consented to participate, a Consent Form was signed by each participant. Any paper documents with participant identifying

information have been stored in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the study and all data files have been encrypted. Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board involving research on human subjects.

Ethical Standards and Considerations

According to Strike, Anderson, Curren, Van Geel, Pritchard, and Robertson (2002), a researcher should maintain ethical standards prior to, throughout, and following research with participants, with whom they work directly through conversation, observation, or morphing into numbers or other depictions. A primary concern is for researchers to be open and up front with research participants about the nature of the study, to respect participants' rights, and to conduct only research that is likely to benefit participant (or at least cause them no harm). Researchers should share the nature of the study by providing detailed information and soliciting voluntary participation through informed consent. The process of demonstrating respect for participant rights, privacy, and self-respect involves the researcher safeguarding trustworthiness, confidentiality, and anonymity. Specific attention was dedicated to demonstrating respect for participants throughout this research process and asserted prior to, during, and after each interaction with the participants.

For this study there were two considerations for the research study including issues of "backyard" research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) and potential obstacles to using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Research for this study was collected from recent graduates of the university I attend. Research conducted in this manner has been

described as “backyard” research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), backyard research involves the study of a researcher’s organization, personal acquaintances, or work setting. This has been noted to create issues with confidentiality, privacy, and disclosure of sensitive information obtained through research. Considering the topic of this study, issues of power and privilege are limited to viewpoints of race and spirituality. Research on these identity elements should not expose participants to harm.

Boyatzis (1998) suggested three major obstacles using thematic analysis, including the researcher’s a) projection, (b) sampling, and (c) mood and style (p. 12). Projection can occur when ascribing the researcher’s “own characteristic, emotion, value, attitude” to a participant (p. 12). If I were not to ask a participant to clarify an ambiguous statement during storytelling, then proceed to assign value and thematically label their story based on my assumption, I could be inserting my perspective and thus contaminating the data. Sampling obstacles occur when the raw data “full of contamination” by factors causing the analysis and interpretation to be tainted. For example, my data would most likely be contaminated if I were to target middle-aged Black pastors of predominately Black congregations as participants for this study on whether race and spirituality impact career decision making. Mood and style occurs as sensory overload, frustration with raw data, and confusion over coding cause the researcher to skew the analysis of data. Being aware of my positionality prior to and throughout the study, as well as being mindful of my role as the researcher was paramount, in addition to other strategies for minimizing the effects of these obstacles.

To address issues associated with backyard research and obstacles to thematic analysis, strategies described in the Procedures and Trustworthiness sections were also employed to ensure confidentiality of participants, as well as consistency of assessment, and adequacy of study findings.

Data Collection

The methodological approach informed the use of narrative methods (Riessman, 2008) to gather life story data on how elements of identity were constructed and negotiated to inform career decision making by a group of Black recent college graduates (Linde, 1993). According to Creswell (2012a), narratives exist within lived or told stories, when speakers engage in sharing and recounting one or a series of experiences or events. Typically, the telling of a story occupies multiple turns in the course of a conversation and narratives may share common structural features. The type of interview, organization of the Interview Protocol (Appendix E), and what I determined to keep in mind during the interview process assisted in the collection of data.

Life Story Interviews

Life story interviewing was the narrative method for collecting data because life stories are considered interpretive (Linde, 1993), culturally expressive (Corso & Rehruss, 2011), inclusive of events that define and comprise an individual (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) and shift power to the individual (Riessman, 2008). Gubrium and Holstein (2002) wrote, “We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through stories” (p. 121), even when we are not cognizant of the importance

of our story. Linde (1993) suggested life stories be used to explore the recent trend toward individual needs for identity, to provide a means for understanding, evaluating, and constructing accounts of experience.

The process of life story interviewing is more subjective than objective, with provision for a variety of questions from interview to interview, dependent on relevant variables about each interviewee's situation (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). The life story interview can "unfold" in three stages: (a) planning or pre-interview stage involving "understanding why use of the life story can be beneficial"; (b) process of conducting the interview, "guiding a person through the telling" of the story; and (c) process of "transcribing and interpreting" the story that is told during the interview (p. 131).

Stage 1: Pre-interview. In this stage of understanding why using life stories is beneficial, it was important to understand life story in the context of this study. A greater understanding of an individual's system of coherence provides a guide for future behavior, which Linde (1993) described as existing midway between common-sense ways of thinking and expert or scholarly ways of thinking. While these systems are considered to be critical to understanding the individual, there is only limited research on how people access and utilize coherence systems in their work lives. This limited research offers significantly less literature on the coherence systems of people of color, leaving various subpopulations, including Asians, Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, open for study (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Specifically for this study, Lips-Wiersma (2002) contended the literature is practically void in explaining how Blacks create coherence of their life experiences as they influence their career behavior.

After thinking through life story in the context of this study, I identified the major objective of the interviews, which was to gather a series of stories from the participants from early years though the present to gain perspective of potential influences on their behavior. Next, I developed questions guided by relevant literature and the conceptual framework. In crafting the questions, I asked myself what area of information will be gathered. I developed the protocol for interviews, timelines, and my role as the researcher. I began the process of identifying interview participants next through steps outlined in the Procedures section. Once respondents indicated they wanted to participate, they were sent the Prospective Participant Questionnaire (Appendix B). Respondents meeting the criteria for the study provided their desired contact information for future communications and were elevated to study participants. Communication began with each participant via email and telephone on a rolling basis to schedule all interviews. Participants were asked to provide a pseudonym for use throughout the study. Convenient times and dates for participants were requested and accommodated using Doodle meeting organizer on the World Wide Web, where participants were asked to use their pseudonym to maintain anonymity. Interviews were scheduled in a location secured by the researcher with consideration for privacy in a convenient location, day, and time for each participant. This process was used for both interviews.

Stage 2: Conducting the interview. Data were collected from nine participants via two semi-structured life story interviews; the first interview was projected to last for 1.5 hours and the second for 1 hour. I scheduled my first interview within these

parameters in different locations most convenient for the participants. Following the first two sets of interviews, I learned the timing I indicated to participants was not accurate. The first interview was spanning closer to 2 hours and the second interview between 30 and 45 minutes. I amended my communication with participants to reflect the more accurate time commitment.

I attempted to create a comfortable and open environment for the participants to feel relaxed and uninhibited throughout the interviews. I began with an introduction and description of the process paraphrased from the Information Concerning Questionnaire Participation (Appendix B) including the study being qualitative in nature, tape-recorded, as well as the need for me to take a notes periodically. The Consent Form (Appendix C) was reviewed with each participant, including confidentiality and anonymity protocols, as well as allowing time for their questions. Following the signing of the form, a few ground rules were reviewed to further establish the open environment, including, a request to speak from personal experience and perspective, communicate in their own way, and respond with honesty and authenticity.

Interviews were conducted according to the Interview Protocol (Appendix E) and demonstrated how the interview questions explored interpersonal, intrapersonal, experiential, familial, and spiritual influences on participants and how these impacts could influence understanding of and responses to career decisions. While these categories framed the questions, I was careful to avoid leading participants toward a specific direction (Patton, 2002). Considering this, the questions were open-ended and

crafted to obtain life stories through phrases such as “Tell me about a time when…” and “Can you tell me a story about…”.

Interviews were audio recorded to contribute to accuracy of transcripts and preparation of data for analysis (Stockdale, 2003). I also took researcher notes during the interviews, documenting details about each interview (Erlandson et al., 1993). For example, I wrote down key words to jar my memory about specifics of one of the participant’s stories, content needing more exploration to gain a better understanding of meaning, and adjustments needed for the next interview. In addition to planned questions, probing questions to encourage continued communication exchange allowed for elaboration about life events (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Some examples of probing questions were: Why was that important to you? How did you feel about that experience or situation? Have you always felt that way? Can you give me an example? Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggested the power of an interview stems from how relevant the questions are that are posed. Time was spent in Stage 1 crafting relevant questions; however, as interviews progressed and as needs arose, exploration for deeper meaning was needed and sometimes new questions were introduced. For example, the question “Oliver Wendell Holmes stated ‘Most people go to their graves with their music still inside of them’, if you had to describe what you think your music is, what would you say?” required considerable follow-up in the first two interviews. I decided to rephrase to provide clarity for what was meant by “music” by adding or “without expressing the uniqueness that makes them special.” There were other instances where needs for clarity required adjustments to questions.

Stage 3: Transcription. In stage 3, the collected life story data from the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by Speech To Text Audio Transcription Service soon after completing the second interview. I wanted to review each interview story as a whole, so I waited until after the second interview with each participant to transcribe. Following the transcription process, I combined each set of interview transcripts into one document. As suggested by Gubrium and Holstein (2002), I worked to allow the participants stories to embody a "flowing, connected, narrative" (p. 131) through a "restorying" process where I read through the transcripts for "key elements, and rewrote the stories to place events in a chronological sequence", omitting only repetitions and other unessential content (Gay, Mills, Airasian, 2012). Then, each participant was contacted to review and provide feedback about the transcript of their interviews for accuracy. This allowed the participants to "respond to the life story in the form of a subjective reaction" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 131). I communicated my appreciation for their attention to detail and assured the participants I would use only the interview content reviewed and approved to their satisfaction. The participants' review of the transcripts was used as a tool for member checking.

Data Analysis

Qualitative narrative studies are explored "from more of a holistic point of view", and identity formation often studies the experiences of individuals in a "holistic manner" (Kroger, 2007, p. 186). Therefore the data was analyzed holistically. In addition, Riessman (2000) indicated life stories can be analyzed in numerous ways including textually (Gee, 1991), conversationally (Polanyi, 1985), culturally (Rosaldo, 1989;

Mattingly & Garro, 2000), politically and historically (Mumby, 1993; White, 1987), and performatively (Langellier, 1989). Performative analysis was deemed most appropriate for this study since "storytelling is seen as performing a self" and useful for analyzing "studies of identity construction" (Riessman, 2005, p. 5). "Approaching identities performatively opens up analytic possibilities that are missed with static conceptions of identity, and by essentializing theories that assume the unity of an inner self" (Riessman, 2005, p. 8). Seeking data elements where participants told stories illustrating an identity assisted in the study of they perceived their identities. For example, through performative analysis Paul's articulation of an experience of racism provided insight into his perception of his socially constructed Black male identity. This next section outlines the data analysis steps utilized for the study, as well as strategies that addressed ethical standards and considerations: trustworthiness and role and positionality of the researcher.

Interview Transcripts

As mentioned in Stage 3 of the previous section, the interview transcripts were first reviewed for accuracy, editing grammatical or spelling errors, ensuring appropriate structuring for coherence of stories, and omitting any repetitions not contributing to content. Since this did not alter the message participants were trying to relay, words such as "um, oh, well, uh" were removed to make content flow. Next the transcripts were uploaded into QSR International NVivo™ qualitative data management software. After each transcript was uploaded into NVivo, I saved each one by pseudonym and analyzed the data in two phases.

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) suggested clustering, taking note of patterns, and identifying plausibility, in efforts to generate meaning for data interpretation. In the first phase of my efforts to generate the meaning, transcripts were reviewed and analyzed to detect descriptive codes, categories, and themes (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). Codes are "words or short phrases" summarizing the essence of a data element, categories store the codes identified as similar, and themes are the "experiences of focus" capturing the intent of a series of coded data elements or categories (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 286). Participant stories were read through several times and assigned descriptive codes summarizing the content of sentences, phrases and terms through open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). In NVivo™, descriptive codes are called nodes, and these nodes organize the full stories, sentences, phrases and descriptive terms into categories. Even though NVivo™ supported data management, I analyzed and interpreted the content. Some nodes were created based on responses to specific questions. For example, in response to the question "How do you define calling?", I created a node of "calling". In addition, nodes emerged from the meaning emerging from stories communicated by participants, such as "disappointment" and "dealing with stereotypes". Utilizing this process with each transcript caused 42 nodes to be created.

In the next phase, the 42 nodes were analyzed for determining associations and relationships. During this process, some categories collapsed into related categories to form themes. For example, three of the original nodes, "being Black" and "stereotypes" were originally combined into one node "Racism". Next it was important to make

connections between subcategories, a process described by Strauss and Corbin (2008) as axial coding. NVivo™ facilitated axial coding through the software's ability to capture data, move data from one category to another, merge and aggregate categories, and rename categories to form themes.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed assessing trustworthiness through certain criteria as a substitution for qualitative terminology, including credibility to internal validity, transferability to external validity, dependability to reliability, and confirmability to objectivity. In addition, Lincoln (1995) discussed positionality and disciplined subjectivity as factors of trustworthiness. For this study, the *Role and Positionality of the Researcher* section addresses these factors. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997), disciplined subjectivity involves the researcher rigorously self-monitoring, continuously self-questioning, and intentionally re-evaluating all phases of the research process. Therefore, in addition to focusing on Mason's (2002) guidelines to avoid bias, and positionality and disciplined subjectivity was addressed through trustworthiness strategies identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including member checks, audit trail, and peer debriefing.

Member Checking

It was important to determine "the compatibility of the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the respondents with those that are attributed to them" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 30), so a member check process allowed participants to verify data and provide any needed clarification. Member checks were conducted by allowing

participants to review edited transcripts from the interview, as well as the results of analyzed data sent electronically. As indicated in Stage 2 of Data Collection, each participant was contacted to confirm their voices were captured accurately. It took the participants between one and three weeks following electronically receiving the transcripts by email to respond with feedback. Each participant made edits to their transcripts. Four participants added several statements to their transcripts, indicating they had time to think about the questions and their responses and wanted it reflected in their transcript. The edits of the remaining five were minimal, indicating how they structured several statements did not appropriately convey their intent. They merely restructured some wording of statements to ensure clarity of message content. It was essential to have the participants verify the authenticity of their reality as it was described on paper (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Audit Trail

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that, by establishing an audit trail after becoming familiar with a qualitative study, the researcher can audit the methodology and analysis of the study. I used a spiral notebook to capture specifics about the interview process. I maintained a log of dates, demographics, and story content including events, influences, and behaviors for each participant. I took research notes to capture keywords and phrases for jarring my memory about elements of a story, document times when I needed to ask probing questions, and highlight needs for adjusting question content for the following interviews. For example, because of the need to adjust the interview timeframes originally communicated to participants, I adjusted the time commitment

from 1.5 hours and 1 hour for the two interviews to 2 hours and 45 minutes. In addition, for the first two interviews, the participants became restless and were willing to continue, but needed a break for restroom, snack, and or water. I took note and planned a break mid-way through the remaining interviews, as well as provided water and snacks. An example of notes regarding a need to alter a question was provided in Stage 2 of the Data Collection process for the question "Most people go to their graves with their music still inside of them, if you had to describe what you think your music is, what would you say?" required considerable follow-up in the first two interviews. I decided to rephrase to provide clarity for what is meant by "music" by adding or "without expressing the uniqueness that makes them special." A second example is this same question which appeared to garner a duplicated response to the question "Tell me about your special gift or talent that you have to share with others?". I noted this after the third interview and chose to omit parts of the question and ask if their "music" used as a metaphor for their gift, "was playing loud and clear" in their lives, or is it muffled or playing quietly" for only them to hear.

Peer Debriefer

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that eliciting strategies to corroborate initial findings through an analysis and interpretation of data can work to establish trustworthiness. Two peer debriefers were selected to determine plausibility of the data. Raw data and data analysis was sent to two fellow graduate students who are pursuing doctorates in (a) leadership, education and communication, and (b) educational psychology and who have taken qualitative research courses and in the process of

writing dissertations. The peer debriefers were asked to review and analyze the transcripts (in unitized coded form) and assist in corroborating themes. While the majority of the peer debriefer's feedback was in alignment with the researcher's findings, through their insight a new category emerged. A category of "stereotype" was originally identified by the researcher and collapsed into the "racism" theme when analyzing. Based on the feedback from one of the peer debriefer's, the data elements within the "stereotype" category could not merely be collapsed into "racism" due to the meaning from the participant's perspective to have experienced racism specifically because of a broadly held but limiting, inflexible and generalized image of Blacks. In addition, the chair of the dissertation committee provided insight into the need to tease out theme categories to better align with the study. For example in the case of labeling a theme "stereotype" as a separate category, I was advised to develop a "racial stereotyping" subcategory within racism as a better illustration of the interrelation of stereotyping as a result of racism.

Role and Positionality of the Researcher

As the researcher and a former Black college student at a PWI, with a spiritual identity, it could be asserted, after reviewing my background, my positionality in the study was subject to bias and undisciplined subjectivity (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Methods to address my positionality as the researcher are outlined in the previous section entitled Trustworthiness.

Researcher's Background

For the past 16 years, I have worked in education, predominantly in the area of multicultural college student affairs. I began my career in education as an eighth-grade teacher of behaviorally maladjusted students with academic deficiencies. Exposing students to new ideas and watching them process information gave me a rare feeling. One student's ability to explain his method for solving a math problem without being corrected for not following the textbook method made him eager to participate in class. Allowing the students to work in groups to develop a shared positive behavior points system created buy-in and desired behavior from students. My primary observation, in this majority-minority environment, was my students' need to feel valued and to be motivated by something greater than themselves. Although group work was not a recommended method for working with students with behavior disorders, I began to provide opportunities for them to step outside comfort zones. I gave assignments that required teamwork, and my students excelled. I began to see improvement in academics and behavior. There was a connection between how the students performed when others depended on their contributions. The students identified their positive characteristics, realized their capabilities, and appreciated others for valuing their input. Although I was skeptical, this teaching experience ignited a passion to help young minds develop.

My next career decision was to work as a college recruiter. I formed bonds with students and parents who were concerned about college admission and readiness, with an assigned concentration on predominately African American and Hispanic high schools. This role caused me to begin soul searching; I wanted long-term involvement with my

students, as well as opportunities to guide them through unchartered territory. I also wondered whether I was being completely honest about what my prospective recruits would experience at my college. There were few cultural support programs and services on the campus, which concerned me, given the minimal representation of minority students in the student body and the on-going discomfort with campus social situations the students were navigating. I did not want to feel that I was "setting students up" for failure, just to increase underrepresented student enrollment. I did not just want to supply information any longer; I was motivated to deliver targeted resources that would allow me to observe student application and implementation.

I began to search for avenues where I could play an instrumental role in students feeling supported, connected, and valued. With this intent, my next career decision involved a shift into multicultural affairs. In this job, I expounded, developed, and crafted my passion for student development. In my current position, I not only have long-term engagement with an ethnically diverse student population, I assist students in graduating as individuals of character, competence, integrity, acceptance, and vision. I help students to be of service to others and to function successfully in a diverse and multicultural world.

It was not until this career decision that I recognized that my discontentment with work had to do with who I was as an individual. In my previous jobs I did not understand my disinterest in routine events and activities as a need for fulfillment. I struggled to connect with my career decisions on a personal level and felt that I was not being true to the calling in my life. From my perspective, my "whole" self informs the

work that I do in my career (Vogel, 2000, p. 17). By bringing all that I encompass to work every day, I not only foster and nurture my identity, I facilitate identity development in those whom I encounter. As a Black woman, I have rationalized fulfillment in connecting to identity at work by connecting to the notion of my whole self being "grounded in humanity" (Vella, 2000) and typified by Tisdell's (2003) viewpoints on the relationship between culture and spirituality.

As a result of my quest, I began to work with students to develop post-college plans. I learned quickly how aligned my experiences with students were with the literature about the meaning-making needs of this generation. In addition, the impact of spirituality and religion on Black students was overpowering as it related to how they rationalized post-college plans. My interest in and need for literature to inform my work grew. As I increased my understanding of relevant literature, I noted that previous research had not fully addressed the intersection of being Black, having spiritual identity, and making career decisions. This study is an attempt to contribute to the gaps in the literature about this intersection.

Chapter Summary

This study was designed to gain understanding of the centrality of racial and spiritual identity elements influencing the career decisions of a select group of Black recent college graduates. This chapter described the methodology for the study, areas that guided use of basic interpretive qualitative research, procedures for data collection and analysis, procedures for establishing trustworthiness of the results, researcher positionality and disciplined subjectivity, and stories of each participant. In the

following chapters there is an exploration of the numerous influences on the participants' lives which led them on their journey toward a personal understanding of calling.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial and spiritual identities influenced career decision making among a select group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the southwest region of the US. The overarching research question was "What are the impacts of spirituality and race on career decision making by a select group of Black recent college graduates in the workforce?" The guiding research questions were (a) "How does spirituality influence career decisions by a group of Black recent college graduates as they prepare for the workforce?" (b) "How does race influence career decisions by a group of Black recent college graduates as they prepare for the workforce?" (c) "What major life events and other experiences influence career decisions by a group of Black recent college graduates as they prepare for the workforce?" and (d) "How do personal passions, talents, and values influence career decisions by a group of Black recent college graduates as they prepare for the workforce?" This chapter presents the findings of the study, including participant case stories, presentation of the findings, and a thematic presentation of the interviews.

Participant Case Stories

This section presents a brief story for each participant. These stories have been crafted from the narratives shared by each participant. While these case stories are not

all-encompassing, they provide background on each of the Black recent college graduates who participated in this study.

Mary

For Mary, being Black was central to her identity, which she attributed to learning to negotiate her identity and handle discrimination at a young age. As she recalled, her Black identity was questioned because she behaved differently than stereotypical images of the typical Black child. She was very polite and respectful, spoke grammatically correct English, worked hard at school, excelled at her critical thinking abilities, and made all A's. She lived in a predominately Black environment, but went to predominately White schools. She was met with on-going challenges from teachers, other educators and peers who, as she described, were not accustomed to working with, and lacked the ability to motivate and nurture, Black children. From Mary's perspective, she excelled in spite of the fact the educators did not believe in her greatness. The support of her family was enough. She processed difficult interactions at school with her mother at home. When she would come home and discuss not being given opportunities at school, teachers' assumptions about her home life, or peers assuming she was attending because she was Black and not because of merit, she had disheartening and eye-opening conversations with her mother about race, racism, and stereotypes she would deal with for the rest of her life. Mary appreciated her experience with discrimination and credited those experiences for her developed Black identity.

During her young years, Mary was gifted with the talents of dance and the ability to break subject matter down so others could understand. She spent the majority of her

younger years in a single-parent household with her mother, who encouraged her to pursue whatever interest inspired her. There was a time period when she also lived with her stepdad; however, he passed away during her younger years. Although she lived with her mother and sister, she considered her family unit to be much larger. They had a lot of support from extended family members, including her grandparents, aunts, uncles and several others, none of whom graduated from college. Even though it was not the norm in her family, she was expected to go to college. Since she excelled in school and was consistently recognized for her academics, it was assumed very early that she would go to college. She spoke about it often with her family and they provided support. After matriculating to a college, which she selected because of a pre-college experience where she made authentic connections with other Black students, Mary declared math as a major. She selected this major because the subject came very easy to her. She chose psychoogy as her minor because of her interest in understanding and advocating for people. Her mother never pushed her toward a specific major or field. She was taught education and her future profession was very important, so she should do her best and be happy. Though Mary's family was very supportive, their greatest impact was demonstrating the belief in spirituality, importance of living healthy, and impact of education on financial stability.

During her time in college, both affirming and negative experiences were significant in influencing her life. Her experiences with spiritually-centered Black students served as her support system for completing school. She sought peers who shared similar religious beliefs and they attended church together, scheduled prayer time

when they were stressed about school, and created systems for supporting and holding one another accountable for doing what they felt was right. Her experiences with discrimination taught her not to internalize hate from others, advocate for her race through everything she does, and use her spirituality as a source of strength for perseverance. Her experience with a history of genetic and socialized family health issues fueled her commitment to a healthy lifestyle. Diabetes, high blood pressure, and other illness related to obesity have plagued her family. In addition, a large number of family members suffered from alcoholism. She was introduced to it at a very young age and recalled it as a staple at family gatherings. Mary has family members who she felt could have made better choices, placing their lives on a more productive path had their decision-making not been hindered by alcohol abuse. She has committed to not fall victim to what she described as a family curse.

Mary believes in God, who she defines as Jesus Christ. Her faith in God is dominant and undergirds her definition of spirituality. With several family members serving as pastoral professionals, religion was a significant establishment in her family. Resultantly, she lived her life connected to God and involved God in her daily interactions with the world. Mary's experiences have made her more faithful, and she believed everything happens for a reason. Mary defined her calling to be a successful Black professional woman who helped to make life easier for Black children. She saw this position as the "sweet spot" where an individual finds the intersection of what they do well with what they love to do. Her "sweet spot" would be using her professional identity as a psychologist to advocate for youth. Mary valued loyalty and upholding her

word, and believed living these values in her daily life worked to dispel some stereotypes about Blacks. She experienced some people to assume Blacks as irresponsible and unwilling or unable to develop goals and commit to them. She never wanted to be associated with these stereotypes.

Serious

Serious viewed himself as a voice those who he feels are not in the position to speak or stand for themselves. He holds himself to a high standard to be an example for Black people, especially for Black men. Having spent a considerable amount of time with elders as a child provided a historical perspective of the Black American experience. Serious attributed the impact of his Black parents' and grandparents' experiences to have shaped how they raised him into the man he is today.

Due to the challenging experiences his parents and grandparents endured in society as African Americans, their stories were a central element in Serious' learning and development. Their experiences impacted the values instilled in him. There was an expectation for him to be grateful for the opportunities available to him because of the sacrifices his elders and others in history contributed to civil rights. He was raised to understand and reflect upon the history of African Americans and consider himself "blessed" to be afforded opportunities to go to colleges, such as his alma mater. Through his upbringing and what he was raised to value, it is very important for whatever he accomplished with his life to make a difference to Blacks and the Black American experience.

Serious, a very talented basketball player in his younger years, was raised in a big city in a dual-parent household. His family consisted of several preachers and ministers, so church and family have played an integral role in his life. He is gifted with connecting real life experiences to biblical principles and exercises. He attributed his character, conduct and behavior to learning experiences in his family and church life. Serious lived by three mandates given to him when he was a child: be respectful, love God, and go to church.

His family was college-educated, yet did not place specific expectations for what constituted success. His parents worked to develop Serious as an independent thinker and instilled a strong work ethic through demonstration. Although Serious did not have parental expectations thrust upon him, his parents still provided guidance and feedback. As an adult post-college graduation, his parents continued to impact his knowledge and wisdom whenever possible because Serious believed they know where he wanted to be, what he wanted to do, and were willing to do whatever they could to assist him.

Serious valued spiritual growth, family, and being an example. His parents taught him that being productive is only possible through spiritual growth. He had a strong commitment to God, who he identified as the "Father of Jesus Christ", and professed to live for serving God. He felt at the end of the day, family was all any person could claim. He lived to be an example for other Black men through his spiritual, family and work life. The example he followed was his father, whom he has spent his life emulating and served as his role model.

Serious contended his college choice was attractive because it allowed him to experience the "bureaucracy and power" he would face in corporate America as a Black male finance professional, but in a controlled environment. His work as a healthcare financial auditor stemmed from his calling to be a voice for those who did not have the power to be their own voice, whether an individual or an underrepresented group. Serious felt the best way he could accomplish his calling, noted to only be communicated by the entity that created and placed him on earth, was by being effective at helping people navigate the healthcare system.

Olivia

Olivia defined herself as an "old soul" since she was born into a family with older members. Her family instilled that she was Black at a very early age and communicated the significance of her being Black. Growing up in a segregated town caused her to frequently witness acts of racism. She credited her experiences with racism for her interest in playing an active role in bettering the Black community. Being Black impacted how Olivia viewed the world, and she approached her daily interactions from the perspective that she was Black first, above all of her other identities. She grew up in a politically correct environment, during a time when people were taught what is appropriate to say in public spaces. Regardless of people's diversity education, Olivia believed it made them tolerant of Blacks, not appreciative of the perspective they brought to the table. A Black student invited to be part of a committee, yet never given an opportunity to lead or serve in any position with power, illustrated the "politically correct game" of being tolerant of others. She felt she could identify when people were

just being tolerant, which helped her identify instances of racism, discrimination and stereotyping. Due to her beliefs about tolerance over appreciation, Olivia worked hard to avoid being associated with "unspoken" stereotypes about Blacks. If she was associated with the stereotypes, she believed she would experience the racism and discrimination overtly.

Olivia grew up with her great-grandmother until the age of nine years old when she passed away. She was then raised in a single-parent household with her mother and younger sister, where her mother set high academic and behavior expectations. At no point did she communicate with her father. Olivia looked to her family to stay grounded and on track, as well as to prayer for clarity and decision-making. She associated family with faith because her family taught her to have faith in herself, and that a person's name was really all they had in this world. Olivia believed in generational curses and was intent upon staying away from the things she felt contributed to single-mother and fatherless households in her family.

Although her family did not attend college, her attendance was expected. She was considered the smart one in the family, and felt blessed that academics came easy to her. Therefore she felt a responsibility to go as far as she could in school, which meant graduating from college. In college, Olivia found a fit in the psychology department because she was interested in human behavior and how things influence people. She experienced countless encounters while in college that engaged her Black identity, including an impactful experience in an African American literature course. Being singled out in class as the spokesperson for her race and being made to receive the

feedback from fellow classmates was a heavy burden to carry. She spent much of her time thinking about what to say, battling the best way to respond, and stressing about how her behavior would impact impressions of other Blacks. The meaning of this experience was just that she "had to learn" at some point what being Black was like in this world.

Olivia believed in God, and professed her faith to be due to her "relationship with Jesus Christ". She believed she had a guiding light surrounding her which was visible to others through her behavior. Olivia's ability to sustain was because of her faith and ability to "lean on Jesus Christ". Her faith let her know she would be okay and that she would be taken care of by her God. Olivia believed wherever she was, and whatever future decisions she made, placed her exactly where she was supposed to be as part of her God's plan.

Olivia valued faith, legacy and service and was gifted with athleticism, as well as the ability to connect with people. As a high school counselor, Olivia assisted low-income and underrepresented students. Wherever her career decisions take her, she felt part of the calling on her life included working specifically with Black youth from marginalized backgrounds.

Luke

Luke carried a bit of a chip on his shoulder because he believed being Black was a burden to bear. He felt this identity was ascribed so many stereotypes, including, but not limited to, not being in high levels in business organizations due to incompetency, having dysfunctional families, not being trustworthy, lacking strong work ethic, etc.

However, from Luke's perspective, this was okay because "it's really easy to catch someone off guard when they don't see your greatness coming".

Luke was adopted into an affluent dual-parent family after his biological family was split and sent to foster homes. He kept in contact with his birth mother and siblings, who eventually reunited, with the exception of Luke. This was hurtful to Luke and caused him to harbor resentment and anger in his youth toward both his biological and adopted families. He fully acknowledged this resentment and reflected upon this challenging time period as wrestling with who he was and how he should relate with the world around him.

Following this period of growth and self-discovery through his high school and college years, Luke highly valued his family, both biological and adopted, and described them as his foundation. He understood the sacrifices made and opportunities afforded him throughout his childhood. His family became the core of his strength. They taught him resiliency because with family he "can bounce back from anything." Luke also valued church, which was synonymous with religion for him. Luke believed every action he took had the purpose to serve his God, Jesus Christ. Regardless of what happened, everything that happened to Luke was in God's plan and within God's will. He grew up attending church and participating in organized religious practices with his family. This practice is one he still ascribed to today. He attended church every Sunday, specifically the home church he attended as a child. He wanted to learn more about God, as well as hear about the struggles and recovery of members of his church and relate their stories to his personal life. Actively engaging with the membership of the

church assisted Luke in taking ownership of his faith and belief in God. Internalizing the different messages of the church members guided and directed his decision-making.

Luke has a gift for working with youth, and began exercising this gift during college though coaching little league football. While in college, Luke majored in industrial engineering. He chose this field because math and science came naturally to him, and he did not want to limit himself. With the goal to financially contribute to his family, Luke felt engineering was a good choice. He credited his college years for teaching him what accompanied being Black and how much he cherished family. Luke was made to constantly prove himself when he was dismissed because he was Black. However, because of this, he believed regardless of what he goes through he can compete with any individual. Through the illness of his mother and the loss of his father during college, he grew to believe family came first. As he stated, "Everything is replaceable except family.

Luke's calling is to be of service to people. He is being guided to a particular purpose that he has not realized yet. His plans after working as a trainer of automotive software were uncertain, however, he vowed to live up to his late father's wishes to "always stay hungry and not settle for less than he is capable."

Jackson

Jackson saw himself as a natural draw for people. His personality was a gift and believed he was meant to share his positivity, genuineness, and joyful nature with others. He was taught early he had two strikes against him: he was "born Black and male." His

view of being male was one of disadvantage when coupled with being Black. He strived to break stereotypes people had about Black males.

Jackson, gifted with stage presence, the ability to perform, and a knack for drawing people in, was raised in a large city in a dual-parent household with his sister until his college years. The sudden loss of his mother following his freshman year in college taught him how strong he was, as well as his faith in God. Since he grew up attending and actively participating in church with his family, he valued church and family, both of which played an integral role in his life. However, until this critical moment in his life, where he lost the nurturer he could not have imagined living without, Jackson witnessed an independent, persevering, faithful side of himself he was not aware existed.

Jackson's upbringing caused him to value family. He felt family knew him "inside and out" and allowed him to be himself without cause or care for withholding or refraining for fear of judgment. He believed his family grew together and stronger through hardships and triumphs. He depended and thrived on his family's bond in his daily life.

Jackson majored in community health in college and lived up to his parents' expectation to keep education a priority. His mother was college-educated and father was a hard laborer "who never made excuses", yet neither placed specific expectations on him. He was raised to find the career path that was best for him.

Jackson felt a strong responsibility to God, who he identified as his "Lord and Savior Jesus Christ", and viewed calling from the vantage point of his religious beliefs.

His upbringing in the church was still one he practiced and believed there was a strong need to actively participate in organized religious practices. He believed all people were put on earth to fulfill a purpose and this served as his viewpoint of calling. Although still searching, Jackson viewed his calling as dealing with people in some way. He currently worked as a health educator for a hospital and believed he was helping people in that role.

Michelle

Michelle, similar to other participants such Jackson, strongly identified with both her gender and racial identity. She faced numerous obstacles because she was female and Black and felt a "two strikes against her" emotion at times. From her perspective, Blacks were often not seen as individuals with feelings, emotions, and points of view. She was often reminded she was just another Black person and thereby discounted. She recalled being called "nigger" on several occasions, even in professional settings.

Raised in a single-parent home with her mother, Michelle felt the nuclear family was not always the most successful. She spent summers with her father, stepmother and nine half siblings, so she was able to compare the experiences of single- and dual-parenting. Her feelings about her father's lack of support made her a rigid person. This also caused her to be very cautious about relationships, although her dream was to find love with a Black man and have a strong Black family with both parents in the household.

In college, Michelle majored in biological science and followed the more difficult track in her academic program. She battled her family when deciding to attend

college because her choice of schools had a reputation of being hostile toward Blacks. Michelle faced racism in the classroom and student employment jobs, all related to a lack of exposure to Blacks in veterinary science. She was constantly questioned about why she was in the program and how odd it was for a "Black person to want to work with animals". She even encountered quite a bit of racism since graduation in her work as a veterinary technician. In her interview for her current position, she was told by the hiring veterinarian, he "doesn't know any Blacks. He was willing to work with her because she seemed professional, unlike other Blacks." Michelle has a personal mission to dispel stereotypes and be a great example of the Black race.

Michelle, gifted with the ability to work with, and be empathetic to animals, had a strong relationship with God. However, she did not believe in organized religious practices. She thought in more "spiritual" terms, but believed God was always trying to let her know where her path should go or what path she should take. She did not claim to hear Him speaking to her necessarily, but she believed her God was the spirit pushing her in a certain decision.

She tried to "make the right decision and live right every day." Michelle valued integrity, remembering where you came from, and love. Being able to trust someone when you were not present was very important to her. Knowing how your identity was formed based on who you were and how you were raised was significant for Michelle. Lastly, being kind to people was what held love in high regard.

Michelle always loved animals, helped sick ones, and brought home strays. She viewed calling as a "natural gift" and felt hers was to work with animals as a

veterinarian. Considering Michelle's experiences with racism in her field, her experience as the only Black student over the course of four years interested in veterinary sciences, as well as lack of interaction with any Black veterinarians, Michelle planned to own her own clinic and start a mentoring program to educate Black youth about the veterinary field.

Paul

Being a Black man was central to Paul's identity. This identity was possibly made more significant due to his countless interactions with others concerning his fair complexion. Since his very young years, as far back as he could recall, having very light skin was a point of discussion by both Blacks and Whites. He considered his household to be a traditional Black household, where one could identify Black culture easily. From music, to church, to vernacular, to open conversations about race and racism, discrimination, and stereotypes, Paul believed he was immersed in an environment that sent clear messages about being Black. Paul linked his male identity with his racial identity. He committed to being the best man, husband and father possible. His desire to serve as a positive and honest role model, as well as do what was "right" to support his conviction that an individual's belief system should align with their actions.

Paul was raised in a dual-parent home with three siblings. His parents, specifically his mother, were "Pro-Black". His parents had a deep appreciation for Black history and culture, believed in being proud of the contributions of Blacks, and nurtured and promote the collective interests of Blacks. He recalled his family staying home the day of the Million Man March to watch the event on television. Paul valued

family and credited his late father for this attribute. The most important use of his time was "spending time with family and cultivating those relationships."

Gifted with the ability to form connections with youth, Paul was an officer in the armed forces. He planned to serve for 20 years in the military and then retire. He believed this was the most solid plan to reach his goal of providing for his wife and children.

In college, Paul was a leadership and development major, a major he chose through a conversation with a White male individual whom he felt had power. He still wondered whether this person was really concerned about him choosing the best major. His family was supportive of his college aspirations and just wanted him to accomplish more than they had, although he felt he "abandoned" his family when he went to college. His father was ill and the extra hand around the house to help with chores and set a positive example for his sisters was now gone to college.

Paul defined calling as the purpose and plan God had for a person. The responsibility he placed on himself was a result of his calling to serve as an example to not just young men, but young Black men. Since "every man is called to lead his family", Paul felt the pressure of his calling on a daily basis. As one of very few Black officers, Paul had not experienced much mentoring from those he felt directly connected. He intended to answer his call by serving as a mentor to other Black males in the military.

Sasha

Sasha identified being Black as a significant part of her identity, although she was biracial. She attributed this to her upbringing in an all-Black environment, without any connection to her Hispanic father. While being Black was significant, she indicated she "is still not sure who she is" and is still discovering.

Sasha grew up in a single-parent household with three sisters for a portion of her youth. Her home-life with her mother was unstable and caused her to long for supportive familial environments. This instability and lack of consistency of living arrangements also caused Sasha to grow very independent. She learned to be self-sufficient, set personal goals, and exceed expectations she set for herself. Sasha sought early to exceed the standard she witnessed in her immediate and extended family and continued to use this as motivation to excel. From her college to other opportunities, Sasha made decisions placing her "far away" from her home city and family.

In college, Sasha majored in sociology and minored in history and Africana Studies. She really loved the sociology courses and felt she "had just found everything" about her life in her classes. She was interested in how history is impacted by usually being "told by the winner." She questioned the history of America, slavery and slavery's affect on Black people. These questions caused her to seek courses in those areas and eventually declare minors.

Sasha, who believed she was gifted with the ability to "work toward something to make a change", saw her life as having purpose. When she thought of the hardships she had endured and her navigation of each hardship, such as surviving homelessness

and the numerous times she "felt she should have been astray, she was appreciative. Although she did not have anyone encouraging her, she chose to go to school, "continue to grind" and educate herself.

Sasha defined calling as having purpose, which she believed came from "God, Jesus, and the Hold Trinity". She believed her calling was to "help people out of situations they have no control over." Currently, Sasha worked in customer service on a college campus in the scholarships' office. Her plan was to attend graduate school, receive a doctorate, and become a tenure track sociology professor at a Research I institution by the age of 35. She wanted to work on Capitol Hill. Her call involved helping Blacks and other oppressed people realize their self-worth, develop a more positive self-concept, and achieve greater standards of living.

Ross

Ross considered himself wise beyond his years, since he always seemed to know what actions to take in any given situation. He recognized early his peers did not have the same level of discernment. He attributed this ability to his upbringing and reflected on the number of times he processed information on how making different decisions could have caused him to reach more positive outcomes. He learned to use this decision-making process in all areas of his life and has caused him to realize a fate much different from the Black male peers from his youth. He recalled most to have "not made it out," meaning they are now imprisoned or back in his childhood neighborhood being unproductive.

Ross was raised in a single-parent home with his mother and brother. His mother's values system, work ethic, genuine nature, and straight-forward demeanor were instilled in Ross. Both of his parents were college-educated, and his mother made sure education was always a priority. Ross may not have always been sure where he would go to college, but he knew he would attend. His ultimate college plan was secondary from his initial plan to attend school on an athletic scholarship for basketball. When it was time to make his decision, he had worked so hard he was offered athletic and academic scholarships. Due to potential opportunities and the vast network at the institution offering the academic scholarship, he bypassed his athletic offer. Ross was an education major in college, after changing from mathematics. He always excelled in math but could not see how he would use this major. He determined his personality and skill set best fit those of an educator. Since he had a history of educators in his family, this was a logical transition.

Attending church was a way of life for Ross growing up. It was customary to attend church more than once per week due to his mother's roles in the church. His church-going practice was one of learned tradition and custom, rather than part of what he felt was required by his God. At present, he does not attend church regularly because he believes God can be accessed anywhere. He believed he is able to be more prayerful, engaged, and intimate with God in more meaningful ways through personal and self-reflective time alone with God. His belief system was tied to his religious beliefs in God, however, he also believed a person could ascribe to being religious and still have

life-guiding principles to direct their daily actions. People can have an "innate sense of right and wrong and work hard to be the best person they can be."

Ross is gifted with basketball athletic abilities, and pursued this gift from his early youth. Being a coach of multiple sports and working with boys to increase their athletic skills is connected to his gift of athleticism. He defined calling as the "work a person is meant to do in life." This work can be through contributions in a career field or service to people through volunteer roles. Ross believed calling has to do with impacting people and making things better for them in some way. He was still seeking his calling, but knew his life was meant to impact Black male youth. Through the decisions he made and position he was in after coming from an environment where so many Black males did not "make it out," Ross believed he had a job to do with young Black males.

Although Ross did not spend much time with his father, his mother was able to develop the principle that a "man does what he says he will do or he is not a man." He lived this mantra daily and viewed this as a spiritual principle. Further, he believed it was even more important for a Black man to stick to his word, to exceed expectations he felt society has for Black men.

Ross currently worked as a teacher and coach for middle grade students. He was unsure of his next career decision, but wanted it to involve basketball and working with young Black males. He planned to attend graduate school at some point, but was unsure of what program he would pursue.

Table 2 summarizes the demographics and characteristics of the participants. The Black recent college graduates were from a diversity of professions, gender diverse, residents of Texas, mostly single and nearly split in their parental upbringing. Of the 9 participants, all were between 22 and 25, indicating they were of traditional college student age during college. Their professions included business, health, middle and secondary public education, engineering, veterinary sciences, military, and student affairs. There were five men and four women. Three of the men were married with two of the three also have children. All of the females were single without children. Types of households participants were raised in were nearly split. Four of the males were raised in dual-parent households, with one being raised in a single-parent household. One male participant was adopted into his dual-parent living arrangement. All females were raised in single-parent households.

Table 2

Demographics and Characteristics of Participants

Name (Pseudonyms)	Profession	Gender Identity	Family Situations
Mary	Assistant Psychologist	Female	24, Single, raised Single parent
Serious	Healthcare Financial Auditor	Male	24, Married, raised Dual-parent
Olivia	High School Advisor	Female	23, Single, raised Single-parent
Luke	Automotive Software Trainer	Male	22, Single, raised Dual-parent, adopted
Jackson	Health Educator	Male	22, Single, raised Dual-parent
Michelle	Veterinary Technician	Female	23, Single, raised Single-parent

Table 2

Continued

Paul	Air Force Officer	Male	24, Married, Child, raised Dual-parent
Sasha	Financial Aid Counselor	Female	22, Single, raised Single-parent
Ross	Teacher and Coach	Male	23, Married, Child, raised Single-parent

***Criteria included not more than two years post-graduation and identifying as Black.*

Presentation of Findings

Three areas of literature described in Chapter I comprise the conceptual framework, along with one model used to organize the data. The literature and model function collectively to respond to the overarching research question of what are the impacts of spirituality and race on career decision making by a group of Black recent college graduates of a PWI. Life and career theory, lifespan model of Black identity development, and spiritual development theory supported career calling concepts to explore the experiences of Black recent college graduates. This literature provided foundation for understanding career decision making behavior by Black recent college graduates.

Super's Life and Career theory focuses on changes in self-concept over time, specifically the exploration stage for this study, indicating career choice to be linked to perceptions of identity. Savickas's (2005) career construction theory informs this study by purporting identity to be central to making career decisions based on how people fit work into their lives. Fouad and Arbona, (1994) added that a relationship exists between racial identity and career behavior due to the interconnectedness of racial identity and self-concept.

According to Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (2001) lifespan model of Black identity development, race is central to identity for Blacks. In addition, the process of Black identity development is informed further by Chickering and Reisser's (1993) college student development theory. Establishing identity involves developing self-concept in social, historical, and cultural contexts, among other factors. Black recent college graduates engaging in identity establishment are also developing in their self-concept.

Wheeler et. al (2002) and Herndon (2003) asserted spirituality to be central to the identity of Blacks. Essential to spiritual development are personal values, purpose, meanings, and direction in life (Fowler & Dell, 2005, p. 34; Love & Talbot, 1999) and developing a greater understanding and connection to self (Love & Talbot, 1999). Unearthing personal values, purpose, meaning and direction in life are elements of accessing spirituality at work (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Haworth et al.'s (2001) concepts outline seven domains influencing individual's understandings of spirituality at work. The findings of the interviews will now be presented.

Thematic Presentation of the Data

In this section, the experiences of nine participants are presented in an effort to understand how the participants utilized the spiritual and racial identity layers of self-concept to inform their career decision-making. The findings revealed three broad themes involving development over the course of the participants' lives that led to their career decision-making up to this point in their lives. The broad themes included spiritual identity development, Black racial identity development and life purpose development. There were three sub-themes within spiritual identity development, five

sub-themes within Black racial identity development, and five sub-themes under life purpose development. Table 3 summarizes the broad themes along with their associated sub-themes emerging from the data in the study of a group of Black recent college graduates. When asked to tell stories about themselves from very early years through adulthood, these participants described racial, spiritual, as well as purpose-filled influences on their decision making in every area of their lives, including career. A discussion of the findings, using pseudonyms and direct quotes from participants, has been incorporated in the presentation of the findings.

Table 3

Results of the Study

Themes and Sub-Themes Influencing Career Decisions
Influence of Spiritual Identity on Career Decisions
Role of Spiritual Self-Concept on Spiritual Identity
Role of Family on Spiritual Identity
Impact of Family Loss
Role of Church on Spiritual Identity
Influence of Black Racial Identity on Career Decisions
Role of Black Self-Concept on Black Racial Identity
Role of Family on Black Racial Identity
Impact of Family Loss

Table 3 Continued

Themes and Sub-Themes Influencing Career Decisions
Role of Racism on Black Racial Identity
Impact of Racial Stereotyping
Role of Schooling at a PWI on Black Racial Identity
Influence of Developing Life Purpose on Career Decision-Making
Role of Racial Identity on Developing Life Purpose
Role of Spiritual Identity on Developing Life Purpose
Purpose To Follow A Predestined Path
Purpose To Utilize A Passion or Talent
Purpose To Bring Others To God
Role of Family on Developing Life Purpose
Role of Values on Developing Life Purpose
Role of Community on Developing Life Purpose

Influence of Spiritual Identity on Career Decisions

In Chapter II, the literature surrounding spirituality was discussed. Through this lens and in support of this study, individuals rarely differentiate who they are from their working selves (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997) and find meaning and purpose through their daily work interactions (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). In this section, the role of spiritual

self-concept, family, church and community on spiritual identity development and their subsequent influence on career decisions is discussed.

Role of Spiritual Self-Concept on Spiritual Identity

The aim of this study was to understand the career decisions of a group of spiritually centered Black recent college graduates. As such, it was essential to explore the participants' views of spirituality to create correlations and make sense of their influences. The participants were eager to share their perspectives about the spiritual identity layer of their self-concept. When asked about his spirituality, Luke shared he treasured his connection to his Higher power, or God, by stating he felt "nothing positive" would come from anything he does if he "does not keep God first." Further Luke believed he would "always be taken care of" as long as he just "stayed positive and kept his faith." In discussing his spirituality, Jackson described his life to only be well-lived if he could "live it for Christ" and in a way 'Christ desires". Olivia also articulated her position when asked about her spirituality by talking about her actions being guided by a "light." The "light" she discussed was reflective of her "relationship with Jesus Christ."

For them, faith provided a clear link to religion and spiritual self-concept, since religion and spirituality were referenced synonymously. From the participants' perspectives, for a person to be spiritual, the common understanding was to have a relationship in some form with a Higher being. For this group of Blacks, even those who do not attend church frequently or support traditional religious practices, being

"led" or "guided" because of a relationship with God and Jesus Christ was articulated as the basis of their understanding of their spiritual self-concept.

Role of Family on Spiritual Identity

The degree to which familial relationships influenced the young adults in this study was great. These relationships were with parents, siblings, grandparents, great grandparents and cousins, and described as influencing, inspiring and challenging participants to achieve without limitations, establish spiritual belief system, develop a Black identity and make decisions benefiting their lives long-term. There were also considerable references to the influence and expectations of parents, grandparents and siblings, being critical to decision-making processes for the participants from childhood through young adulthood.

Jackson spoke of his belief system and how he viewed it being entwined with family. He discussed faith as a product of, and fueled by, his familial relationships, since "religion is one of the things you know the family is based upon." Mary explained her mother's way of challenge and support being ideal. Mary was able to glean her mother's expectations for her to flourish, while also supporting Mary's need to forge her own path to success:

> My mom, I love her because she never pushed me to do one specific thing or the other, but she always pushed me. In regards to my profession, I remember telling her I wanted to be a doctor. And her saying, 'Okay, make it happen, go find out everything you need to do to be a doctor', because she didn't finish college or anything like that. So, in her mind, she didn't know what all it took and she

> didn't know how many years. A lot of times I had to explain to her what was really involved, but she played an active role in wanting to know. She would say 'Okay, what is this life going to look like for you and what can I possibly do to try to help you get there?' She never pushed me one way or the other. She always pushed me to be the best at whatever I decided…She stressed the importance of making a difference and being happy with my work.

Mary's reference to what her mother meant when she advised her to be "happy" was illustrated in another story where she described a time where she felt "happy" following a job interview. She stated:

> Right after the interview, we [me and my mom] went to IHOP and we were just happy. It was a supernatural joy that I had coming out of the interview, so just really happy and my mom, she's just happy all the time. So, she matched my happiness and we were sitting in IHOP. We were just sitting and talking about stuff and one of the Black ladies who was working passed by and then she just turned around, came and stood there. She said, 'This feels good. Whatever is going on right here feels really good and it feels like I'm familiar with this feeling. So, I just want to stand here for a moment and be in this feeling with you.' So, we all sat there for about five or ten minutes. Then the lady walked away, she picked up her tray, she said thank you and she just walked away. It made it [spirituality] real for me. It made my spirituality really real for me because I know that it was nothing but the joy of the Lord that was just resonating in the air.

While being specific about God not being tangible, she was clear about Him (God) being present with her and her Mother, as well as accessed and experienced by the restaurant staff person. The happiness or "supernatural joy" Mary's mother advised her was important was an illustration of her mother's influence on her spiritual identity development.

Luke discussed his parents' expectations of him through stories about different career paths he shared with them growing up:

> They [my parents] didn't really have specific plans, they were open-ended. But they wanted me to have realistic goals. I remember when the movie *The Barber Shop* came out, and I watched the movie and I told my parents I wanted to be a barber. They [my parents] went, 'No you don't.' The movie *Drumline* came out and I said I wanted to be a drum major. They [my parents] were like, 'This is just the same old thing another routine. You see something and it looks nice, everybody is talking about it but realistically that's not what you want to do. Go do something that will make a difference for people and your family.' So my parents always kept me grounded.

While his parents were supportive of his eagerness to determine a career, they were clear about his need to be realistic and thoughtful as he explored possible paths. The importance of his career making a difference for others, as well as his family, communicated messages developing his spiritual identity.

Paul discussed the investment his parents made in his life and how he attributed his productive path to their investment:

> They [my parents] invested in my life. I look at people now and I'm like, man, if they had somebody invest in their life, what could they have been or where could they be? I can see the difference between me and some of my friends just due to the experience I've had because of the doors they [my parents] opened for me. It really made a huge difference in my life. And some of that was through my decisions; you still have to make choices to do the right things and go the right ways, but they taught me how to choose the right way. I really believe them opening up those doors for me; it had a huge impact on my life. They [my parents] just had high expectations. They [my parents] were never really like, 'Oh you're going to be a lawyer, you're going to be a doctor, but you've got to do something big' – and they put me in the position to do big things. They [my parents] just always encouraged me to keep God first, be the best that I could be, and go farther than they went.

While Paul's parents were not specific about identifying his career path, they were specific about the importance of keeping "God first" in his life in order to accomplish his best.

Serious "thanks God" for his parents "all the time" because they did not place any specific expectation on him. Serious described his gratitude for his parents to be a product of the drive they instilled in him to always do his best and never become complacent:

> So they [my parents] never put a specific expectation on us, but it was more so from a distance empowering kind of standpoint. Just watching out or kind of

> warning us and giving us insight and resources wherever they could. If we express something that we are interested in they would find somebody or something that we could do to explore that more. But they never put any kind of expectation on us other than to pray for direction from God. And I really think that made the difference because my old friends whose parents weren't necessarily like that, and they [old friends] had expectations for specific jobs or careers or about being this or being that, and unfortunately couldn't handle it and in some cases they bombed in the worst way. They [old friends] went totally left. So, I think it's a blessing that my parents had the perspective that they did and didn't feel like they had to set that kind of bar for me to stay on track...They showed me what to do and how to live by their example.

Serious appreciated his parents for providing a solid foundation for his growth and development. He felt his parents laid the groundwork for him to develop the needed ambition and spiritual identity to do and achieve beyond levels of "mediocrity" in his professional life.

Luke expounded his perspective on his family's role to include being "critical" of his decision-making processes. Luke outlined his options and involved his family in any decisions from small decisions like when and where he will get his vehicle fixed to major decisions like when and where he will eventually attend graduate school. Luke stated:

> All of it starts with prayer for any problem… I'll run it by my family. They give me the reassurance of supporting my decisions when they feel they are good

> ideas… So throughout all of that, the two constants are my faith and my family. I don't make any major decisions without praying first and considering what my mother will say.

Luke indicated this process involved both of his parents prior to his father's passing during his college years. Serious also spoke of family in relation to decision-making, as he stated:

> I used him [my father] to help me make decisions. He would not tell me specifically, but he would help me figure out what I need to do and what I need to be. I knew I could go to them about anything. Really anybody in my family. I could ask any kind of question and they [my family] wouldn't give me some kind of ambiguous answer. They would give me a direct answer but also refer back to the foundation I had been given. My parents equipped us [me and my siblings] to have a foundation that we needed where we were independent, but at the same time we knew there were guidelines (provided through church and religion) that we had to abide by…My parents instilled God as the Lord of our lives early and through all things He [God] helped order our steps.

Through Serious' story about discussing career opportunities with his family after graduating from college and the path he should take, he spoke of his parents specifically as playing an advisory role. In this role, Serious recognized their wisdom beyond his own, and this process gave him direction. His parents' direction was coupled with his spiritual identity, "instilled" by his parents at an early age, to make decisions.

Ross also explained his spirituality to be a product of his family raising him to have a strong spiritual identity coupled with what his family taught him was right and wrong:

> If it had not been for my mother pushing me to do what was right because it was right even when no person was looking, I might be dead or in jail right now. She taught me that even when no person was watching, God was always watching. She felt she had a responsibility to God to teach me because the Bible instructs parents to 'raise a child up in the way they should go' so they will never depart from God's way. It's how I'm raising my son right now.

Ross interweaved his family's influences into his spiritual identity "intentionally." He demonstrated he has this responsibility as a parent. As he articulated "I don't have any plans to answer to God for not raising my kids right and helping to save their souls."

Impact of family loss. For the participants in this study, the loss of family emerged as having an impact on spiritual identity development. The majority of participants told stories about the death of someone they saw as a parent, and articulated some life lesson or meaning associated with the loss. In relation to spiritual identity, loss was observed to impact spiritual self-concept. Jackson lost his mother to cancer following his freshman year in college. He indicated this experience molded his identity, drove him toward independence, and revealed a high level of fortitude he never knew he was capable of displaying. Jackson stated:

> It definitely shaped me. I honestly believe that with losing a parent it's always hard. I grew up with both of my parents, so I think that with losing my mother,

> pretty much the rock of the family, I think that caused me to grow up faster and you know not be so dependent…I didn't have my sounding board anymore. I had to start making my own decisions and trusting myself regardless of what anybody else said…I was nineteen years old and that was the end of my freshman year when she died…I learned that I was definitely stronger, stronger than perceived, stronger than I could ever believe. I didn't know that I would be able to handle the situation that impacted my life more than anything else ever.

Losing his mother taught Jackson about himself. His story illustrated a reflective time period for Jackson where he developed in his self-concept.

Ross discussed his spirituality strengthened through the loss of his parents. His mother, whom he described as the person "who made everything work" for him and his brother, fell ill a year before her passing. Ross stated:

> I learned to trust God to help her through her chemotherapy treatments because there was nothing I could do. No matter how bad she hurt or how bad I wanted to fix this for her like she fixed so much for me all my life, I couldn't do anything. So I just had to be still and trust God to take care of my mother. It was hard but I felt my faith growing as it got easier to deal with her being sick. He eased her pain by taking her away from me. I didn't understand it and it still hurts because I still want her to watch my kids grow up. See the man she worked so hard to mold and protect. I know she is still with us spiritually, but it doesn't take the pain away.

Ross described his faith in God grew through this story because there was nothing he could do to make her well or take away her pain. It became easier over time to trust God to protect and take his mother's pain away, even if that meant through her death.

Role of Church on Spiritual Identity

The practice of going to church was communicated in several of the participants' stories to be instrumental in the development of their spiritual identity. Participants recalled their experiences and belief systems from their very young years to be due to their childhood upbringing in church. Each articulated the ways they related with their faith to be a product of what they were thought was customary to do for those who believed in God. This practice was a factor for developing spiritual identity.

Luke explained church to be central to his spiritual development in relation to faith "because everything that I do is shaped and molded around my upbringing in church. That's what built my faith." Jackson indicated, "Every Sunday we would be in church and we pretty much were there throughout the week for several different things." Serious indicated his "family and church was all [he] knew and they went hand in hand." Serious stated:

> We got challenges growing up as a family but because church was such an integral part and spirituality was such an integral part of our life, it really had an effect on our character, our conduct (our being my siblings and I) our achievements, whether in the classroom or out. Behavioral types of things and all of that had a lot to do with the fact that as a whole family unit were so rooted, and there was such a solid foundation being laid in our lives from a spiritual

> aspect. Growing up, my family and church was really all I knew. Probably five to seven days a week I was at church, in the evenings, after school. I thought that was just the norm of life….unbeknown to me. I didn't necessarily know what was going on. I just thought going to church was just part of regular life… and when he [my father] talked to us he said 'there were three things that were just mandated for you all [my siblings] growing up. And these things are the only three things that you have to abide by.' It was [to] be respectful, love God and go to church. Those are the only three things. And if you noticed school was nowhere in there or being this kind of person or being that kind of ball player or making these marks [grades]. It was just those three things; be respectful, love God, and go to church were the only things that he mandated. And it shaped our character.

For Serious, the "integral part" church played in his life developed his spiritual identity and provided his way of engaging in and exchanging with society. Serious told another story about his decision to serve as a deacon in the same church he grew up in, as he articulated:

> I feel like that's [my spirituality] affected me the most. I've always taken my spirituality very, very seriously and I never wanted to play with that. I always thought I definitely didn't do everything right and made a number, tons of mistakes, but I never felt like I was okay in doing those things. I knew how I was brought up and I knew the importance of it, and I recognized God's hand in my life, his abundant mercy in so many different situations that he granted me.

> So I always took that seriously, and when I was called up to serve [to be a deacon], it [my spirituality] went to a whole other level because I felt like there was a responsibility to God that now was public. And so before I had this belief in, and relationship with, God, and I was on this journey and I professed and people knew that…now it's like you are the deacon of the church, you're representing [God], you are the part of the crew that's keeping the man of God's hands up….and serve his people.

Serious took on a role in the church due to the influence of his spiritual identity. He now saw himself in the position to contribute to the spiritual identity development of others through church, just as the church did for him throughout his lifetime.

Paul also shared his parents raised he and his siblings in church. He explained as a Seventh Day Adventist, his church attendance and other religious activities took place on Saturdays and were important to his faith:

> Every Saturday, we [my family] were in church and we'd be in church all day. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, we were in Bible study. On some Sundays, we would do church events, whether that was a picnic or a campout with the church. We did all we could if something was going on…We were all in the choir. The youth choir, we were very involved.

Paul stated his college experience interfered with his "spirituality" because it interrupted his church-going behavior from his youth. Since he was involved in a student organization during college requiring their members to attend every home football game, he went to the games and "neglected" church. He eventually became more lax about his

church attendance when football season ended and began to struggle with his faith. Paul's spiritual identity was directly connected to the role of church in his life.

Ross attended church multiple times a week and indicated there would be punishments if he or his brother complained about attending, or caused his mother to be late for, any church activity. Similarly, Jackson spoke of the intermingling of "religion and church activity" when he stated it was "all interwoven" for him growing up. Originally introduced to church by her grandmother, Olivia shared going to church was the norm for her as far back as she could recollect. A number of her earliest memories involved church.

Church was so engrained in the participants' lives growing up, once they moved away for college, their spiritual worlds were thrown into hiatus. Mary discussed how challenging it was during her first year of college to get her spirituality together because her church attending patterns from her childhood had been interrupted. "Back at home, I was so used to waking up every Sunday going to church and making sure that I had a leadership role in the church." What was described as their multiple interactions with organized religion in their churches growing up seemed to have been a product more of family tradition or custom than self-actualized faith or spiritual belief.

While each participant described being exposed to faith and spirituality in the same ways, they were spilt in how they currently viewed church. The majority of the participants remained active in church. Paul stated he "stays in church no matter what's going on." Olivia shared attending church throughout the week was a part of her natural routine. A couple of participants attended the churches they grew up attending. Luke

indicated he tried to make sure he was "always in church on Sundays" at his home church, Serious shared he was a deacon at his home church, and Jackson stated he still attended his home church with his father and sister. While attending church was still the norm and a necessary practice for most participants, there were three who articulated their spiritual identity developed beyond the role of church. Now, they felt their spiritual identity had developed to be more "authentic" as Michelle expressed, which allowed them to genuinely connect to their beliefs in more profound ways.

Michelle openly discussed her belief in God, but did not feel it was or needed to be bound by going to church:

> I have a relationship with God and lately I have not been going to church because I feel like it has gotten too secular. I still read the Bible, I still pray to Him, and I really try to live my life right in the way He [God] wants me to. I try to make sure people can see my daily actions and that I am a woman of God. I guess in my decisions, I ask what would Jesus do and just try to use that to kind of base what I'm going to do or where I'm going to go. It's pretty cheesy but I just try to make the right decisions. I guess I just try to live right. I know I'm going to sin and whatnot or stumble but I guess in the back of my mind, I'm always trying to make sure I'm living a Godly life and not necessarily letting the worldly things consume me.

Ross explained his belief in God ruled every facet of his life; however, he viewed attending one church and following one church leader to be dogmatic and "limiting." Sasha expressed her beliefs to not involve going to church or following any specific

rituals at all, even though she was Christian with a strong faith in God. While Sasha believed in "God, Jesus, and the Holy Trinity," she expressed strong perspectives about church due to experiences causing her to distrust people. Her belief was clear as she described God as the reason she was able to navigate such difficult circumstances growing up:

> I went to church all my life, but now I do not go to church. Hopefully, that doesn't sound too terrible, but I am against the institution of church and religion…I cannot go through an organized church. I just don't believe in all that. I am completely like just a spiritual person. I believe in God and Jesus, as far as the Holy Spirit and stuff like that and I think I have a calling on my life. I [also] think He [God] saves me each and every day and wakes me up for a reason. I just know there is no way that with all the things that could have happen to me thus far that did not happen to me…I remember living or sleeping outside behind this like convenient store, one time. I remember being in the homeless shelters and a group home with a little divider thing that split the men from the women. Often times we would hear about women getting raped and stuff like that. Thank God, nothing happened to me while in that shelter. And in another shelter for women with children, we just had a room. And I just thought 'I love this shelter.' In retrospect, looking back on it, that was a problem. But, at the time, I just loved that shelter. I thought, we were living high class. We had this one room – but we had a door to it, it had a lock on it, and we had our own beds. And I only had to share with my little sister and my mom, and I just

> thought that was just amazing…Then we were living in an old home, we had light, gas, water, it just had a roof. And at the time I was thankful for that roof, it's all we had. And then she [my mother] left when I was 14…and never came back…All the times that I have been broke, homeless, without anything and had somebody come and just do something for me to help. That means there is something God has me here [in this world] to do. I don't know God's vision, and I don't know if I ever will know His [God's] vision, but I'm sure I'll get it done. I am tremendously blessed and I know there's something for me that I have to get it done.

Although Sasha's belief in God was strong, she felt it was important to be specific about not attending church as it was customary when she was growing up.

Influence of Black Racial Identity on Career Decisions

In addition to the interwoven influence of spiritual identity on career decisions, participants also spoke of a correlation between Black racial identity and career decisions. Inherent in this Black identity is knowing, as Mary described, "who you are and where you come from as a Black person." Ross described this identity to involve an awareness of, and need to pay homage to, family members and other Blacks whose "sacrifices and struggles afforded me opportunities to accomplish feats beyond their grasp." There was also a sense of obligation to the Black community discussed by several of the participants in relation to their Black racial identity. Therefore, in this section, the emerging career decision making influences related to the roles of Black

self-concept, family, racism and community on Black identity development are discussed.

Role of Black Self-Concept on Black Racial Identity

Paul described several experiences with Black self-concept. One emerged as he described being lighter in complexion and having to struggle with his Black identity. While validated by family and negotiated to a place of self-efficacy, Paul's racial identity was greatly influenced by family, friends, and often peers. Paul's story about a time in second grade, he remembered "like it happened yesterday," involved images of his complexion. He stated:

> And, the next day at school one of the White male students was like, 'Hey Paul, why weren't you at school yesterday?' And I was like, 'I stayed at home, we watched the Million Man March.' And, he was like, 'What?' This is crazy to think about because I was only in second grade. He said, 'What? You're not even black.' That was hurtful to me. I didn't know how to take that, so I cursed at him. I ended up getting suspended.

This exchange with his peer, on the heels of Paul being so immersed in such a celebratory and historical event for Blacks, called Paul's racial identity into question. Clearly, this was an important event for Paul's family. He explained school was very important, and yet he was allowed to not attend school to stay home and watch the Million Man March with his family.

Paul told another story associated with constructing meaning about being Black in society that impacted his Black self-concept. He described a time when he was forced

to transfer to a different high school, which was also a story about racism, yet more applicable to how Paul sees himself so it is presented in this section.

> I got put out of school. I felt like it was a race thing and that's the reason I got put out. What happened in 9th grade was I was messing around with a little white girl at this boarding school in East Texas…They put me out of school and sent me back home to Houston and the girl got to stay in school. Nothing happened to the girl. I didn't do anything wrong to her. Nothing happened to the girl, but I got put out of school. I got sent back home and everything just because I was Black, and they didn't want me messing with this white girl. There was just another side of me like from then on. I knew how people could be and how unfair people could be just because they didn't like Black people. I learned … As a Black person, I just lived like that. I lived with that in my head that no matter what's going on, things are not the same for you as a Black person as they are with everyone else. So, you need to make sure you're not putting yourself in any compromising position because you're going to end up with the short end of the stick.

This story illustrated the development of Paul's perspective that life was "already going to be hard enough" for him as a Black person, so he could not afford to do anything to go against what was deemed acceptable in society. Experiences such as this played a role in Paul's development as he learned to construct meaning and develop identity. Paul described seeing through this lens to be highly influential to his perspective, roles he desired to fulfill in life, and his career decision-making.

Luke described an experience where his family situation impacted his Black self-concept. Through his story, he described being devastated to learn he did not have a traditional family structure. In addition, he expressed his public regard of the Black family. Luke stated:

> Nobody said that I was adopted. It was not like they treated me like the black sheep of the family. They treated me like their own… I was very angry when I realized it. The older I got, typically when you grow up and mature, you appreciate the situation that you are in and that is what I did… Honestly I think that me being Black, is a tireless and exhausting situation of explaining that is not necessarily dissected and understood when you think of Black individuals growing up, especially outside of the neighborhood that I grew up in. The elementary, middle, and high school that I went to, you see family situations like mine all the time. Maybe not necessarily the same as in my case with adoption, but with single parent households. You have so many different examples of these types of situations and I think that being Black, mine was seen as a dysfunctional Black family. I feel that if I was from another race, White maybe or even I know people talk all the time, about how the Latino community has different family situations too. And people describe what they are doing differently than they describe Black families. They say Latinos are taking this or that person in because they are trying to do better for that person and help them. I feel that with Blacks it is not seen as a positive thing because Black family is seen as dysfunctional not just non-traditional like with other races. The fact that

> I see my nephew as a brother is not respected and growing up away from my siblings is not understood and our families and how we are raised is just looked down at.

Luke was initially devastated and felt betrayed. He indicated his family was similar to other Black families by having a non-traditional structure, and was originally disappointed to be included with this segment of Black families, as well as hurt to not be informed about it. However, as he matured, he learned to appreciate his adopted family and overall family structure and believed this situation was the best for him. Through his story, he described being adopted, but he also expressed his frustration with negative perceptions from non-Blacks about non-traditional and non-nuclear family structures within some Black households. This impacted how he saw his family situation and his Black self-concept, causing him to view the constant validating of the Black family structures to be "tireless" and "exhausting."

Role of Family on Black Racial Identity

Most participants described family as central to how they viewed themselves as Black people and as part of a Black community. Luke shared a second story about his family, which demonstrated the positive impact of his non-traditional family structure and served as his platform for explaining Black family structures to those who might be critical. The influence of this experience had an overwhelmingly positive impact on how Luke viewed Black family and attributed this experience to the reason family was so central to his Black racial identity.

I remember, it was a birthday and I was going to be visited by my biological mother. She had called me on the phone and told me that she was going to come by and see me for my birthday. She didn't come by that day. So, afterwards I was sitting at the house, she called me again to say she was going to come by the house. So, I am sitting in the front yard and it is about five o'clock, sitting in the front yard waiting for her so show up. So me, my mom and dad [adoptive parents], we are outside. We are talking. I am playing basketball with my nephew, you know we were just waiting. You know they would not let me wait outside by myself. It started to get dark, a car drives by. I see it drive by the house and I jump up and I run to the corner. It was not her. Cars keep passing by, keep passing by. This goes on and on and it was late around 11 or 12 o'clock. It was very late for me to be out at that time. She never came. Normally that would have a negative effect on people, but it had a positive effect on me. Throughout all of the false hopes and disappointments like that from her, my nephew was still there - asleep on my sister, my mom and dad were still there - out there waiting with me. So, throughout all of that disappointment, not just on that one night, but in my whole life, in anything that happened that was negative, I could always count on those four people to be there, my mother, father, sister and brother. I could not have been raised in a better way or by better people. I realized all that on that night.

Luke shared he learned something that was his most important value through this experience. His experience moved him in developing his Black self-concept by establishing the value of family, more specifically the Black family.

Serious articulated similar correlations between family and Black racial identity as he discussed the way he views "being a Black person even today." Serious stated:

> I think my parents, of course they grew up in a time much different from what I did and my grandparents even a more different time. And so the different values, the type of discipline that they kind of carried down through the generations onto me, I think our culture, community and who we are, and them being Black, and the things that they had to go through shaped the way that they raised me. And the way that I was raised shapes the way that I think even today. It shapes the things that I do. And so, because I'm African American, because my parents are African American and they endured certain things, I think that it affects me today. Growing up just the values that they instilled in us about Black heritage. The gratitude that they always wanted to see in us from seeing good things happening to Blacks, or from Blacks doing big things, or even us [my siblings and I] being able to do things, or reaching a certain place in life that our ancestors never reached. They just gave me a different perspective in life by making sure we [my siblings and I] knew what they didn't have growing up or what they had to go through. It's a blessing that we are where we are, it's a blessing that we can do this, this and that. But, they brought us up understanding

> that it hasn't always been this way for us [Black people]. That was instilled in us very early on and even in me today.

Through his parents, Serious developed his sense of what it meant to be Black. This view developed over time, but still "shapes" his current views about being Black.

The role of Blacks working together to establish common practices, transforming less than acceptable conditions, and addressing systemic issues was described as family values. To illustrate, there were terms used by participants such as "family reunion," which communicated full messages about music, food, reverence of Black ancestors, God, church, and time of year, among other things. Several participants spoke about being Black in conjoined terms with the Black community and described community as central to how they viewed themselves as Black people. Paul even made a comment about his intent to transfer during his freshman year to a historically Black college because it would be like "going to school with family." Olivia described her identity to be influenced by her family's value of the Black community, and belief in the responsibility Blacks have to the Black community. This was illustrated when she stated:

> I think my family understands I never would abandon them, that I could take them wherever I go and when I say my family I also mean my community and my people… I feel like that's been one of my purposes in life to bring my people up. At times, that is a heavy burden. I place a lot of responsibility on my shoulders… I think it [the responsibility] shaped my identity the way my family has shaped my identity. I definitely have come to realize that I have a higher

> calling because so much has been placed in my lap. It's just made me kind of step up to the plate on a lot of things. It made me realize, I don't function by myself and my identity isn't just who I am. My identity comes from who my family is and who my community is and how my community represents itself.

Olivia's racial identity was influenced by her family's views of the Black community. Further, she articulated a sense of Black identity from a broad community sense as a result of how her "family has shaped" her identity.

Impact of family loss. Loss of family emerged as influential to Black racial identity development. In the process of telling their stories, each participant shared some life lesson or meaning associated with family loss. As the participants told their stories about loss, they alluded to Black self-concept development. Olivia's story about loss involved her great-grandmother. Through her story, she indicated she often found herself viewing herself through the eyes of her deceased great-grandmother to gauge herself as a Black woman. Olivia stated:

> I grew up with my great-grandmother all the way up to the third grade. She got cancer when I was in the third grade. I always think back on this and realize that I wish I knew a lot of things. I wish I could've asked her more questions, but when she passed away, that was something. I really felt the emptiness, especially because my mother was really only around on the weekends. So I had lost somebody who was really a center for me and a caregiver for me and that provided for me and showed me the things that I needed to know. Once she was gone, I felt like I lost a part of me. That was a big moment in my life. I still think

> about my great-grandmother, especially in quiet times when I'm meditating. I always think what she would think of me as a Black woman in today's society, or would she be proud of who I have become. So, I constantly think about her. She's a big part of my life, even today even though she's not here.

The process of exploring her identity outside of her great-grandmother, who she described as her "center" and who she thought about "constantly," heightened Olivia's awareness of her Black self-concept. As she discussed viewing herself through her great-grandmother's eyes "even today" and wondering what her great-grandmother's opinion of her "as a Black woman in today's society" would be, there was evidence of the influence of her great-grandmother on her decision-making.

Luke discussed the loss of his father during his college years gave him permission to be vulnerable and made him take ownership of, and authority over, his decisions as a Black man:

> That was the most impactful event when my father passed. Basically I would tell my dad everything. He was my example for how to be as a Black man…Once he passed, I didn't have anybody to talk to. I didn't have anybody to depend on. It opened up my eyes and allowed me to be broken. It allowed me to reach the lowest point that I had ever reached in my life, but when I hit rock bottom all the way to where I was ashamed at one point to look at the person that I had become in the mirror, it allowed me to realize everything that he [my father] was trying to teach me my entire life. Because for the longest I would put off all the decisions that I made in my life on other people. Positive and negative, I did this because

> this person was doing it, or I did this because I wanted to make my parents proud or I did this because I wanted to be an example for my nephew, or I did this because everybody else was doing it, or I did this because I was tired of other people telling me I couldn't so I am going to do it anyway just to prove them wrong…When things went great I would take the credit, but when things went wrong I blamed it on others. I was using it as a crutch, and when my dad passed it allowed me to just look at who I was, look at who he wanted to be, and look at where I wanted to go. So, that changed my life more than anything else ever could. It allowed me to just basically look back on my bad decisions and realize that I am a better person than this and begin to actually live up to my potential as a Black man.

Luke's story encompassed pain and victory. He discussed a breakdown followed by self-realization. His story demonstrated development, as he discussed "looking in the mirror" at who he was becoming versus who he wanted or should be becoming. Developing his identity as a Black man was a factor in his story, as he reflected on losing his Black male father who was his "example of how to be as a Black man."

Paul also experienced the loss of his father during college. He articulated meaningful connections of this loss to his growth in sound decision-making, as well as needs to assume his leadership role in his family:

> In 2007, my dad got diagnosed with cancer. He ended up dying in 2008. He had an invasive cancer. When they found it, it was all up on his stomach, and then it moved around. They couldn't find out all the places it was, and they couldn't

> stop it. So, he ended up dying in 2008. And, that was a rough time for me. I guess we always looked to my father and my mom for leadership or advice and different things like that. After he died, it really showed me that, 'It's your time to step up in the family as a leader and to start handling your business differently. You got to make decisions. Become a man now. …You have to be the example of a Black man for your sisters, so they know what is and is not okay and for your brother so he lives up to all we come from as Black people'…He [my father] used to have me listen to these songs and one of the songs is called "Patches." It's an old song. It went pretty much like, 'Dad is leaving one day. It's going to be your turn to carry the load for the family.' That really changed a lot of stuff for me. I started telling myself, 'You need to start being more serious about your life, about being a leader, about being an example for your sisters, being there for your sisters, being a man for your family. You really need to step up.' I think that was very important for me and it changed the way I view life. If I'm going to do something I know I shouldn't be doing, I always think 'What if I die in the middle of me doing this?' and 'What impact would it have on my family?'…It discouraged me from doing a lot of stuff and showed me that life is very precious and cannot be taken for granted. My whole outlook on life just change from then to now.

Paul's decision-making was directly connected to who he was as an independent individual who viewed himself as a Black man, playing a particular role within his family, with a specific purpose to fulfill for those who depend on him. His story also

demonstrated development in Black identity as he described his new role as the self-sufficient leader of his family following the death of his father. Further, Paul described his decisions as needing to be a product of his new role in the family as a model for Black men and contingent upon his family's best interest.

Ross experienced the loss of both of his parents over the past year. He described the long-suffering of his father prior to his passing to be "hard" because he always hoped to have time to build a relationship with his father due to his absence while Ross was growing up:

> We just started really communicating my last year of college. I finally stopped being frustrated with him. It was time out for all that blame stuff. Past was in the past, so I wanted to have some kind of relationship at least as an adult. But, we never had a chance to get there…. Losing my dad kind of helped me try to do better with communicating that love that I do have towards other people, particularly with my Black guys.

Ross was not particularly close with his father; however, the lack of strong relationship made him want to develop solid connections with his Black male students. The impact of the loss of his father caused him to desire to interrupt a pattern in his Black male experience and positively impact other Black males.

While Ross's father had a prolonged period of illness, he described his mother to pass within months of being diagnosed with cancer. His "model for how to be a responsible adult" was "gone and I was lost." Ross indicated his feelings to be those of "numbness" and "disbelief" that someone so "big" in his eyes could actually fall victim

to an illness so quickly. In many ways, Ross spoke as if he was still in disbelief. The impact of this critical event was monumental for Ross and this was illustrated as he discussed what he will miss due to her loss:

> It kills me to think she won't be able see the product of all her hard work. She did it all. She did it all by herself. She won't be around to see I was actually listening all those years either. When she told me stuff like, 'Make everything I do count, be good to people, be the best at everything I do, be a role model, God is always in control." She always said life is too short to be unhappy and just remember whatever bed I make I have to lay in it. …And specifically for a Black man that's important. There are so many stereotypes out there. Almost like people want Black men to be seen negatively. You have to work so hard to be the positive example people need to see so they can see the truth and not what media shows them…If you had great examples and great role models then you tend to come out okay. You don't and you may not come out okay. So, I would say just being married and having that title of Dad or stepdad has really helped me stop and think about what kind of legacy I want to leave for my children as a man and specifically as a Black man.

Through this influential experience of losing both parents, Ross recounted life lessons related to being a Black male role model. The influence was substantial considering he intended to not only enact these lessons through his life, but relay them to his children through being a model of fatherhood.

Mary experienced two very "difficult" and "earthshattering" events when she lost both her grandmother and godmother around the same time period, about a year following her college graduation. She considered both women to be her "role models" and "two of the most important women" in her life, so the impact of their loss was very influential. Mary believed losing them shaped her into a better person because she found herself trying to "take on" their most outstanding characteristics. Mary described both her grandmother and godmother espoused an "incredibly great work ethic." She recalled a story during her grandmother's last days when Mary discussed not being able to get to class on time:

> And she [my grandmother] said, 'Mary, that's unacceptable. You don't do that. All the years that I've worked, I have never been late to anything. You need to do better. You don't want to send the message that you disrespect somebody's time.' I said, 'All right grandma, I'll do it.' And I'm not late for anything anymore. I make it a point.

Through this very influential and challenging experience of losing two very important women, Mary embraced characteristics impacting personal and professional areas of her life taught to her by women she considered role models for her as a Black female. The example of work ethic, demonstrated in this story by time management, was a trait Mary adopted and went to considerable measures to exercise.

Role of Racism on Black Racial Identity

Considering each of the participants identified race as central to their identity, racism proved to play a role in racial identity development. A number of the participants

articulated the enormity of racism and its impact on how they viewed themselves and other Blacks. Other participants spoke on the periphery of race, only rearticulating their perspectives as learned or instilled by others. The participants provided reflections on how dealing with, or even just experiencing, racism challenged and assisted in their growth and development processes.

Michelle discussed an experience at work where for the first time she felt minimized, devalued, and powerless because of her race:

> I had a situation here [at work] where I was speaking to an individual as a manager about policies and how unfortunately we couldn't give in to what they wanted us to do because it was against our policies and the lady dealt quite a few crude remarks at me in regards to my race and how I was trying to go on a power trip from it. Long story short, I remained very professional, but she proceeded to tell me how she was going to go above my head and get me removed because she felt as though I was treating her different than other people, and she felt that it was due to the fact that she was white and I was black. She called me a nigger and told me I was taking a power trip and I was trying to get her back for all the different times in the past that my ancestors had been put down, and I was just trying to make myself equal with her and get back at her and let her know how it felt. In reality, I wasn't doing any of that. I just started blocking her out and proceeded to hand her over to another manager to handle, since I was becoming very angry, and I didn't want to allow myself to respond back at her. I guess just her calling me a nigger that she really caught me off guard because 'we're in a

> workplace, you're grown, I'm grown. Surely we have the decency to handle this in a very professional manner.'

Michelle reflected on this experience and made connections to her professional demeanor. Her need to remain professional was validated by this experience because from her perspective, if she did not maintain a certain level of professionalism, she might deserve the comments hurled at her by the woman in this experience. In addition, Michelle discussed her experience with an individual in power at her current job:

> When I went and interviewed there, he made it very clear that he told me he was raised in a racist background and that he was raised in a family that didn't like Black people and he was telling me, 'I never worked with a Black person, but you seem very professional so I'm willing to take down the stereotype I have in my head of Black people.' That really caught me off guard because he said it so blunt. I guess that really made me want to prove him wrong and breakdown that stereotype in his head. I was aware of what I was walking into. That I was walking into an atmosphere that normally doesn't have a lot of diversity, and so I just went in there with the mindset to change everyone's opinions on how they may view African Americans or minorities for that matter. I was very much so aware when I made the decision to work there of all the stereotypes that I probably would be facing within the clinic and with clients coming in.

Michelle saw these types of interactions in her field as coming with the territory. She was aware and eager to immerse herself in the field regardless of the potentially damaging affects to her self-concept.

Paul shared a story about an interaction at work where he experienced racism checking identification for a secure area on his military base. Paul described this experience as causing him to feel placed in a box, as well as minimized by power dynamics and dominance because he was Black. While this story was the longest of all provided, to shorten the story could minimize the message.

> There's this one gentleman, he tried to get into the building but his badge wasn't working. So he starts raising his voice. Later, I felt someone walking right up on me, so I turned around and the gentleman is standing right behind me, but he's like directly in my face – less than an inch away, pretty much chest to chest. To get to the end of the story, nothing ever happened to the gentleman. He's an older white dude. They gave him paid leave. I just felt like I got the short end of the stick. I did what I was supposed to do as far as not hitting him back. That dude stepped way over the line and nothing ever happened to him. I spoke with one of my commanders who happened to be a Black man and he told me, 'It's not going to be fair a lot out here.' What he told me to do from then on is, whenever somebody does anything they're not supposed to do, you put that paperwork together because they're going to do it to you every chance they get. He told me I should've press charges. The first thing every black person I tell this story to says to me is 'Was he white?' That's always the first question.

For Paul, this experience involved racism. As he articulated, Paul was unsure whether he experienced this situation solely because he was Black, or also because he was of lower rank in the military. This illustrated the perception of racism being experienced as

actual racism regardless of reality. Due to the history of race relations in this country, individuals' perceptions are their truth and most often the experiences of perception and reality are interchangeable.

Impact of racial stereotyping. Lasting implications of encounters with individuals were also experienced by participants in relation to stereotypes. While stereotypes emerged in themes, several participants discussed them directly as contributing to how they engage with the world as Blacks. For example, Ross indicated:

> I think that black male has a negative connotation in society. I think I have an opportunity to change that. And try to make sure I'm always doing something that will help change those views and I'm always encouraging someone else to change their views. I think about that all the time being a black male today. You need to make sure you're doing certain things to set yourself apart and not fall in line with what people say black males are.

Jackson demonstrated stereotypes to have impacted his as well when he stated he "likes to break stereo types all the time. He expounded:

> I grew up with the saying instilled in me that 'you have two strikes against you: You are a male and you are African American'. With that being said I know that I need to always mind my P's and Q's, as well as just make sure the I'm sharp and impressive.

For Ross and Jackson, having a Black male identity in society is associated with negativity and they feel personally obligated to combat Black male stereotypes through

their actions and behavior. Their public regard or how they believe others perceive Black men has impacted their Black self-concept.

Mary discussed stereotypes associated with Black women and how Black women are "often categorized as just being angry". She expounded further about her need to be accountable for her commitments by saying:

> I know that a part of why upholding my word and doing what I said I would do is so important to me is because of stereotypes about being black and how I know that a lot of people don't expect black people to follow through or contribute.

Mary's Black racial identity has been impacted by racial stereotyping, causing her a heightened sense of personal responsibility. She works hard for fear she could be associated with how she perceives society views the work ethic of Blacks.

Role of Schooling at a PWI on Black Racial Identity

While several participant stories about race existed outside of school, for some, their most influential encounters were experienced as part of acclimating to being among the just over 3% population of Blacks on a campus of approximately 37,000 graduate students. Jackson discussed his experience of transitioning to college to be "a little different" than expected. He visited campus during a time when classes were not in session, so he did not witness the campus on a regular class day. He recounted his experience at the freshman orientation:

> It was when I came to the New Student Conference that I realized college was a little different. In a sense, that kind of changed my view. I didn't actually know if I wanted to come here anymore. It was different in that I stood out as the only

> Black person. I wasn't used to that since I went to predominantly Black high schools and elementary schools. I had the grades to get here, so that wasn't an issue. Honestly, PWI wasn't even in my realm. I wasn't even thinking of going to a school like my college. But, here I was, one of millions is how it felt. It was a lot to take in, and it was a lot all the way to graduation. I just adjusted, and it became normal to be uncomfortable.

Paul described an experience where he felt alone and isolated because of his race. The meaning he associated with being Black influenced the socially constructed reality of how he engaged with the world as a Black person.

Mary talked about her college experience as if she discovered a formula for dealing with culture shock. She felt her biggest challenge was navigating situations where she was the only Black person, as well as times when people did not understand her. To address this challenge, she "found people who looked like me." Mary stated:

> And so that was the biggest thing that I did to cope. And when I would have moments, when I would feel defeated or like I was going through a situation that would be unique to a Black student, I thought about some of the things other Black students said…. they kept saying get plugged in, be around other people like you.

Mary felt if she could befriend other Black students who were experiencing similar culture shock issues, it would make going through the situation easier. Mary's reality of being Black and the meaning associated with her racial identity was key to how she dealt

with transitioning to college. The developmental process of constructing her racial identity was influential to how she viewed herself.

Sasha discussed her challenging transition to, and persistence through, college to be worth it to provide an example for Black children:

> I really want to be that person, for a black child, specifically, because I understand. Oftentimes in college, I was like these people do not understand and don't like me. I just felt that way. They just don't like me and they don't want to be around me, but you know what, I'm going to show them that I can do this. I tell myself I'm going to show them that I can do this because too many times I was written off. I was working at my job in financial aid since the summer of my freshman year. Too many times people would call or come in and make comments like, 'You will give a minority child a scholarship, but you won't give one to my child when he actually deserves it.' Stuff like that when you just want to go through the wall and hurt somebody. I feel like, you know what, I'm going to walk across the stage. All those hundreds of White people that's in the audience, I want you to be sure and notice my brown skin walking across the stage.

Sasha constructed meaning in transitioning and persisting in college. Her meaning dealt more with the physical example she provided to Black children. Sasha also articulated a motivating factor to involve demonstrating something to White people. These were individuals who did not want her on campus, did not believe she deserved to be on campus, and/or did not think she could handle the rigor of being on campus. The

meaning communicated by Sasha's construction of reality also provided basis for her decision-making.

Influence of Developing Life Purpose on Career Decision-Making

Life purpose and the fulfillment of life purpose emerged as a career decision-making influence for this group of Black recent college graduates. For the participants, life purpose was significantly motivated by racial identity and spiritual identity. In this section, the contribution of racial and spiritual identity to the development of life purpose will be presented.

Role of Black Racial Identity on Developing Life Purpose

For several of the participants, racial identity contributed to life purpose influencing career decision-making. Ross discussed being Black helped him connect and relate to his students at the predominately Black and Hispanic middle school where he was a teacher. Ross stated:

> Being Black definitely helps me do my job better. I feel like with the population of kids that I interact with, I feel like I can understand them in a way that maybe a guy that is not Black or not minority understands…. So the stuff that they see throughout the day or some of these situations that they come across that they do not know how to handle just because of maybe their race or maybe because of their background as far as what they know and what they have been taught at the house, I feel like I can help guide them through some of the experiences that I have had. Some will step up, some will talk at you, some will yell at you and some may curse at you. But, what you need to be worried about is if they are not

> talking to you because if they are not talking to you, they are giving up. Trying to instill that communication may be different but there is still love there. To instill the care that I want you to get better at whatever we are learning.

Ross engaged his racial identity at work and felt this identity engagement made his work meaningful and gave him purpose. Luke discussed setting a standard for positive Blacks performance in his field of engineering, which he noted was underrepresented by Blacks in leadership roles. Luke stated:

> At my current job we have dealerships all over the town. None of the dealerships that I have been to have any Black personnel managers. I haven't seen one Black sales manager, and I haven't seen one Black general sales manager or anything like that. There is a barrier there to moving up. I do not see anybody like myself. I really don't want to be here and don't see anyone as an example that has survived here. However, I don't want to divert from what I went to school to do. I don't want to divert from the vision that I found myself having for so long, so that is fueling me to think about going back to school to have an edge. Just because if I know it is like that here, then it's like that in all of corporate America. So, I don't want to be another one of those stories where we hear that he went to school, he majored in engineering but he does something outside of engineering. Even though people may not say it, it is in the back of their heads that 'he couldn't do it because he was Black.' So that fueled me to want to make sure that I made my best effort and gave myself a fair shot at doing what I wanted to do because I know there are few people of color in the industry that I

> am in, and I know that once I make it, I can change a lot of perceptions that people have of Black people, just like I did when I started this job. I think my role will be to open doors for other Black engineers so they don't feel like I did when I started here.

Luke decided in order to give himself a "fair" shot, he needed a master's degree to gain an edge in his career field. His racial identity was paramount in this story about forging unchartered territory in his current company, serving as an example for fellow Black engineers, and breaking perceived stereotypes that Blacks cannot handle this field.

Role of Spiritual Identity on Developing Life Purpose

Spiritual identity played a role in the development of purpose in the lives of this group of Black recent college graduates. As mentioned previously, participants rarely deviated from their belief in God being at the core of how they viewed their spiritual identity. Views of how the participants' spiritual identities contributed to their life purpose included (a) following a predestined path, (b) utilizing a passion or talent, and (c) personal satisfaction.

Purpose to follow a predestined path. Following a path that was predestined or predetermined emerged across the participants' viewpoints of spirituality. Paul discussed an "individual plan that God has for you." Luke believed he had a preordained path to accomplish a purpose. Along with living to serve God and having other's witness God within his life, Luke felt individuals were "destined to do" certain things in fulfillment of a purpose. He noted, "I feel that everything that we go through, He is guiding us to ultimately reach our purpose." Luke indicated his purpose could

serve as an example to others to accomplish what they "are destined to do as well; something they are meant to achieve in life, so they want to work in order to get there".

Michelle also described a predestined path for her life. Michelle linked spirituality and calling as she discussed accomplishing a purpose:

> I think of calling in a spiritual sense. It is God trying to let us know where our paths should go or what path we should take. It's not necessarily Him [God] calling my name and saying, 'do this.' But I think He [God] is the spirit that pushes me in that direction, just as He [God] pushes other people to be in communication or to be an engineer.

Michelle discussed her predestined path from the career standpoint indicating they merged into what she felt was a calling for her career. She felt her predestined path had her becoming a veterinarian and contended this was her purpose. In addition, from Michelle's perspective, she was also guided along the path by a Higher power to ensure she reached her calling.

Jackson indicated people have "purpose" and each person was "destined to do" something specific:

> I think that everyone is here to do something, whether it be to make someone smile or whether it be building connections with people. I just think that everyone has some purpose for their life. So, I think of purpose, like what they are destined to do.

This personal characteristic Jackson referenced seems specific and possibly changed from day to day, in the example of making someone smile. Further, Jackson explicitly pointed out his beliefs were due to a specific relationship with a Higher power:

> This comes from my religious beliefs given to me by my Higher power, Jesus my Lord and Savior. I believe that he predesigned our lives…has a purpose for each one of our lives. Each individual that is placed here on this earth (has their own purpose) and that's based off my religious beliefs.

From Jackson's perspective, his Higher power not only supplied his predestined path, but supplied a specific path to every individual. Similarly, Mary discussed her path as being specific to only her and "something that I really feel like I was designed to do and that nobody else can add what I can add".

Ross indicated he was "put on earth to do" a specific thing and indicated he had faith because his path had been predetermined:

> God has already ordered my steps, so by faith what is meant to be will be. My job is to do the best I can do with what God has blessed me with so I can witness the plan he has for my life. I'm not sure what it is yet, but I know it will serve Him [God]. I know I will make people's lives better. I know I will be fulfilled. All the experiences I have are meant to help me reach my ultimate role in life. I'm a teacher right now, but I don't know if this is what I will be doing in five years. This is just what I am doing right now. All the people and the kids I work with everyday could all play a role in the next stage of my life. This is all meant

> to teach me something and help me grow. All I know is I have to work hard as I can in this profession until he directs my path somewhere else.

According to Ross, all of his life experiences build upon one another to assist him in preparation for the next experience in his life. Although Ross was uncertain what he would ultimately do as a career, he believed as long as he committed himself, God would direct his decisions. Comments such as being a "teacher right now" and "this profession", coupled with "I will make people's lives better" and "I know I will be fulfilled", demonstrated his connections between his spirituality and career.

Serious provided an illustration as he discussed his current position in financial health administration:

> ... a voice for those that don't necessarily have the power to be their own voice, whether it's an individual, whether it's a group that is underrepresented whatever it may be, in different factors. I feel like that's what I was placed here to do…I like to strengthen my organizations, which is centered around affecting change on behalf of others or in some way representing those that might not have the power or the voice or the position to represent themselves.

Serious saw himself acting and/or speaking on behalf of those who could not represent themselves. This service to those who might be marginalized by systemic constructs was illustrated as what he was "placed here to do".

Purpose to utilize a passion or talent. A second theme which emerged was utilization of one's passion and talent in fulfillment of spiritual needs. Participants discussed specific unique desires and abilities. From their perspective, their access of

these passions and use of these talents was what they should be doing with their lives. Paul, for example, discussed his ability to work with youth:

> I have a gift for working with younger people. Initially, I talk with them; see where they're going…I volunteered in a school when I was in college. I did really well working with the kids and they were just always like, 'Hey where is Mr. Paul, where is Mr. Paul, where is Mr. Paul. So, I think the overall I should be going out and spreading the gospel. I think the area that I'm called to work in is with young Black men who are in desperate need of role models.

Paul discussed his ability to work with youth, specifically Black male youth, as unique to him. In addition, he discussed being one of the Black officers in the military. His desires to support fellow Black males in the military through his officer role had manifested as a passion:

> Well, I think as a Black officer – there's not a lot of Black officers – so I think that is a part of my passion because it was so hard for me. And I came in as a commissioned officer from college. So I have only heard how hard it was for all these enlisted Black members. What's cool is I can mentor these younger dudes in the military and hopefully encourage them to do bigger and better things in the military and for their life.

Through his experiences with young Black men and as a mentor or role model as a Black officer, he envisioned himself fulfilling his purpose. His passion for helping Black males, as well as talent for authentically connecting with Black males, served to satisfy spiritual needs through work.

Michelle also expressed utilization of a talent. She went further to discuss talent as providing happiness and fulfilling an area of passion:

> …Say you're naturally gifted in one area more than another area or something that is close to your heart. Like say your mother died from cancer and maybe you want to be an oncologist to try to understand it better…Personally, I see it as something that you're gifted at and really trying to make a career out of it. I think I've always bonded very well with animals even when it comes to wild animals not necessarily just a dog or cat. It could be a cow. It could be a snake or whatever. I've always been really good with them, handling them. I've always been cautious of them, but quite a few people have told me, 'The way you interact, you can really tell they make you happy, you can really tell that you're passionate about what you do.' I would say I have a calling with animals.

Michelle made clear connections to passion, talent and career. She described the process of decision-making toward her career as a veterinarian to be a product of recognizing "something that you're gifted at and really trying to make a career out of it". According to her, she had tapped into her happiness, as well as her passion.

Purpose to bring others to God. The third theme which emerged involved the personal satisfaction participants found in bringing others closer to God. Mary demonstrated this as she shared her desire to have others "witness God" through her behavior and how she "interacts with them." Serious discussed fulfilling a definite purpose God had for his life. Serious also expressed that it was his intention to act as an agent of his Higher power in whatever he was destined to do:

> I feel like it's essential to have a relationship with the Lord first. If I don't have that relationship, I feel like I can really really want to do certain things in life, I can really really like to do certain things in life, I can find what I'm really really good at in life, but that does not matter. I feel like what I am meant to do comes from above [God].

Although Serious was a deacon in a church and formally ministered to people, he viewed his behavior even outside of the church as a symbolic extension of, or acting on behalf of, his Higher power. His daily interactions with people all worked together for personal spiritual satisfaction.

Olivia shared she was "not certain" of her career path. She did, however, indicate whatever it would be would fulfill her needs to serve God. She discussed this need being a product of a relationship with "Jesus Christ" and being able to impact people in a way that would help them want to know God for themselves:

> Even when I come to work, and I work in a high school, so talking about the Bible or talking about Jesus Christ isn't an option. But, through my actions, and how I hold myself, and how I speak to others, that's what I'm always constantly thinking. I have to have this guiding light. I always think of this light that surrounds me and people should see that and wonder. They should ask the question, 'How do you have that?' and that opens the opportunity for you to say, 'I have this relationship with Jesus Christ' and make them want to come into Him [God] and have Him [God] in their life. I believe ultimately I am meant to draw people to God. How I will do that through my career, I think there's

> infinite ways to go about it. I believe this is the thing that we have to try to figure out in life.

Although Olivia confessed to being unsure of her career, the mere mention of her current work environment not being conducive to conversations about God, not knowing what she wanted "to do in life", and how she believed people should try to "figure out" how to draw people to God through their careers alluded to her views of spirituality from a career standpoint.

Paul also considered his spirituality involved the personal satisfaction of working on behalf of God. He expressed, "I think we are ultimately called to witness and spread the gospel in every area of our lives". Although Paul does not hold any formal religious roles in ministry, he believed he would be held accountable for "spreading God's word" to whomever he interacted and did not wish to be one of the people who "neglects" this duty. He believed talking about God and what God wanted from people was essential, and he should live his life as an example to others. As an officer in the military, Paul felt his purpose was to be an example of a spiritual lifestyle to others.

Sasha indicated all people "are alive for a reason", while Luke believed his purpose was to serve God. Luke's purpose was also aligned with the personal satisfaction theme:

> I think the source of my calling is my Lord the Savior Jesus Christ. I believe that everything that we do has a purpose to serve Him. I believe that He is the one guiding us to do this or that. Everything that I do and every decision I make, I feel that it has a purpose and goes to the whole purpose of serving God.

While Luke defined spirituality as fulfillment of something an individual was "destined to do," he also felt this could be a blessing, as well as a burden dependent on the individual's viewpoint:

> I feel this responsibility is a gift and a curse because you have some people that will feel that, 'Ok well whatever is for me, is for me.' They will use that as a general saying, and they use that as a crutch to not go out and do anything to achieve because they feel it will just fall in their lap in God's time. But, I feel if I share God's message with people who are on the other side of the spectrum, who can see my faith in what I want, see me making decisions to make it happen, then they can know that they also can fulfill their purpose.

The burden had to do with the responsibility to fulfill one's life purpose. From Luke's perspective, individuals could feel burdened by working toward their purpose because it could be challenging.

Ross discussed his decision to become a teacher to provide him a platform to satisfy personal satisfaction needs. He stated:

> I know teaching helps me have an audience so I can feel like I can do what my purpose is by sharing those experiences. When I'm in the classroom, I definitely teach math, but we talk about a lot more stuff besides math. You know, when you have a kid come in – I swear with teachers now, you just don't wear the teacher hat, you wear the social worker hat, and you wear the counselor hat. There are so many hats you wear that a lot of times to even get to the math you have to be in a relationship with the kids, and the only way you get those

> relationships is by sharing experiences… All I know is I have been presented with opportunities to share things with students that I do not feel like I would have opportunity if I was not a teacher.

Ross indicated his students served as an audience for him to accomplish his purpose of sharing his experiences. Through putting on different "hats" and sharing his experiences, he felt the students were supported and assisted in some way. Dependent on an individual's belief system, whether the path was on a trajectory the participant was already working on, or on a course yet to be revealed to them was the deciding factor for how purpose was viewed. Participant understandings of spirituality have been explored to provide a foundation of the importance of spiritual fulfillment through their careers.

Role of Family on Developing Life Purpose

Family also influenced how participants developed life purpose. This influence stemmed from views of what to expect from, and how to make choices concerning, their work lives and professional careers. The participants described their family members, specifically parents, consistently setting expectations and communicating messages about work and career choices. These expectations and messages moved beyond the details of occupational choices and focused more on states of being when in a job, occupation, or career.

Luke described his parents' expectations of him, which involved personal satisfaction. From his parents' perspective, "happiness" and fulfillment in life, as well as his work life, was paramount:

> Well, in my household, the main thing that was always first was happiness. I was always taught growing up that nothing would ever be perfect, but at the end of the day, as long as I was happy with the situation that I was in, then everything I went through to get there was worth it. Also they [my parents] always pushed me to be the best in what I desired to be. When I recently got my current job, my father had passed away by this point, but I told my mother about the job and the opportunity that I had. She liked it, but the main question that she asked was, 'Am I happy? Was I going to be happy?' So they [my parents] always pushed me to be the best that I could and stressed that as long as I had happiness that was all I needed.

Michelle also articulated parental expressions of satisfaction from her mother. Her mother's hopes for Michelle finding a profession she loved validated her desire to unearth her ideal career path of becoming a veterinarian:

> My mom's hope for me was to find a job that I would love, while also bringing in income. We're pretty much on the same page in following my dreams and really being happy with my career just because I will be spending at least a third of my life working.

Mary discussed her mother's influence on her expectations of work and career similarly, in addition to sharing how spirituality played a role:

> My mom is very spiritual. She is a minister. When I told her about some of the stuff I was doing in the private practice where I currently work, she was just like, 'Thank you God that my baby is finally doing what is making her happy and

> what's moving her.' That summer in college when I could not identify a career, didn't know what my purpose was, didn't know what I was supposed to do in life, she [my mother] would pray 'God speaks to you and that you open your heart and search yourself to figure out what it is that you want to do because he's going to allow you to do it, whatever your desires are.' She knew finding my purpose would help me feel satisfied and if I was satisfied it would be easy to do my job well. She [my mother] not only stressed the importance of making a career for myself in something that I loved, but that is was very important that it paid well. So, she was clear about the value of fulfillment joined with financial stability. She would say, 'I'm working hard while some people are in their offices telling me what to do and making a lot more money than me. I want you to be one of those people in the office. She always pressured me to make a profession and not just have a job.

Even in affirming Mary's recent career choices, her mother continued to influence her and communicate messages about work and career expectations:

> Clearly, she loves what I'm doing now. She [my mother] is like, 'I am so happy that you figured this out because this is what you need to be doing. This is what you were made for….She always tells me all the time that she's really happy that I'm doing what I'm doing and how she can't wait to see what I'm going to do as I get older inside the profession that I am in.

Role of Values on Developing Life Purpose

Participants told stories of how certain values became central to their identity. These experiences were developmental to the degree the participants felt they helped to shape what they determined was important in life and assisted in decision-making in all areas of their lives. The role of values on developing life purpose was found to be interconnected with other emerging themes and subthemes of racial identity development and spiritual identity development.

Olivia recounted an experience concerning values as she articulated having issues during her college years with sex and sexual situations. She described this as having issues with the "spirit of lust":

> Nothing was going right. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. I could not focus. My relationships were a mess. I knew it was because I stopped letting God be Lord of my life. I had started looking at guys in sexual situations for fulfillment. And I even knew it was wrong, but I gave into flesh. After I was hurt by this one guy so bad, I made a covenant with God. I was not going to fall to the spirit of lust anymore. I was going to keep him first and see my body as a temple. After I graduated and moved here, I was good for a little while. Then the guy I was talking about moved here too. He even moved like five minutes away from me. I knew it was satan trying to test me. Well, I let him win. He called me late one night wanting to come over. I knew I shouldn't even answer, but I did and I let him come over. I cried and cried and asked God for forgiveness. It happened so many times before, but this time I was so

> disappointed in myself because I broke my covenant. I am still trying to get back on track and hear clearly from God.

Olivia talked about instances where she was met with negative outcomes as a result of disconnecting from her spiritual self. She felt these times caused her problems in having "breakthroughs" in her life. Those "breakthroughs" included direction and purpose for her professional life. Olivia believed not engaging her spiritual identity caused interference with connections to her Higher power, who provides direction and purpose in every area of her life.

Luke shared a story about missing the opportunity to see his grandmother before she passed away. He discussed his sister making plans to take him to visit his grandmother, but never coming to get him. Unfortunately, he was not able to visit with his grandmother before she died. From this experience, which was also a story about family loss, Luke swore this would not happen to him again and that he would always put family first. He made direct connections to the value developing nature of this experience when he told the story of his mother suffering a stroke during his college years:

> The time that my mother was in the hospital I took it very serious. She had a stroke my sophomore [year] and was not looking too good. I was supposed to work that day, but I left. You are not supposed to leave during your shift. I called everybody to take my shift, but nobody was picking up. The person working the shift after me reported it, and I got fired. The loss of my job showed me a lot of people don't value family like me. According to the policies, she had

> every right to fire me because you are not supposed to leave without somebody replacing you. But, the situation also showed me that it doesn't matter what it is, I don't care what is going on, for me family comes first. I knew then I made the right decision. I also knew I was going to be a better person because I understood how valuable family was to me. To this day, today, right now, the job that I have right now, if it came down to me choosing my family over work, I would choose my family every time because I know that I can get another job. I even ended up with a better job. Everything is replaceable, except family. I would do it all over again if I had to.

Luke demonstrated self-directed decision-making and independent thought without need for, and in absence of, approval. Luke used his value of family to guide his behavior, demonstrating his secure sense of self. Development in self-concept was displayed as he articulated his fervent belief he would make the same choice again if the situation were to arise again.

Sasha did not have any place to live on a consistent basis when she was growing up. Due to the struggling financial situation of her mother, Sasha and her sibling did not remain in the same home for long periods of time. She was still preoccupied with trying to understand why, as well as angered by experiences that spanned across her childhood into her adolescent years. Sasha stated:

> As far as the homelessness, that was pretty much all of my childhood. There are only a couple of times that I actually had a place, a stable home to live in….She [my mother] never worked really, and so my first time being homeless was in

> second grade. We lived in a project at the time. My mom still makes me mad today when I think about it. We were living in Section 8 Housing because we were at a project. She only had to figure out $50 a month. She got four months behind on the rent. How that happens, I don't know. So, I was angry. I remember being a little girl in like the second grade, just angry all the time because I could not understand how a grown woman [could] not come up with $50 a month…As little girl I was like, 'Well you could've gotten up and got a job on your own and paid your own rent like nobody is supposed to take care of you.' So, we were homeless a lot.

Sasha acknowledged her value of "making money" and discussed it throughout her interview. From statements like "all I think I care about is making money to survive most of the time," to "one thing I worry about too much is money, and all my friends will tell you all I worry about is money, and making money, getting a lot of money, and that's all that matters to me," to "it is the money aspect that always make decisions for me." Sasha's value of money also revealed high levels of stress. She expressed great concern about running out of money and indicated that just the thought of running out of money "freaks me out" and "makes my blood pressure rise." The process of developing her value of money was directly attributed to her experience of being homeless. As she said:

> And those struggles that I've had in my past have influenced the way I do things. And so, I'm sure now some people could think I'm mean or whatever, but I'm all about making money. My best friend, Karen, she tried her hardest to drill in my

> head that money does not have a heart and does not love me back. But, I have that mentality of, I just have to survive.

Sasha articulated "making money" as her most important value as a result of this experience. Based on her story of homelessness, Sasha was unable to develop trust based on the unreliability of her mother as her caregiver. It was probable being homeless shaped Sasha's identity and would continue to have a substantial impact. To this end, Sasha's value of money most likely began developing earlier than she could recall.

Role of Black Community on Developing Life Purpose

In addition to a sense of community having an impact on Black racial identity, through the participants' stories it also had an impact on developing life purpose influencing career decisions. Olivia said the influence of her sense of community was powerful. She received feedback from family to not go to her college choice, but felt she needed to help forge a path for Black students after her. "Don't go. That town is racist. Something bad is going to happen to you," is what her family told her. Olivia said she heard them, but chose to attend anyway. Since she comes from a "very strong-willed family" with "hearts open to everyone" and is "willing to help their community," that's how she saw her role. Olivia stated:

> By going to this college, I was opening more paths for individuals to be able to come after me. It could make a difference if more people saw that not all Black people are the Black people you see on TV. They [those at her college] got to see me, and had a positive reaction to me. Therefore, the Black people who

> come after me might have a much easier time being received on campus. I thought, 'Okay, once I leave here, it's going to be easier for somebody else, even if it's difficult for me now.' And it was very difficult for me. Many times I wanted to leave, and many times I just felt so alone, but I survived. I am very happy I stayed and graduated for the next person behind me…. I think my family understands I never would abandon them, that I could take them wherever I go, and when I say my family I also mean my community and my people… I feel like that's been one of my purposes in life to bring my people up. At times that is a heavy burden. I place a lot of responsibility on my shoulders.

Olivia constructed meaning in transitioning and persisting in college by thinking of the barriers she could break down for the Black community. Her thought processes involved community responsibility to future Black students and was influential to her decision making.

Similarly, Sasha discussed being motivated by providing an example for Black children following behind her. Sasha stated:

> I really want to be that person, for a black child, specifically, because I understand. Oftentimes in college I was like these people do not understand, and they don't like me, and I just felt that way. They just don't like me, and they don't want to be around me, but you know what, I'm going to show them that I can do this. Sometimes I tell myself I'm going to show them that I can do this because too many times I was written off. I was working at my job in financial aid since the summer of my freshman year. Too many times people would call

> or come in and make comments like you will give a minority child a scholarship, but you won't give one to my child when he actually deserves it. Stuff like that when you just want to go through the wall and hurt somebody, it's just like, you know what, I'm going to walk across the stage. All those hundreds of white people that's in the audience, I want you to be sure and notice my brown skin walking across the stage.

As with Olivia, Sasha constructed meaning through her college graduation from a PWI. Her meaning dealt more with the physical example she provided to members of the Black community than just the experience of completing her degree program.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial and spiritual identities influenced career decision making among a select group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the southwest region of the US. This study sought to understand the Black racial and spiritual self-concept forces that guided their decision making, and how these forces informed and facilitated their career decision making processes.

The data revealed development over the course of the participants' lives to influence career decision making for the population researched in this study. In addition, life stories from youth to present, illustrated significant racial and spiritual identity influences on the career life purpose for this population. A total of sixteen themes emerged as influences. These included broad and sub-theme categories of spiritual identity development, spiritual self-concept, family and loss of family, church, Black

racial identity development, Black self-concept, Black community, racism, schooling at a PWI, developing life purpose, purpose to follow a predestined path, purpose to utilize a passion or talent, purpose to bring others to God, and values. The findings indicated racial and spiritual identity, as well as purpose, family, and values are the primary influences for driving decision making for this group of Blacks in every area of their lives, including career.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial and spiritual identities influenced career decision making among a select group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the southwest region of the US. This chapter discusses the findings of the study. A summary is provided first, followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions. In conclusion, implications for theory, practice, and policy, as well as recommendations for future research are provided.

Summary of The Study

In summary, this research study was conveyed in five chapters per the Texas A&M University traditional dissertation formatting guidelines. Chapter I consisted of the overview of the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions and conceptual framework. There was one overarching and four specific research questions guiding this study. The overarching research question was: What are the impacts of spirituality and race on career decision making among a group of Blacks who recently graduated from graduate programs and joined the workforce? The four specific questions were: (a) How does spirituality influence career decisions by this group of Blacks who recently graduated from graduate programs as they prepare for the work force? (b) How does race influence this recently employed population's career decisions? (c) What major life events influence these Black individuals' career

decisions? (d) How do personal passions, talents, and values influence career decisions by this group of recent college graduates? The framework used to guide the research was: (a) career decision making (Super, 1990; Savickas, 2005); (b) Black racial identity (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Sellers et. al, 1998); (c) spiritual development (Fowler, 1981; Love and Talbot, 1999); and; (d) career calling concepts (Haworth et al., 2001).

Chapter II presented relevant literature from three areas related to examining Black recent college graduates and their career decision making. A review of the career development literature revealed the most prominent and accessed theories to be influenced by White culture under a set of assumptions about the White, dominant, and privileged experience in society (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). A review of spiritual identity and racial identity literature indicated these areas to be growing in research on career behavior, though not widely represented through mainstream research (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Furthermore, the literature review indicated: (a) race is at the center of work experiences for Blacks (Byars-Winston, 2010); (b) spirituality is significant in the human development process of Blacks (Wheeler et al., 2002); and, (c) racial identity and spiritual identity are linked to career decision making for Blacks (Constantine et al., 2005; Falconer & Hayes, 2006; Fouad & Arbona, 1994; Stewart, 2007). However, theory and research applicable to how the intersection of racial and spiritual identity influences career decisions was discovered to be recent and minimal (Constantine et al., 2005; Falconer & Hayes, 2006; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001; Stewart, 2007). This literature provided a foundation centering self-concept as fundamental for career

decision making by this group of Black recent college graduates. In addition to bodies of literature, this chapter also provided an examination of relevant studies.

In Chapter III, the methodological framework used for this study was outlined, in addition to specific detail presented about the participants, methods, and analysis of data. The methodological approach was basic interpretive, using a constructivist perspective relative to this approach for interpretation of their socially constructed experiences as they relate to their careers. The use of narrative methods through life story interviews for the purposefully selected participants was outlined, as well as the process for performative analysis and trustworthiness.

Chapter IV presented the research findings and results. Data from the nine participants were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to understand how racial identity and spiritual identity inform career decisions. This allowed for deep and rich data that unearthed their career influences. Findings confirmed the central role of Black racial and spiritual identity in the career decision making of this select group of Black recent college graduates. The participants indicated desires to satisfy racial and spiritual needs through their work lives, which motivated the development of career life purpose. While each participant articulated a personal definition of career life purpose, they did not deviate from their Black racial and/or spiritual identity being at the core of their definition. Understanding participants' views of Black racial and spiritual identity was instrumental in examining influences on their career decision making.

This population viewed religion at the center of their spirituality and as an avenue through which to combat racism and the public's negative regard of Black people. The most significant decision making influences for the participants were spiritual identity and interpersonal familial relationships. These influences impacted and helped to shape individual self-concept, which influences career decisions.

Discussion

According to Bloch and Richmond (1997), traditional career theories were instrumental in examining career choice, job satisfaction, and work motivation, but limited in investigating the deeper meaning associated with elements of identity. More research investigating the intersection of spirituality and career decision making processes was warranted according to Duffy and Blustein (2005). Further, considering the increasingly diverse workforce, this study's intent to explore how a Black person with a spiritual identity embraces and makes sense of their career decisions (Savickas, 2002) was relevant and timely.

Findings in Response to Research Questions

The following section will focus on findings responding to each research question that guided the study. Each of the four questions worked collectively to answer the fundamental question of *What are the impacts of spirituality and race on career decision making among a group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs and joined the work force?*

Question #1: How does spirituality influence career decisions by this group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs as they prepare for the work force?

In reference to the first research question, the findings of this study revealed this group of Black recent college graduates to interpret spiritual identity as central to their self-concept. While this finding is in alignment with the literature (Herndon, 2003; Wheeler et. al, 2002), the participants in this study were insistent upon providing clarity about the high degree of their belief and faith in God. They reflected on God's purpose for their lives as a basic philosophy and articulated their staunch and resolute beliefs in dynamic and highly expressive ways. As Phillips (2000) discussed, their beliefs could be partly due to their recent graduation from a PWI, as parallels to college adjustment and higher degrees of spiritual commitment were found to be significant for Black students attending PWIs.

The findings suggested the spiritual identities of participants developed as a result of the negative experience of racism shared in their stories. This finding was in alignment with the literature, as Smith (2012) explained Blacks' association with spirituality to involve a defense mechanism for withstanding oppression. The synonymous view of spirituality and religion has also been identified as not just a defense but also a coping mechanism for racial discrimination (Smith, 2012). This racial discrimination was identified by Sellers and Shelton (2003) as blatant, subtle, and intrusive. Byars-Winston (2010) discussed Blacks' belief in a Higher power as a means of managing the long history of racial discrimination in the United States. Spirituality

can assist in adjusting and countering the psychosocial impacts of negative experiences, such as racial discrimination and has been suggested as central to Black culture (Herndon, 2003; Wheeler et. al, 2002). For example, Herndon (2003) and Wheeler et. al (2002) asserted spirituality was central to the human development of Blacks. In addition, McAdoo's (1993) contention that Blacks had strong spiritual orientations, embraced the value of spirituality, believed in the liberating powers of spirituality, and applied spiritual principles in life was also evidenced in this study.

This central nature of spirituality in Black culture was linked to self-concept for the participants of this study. Super's (1990) life and career stages indicated individuals to express understanding of their self-concept through career choices. Further, Savickas (2005a) described layers of identity to be fundamental to making career decisions because people fit work into their lives based on their identity. For this study, the group of Black recent college graduates' ways of discussing self-concept was through racial and spiritual identity.

Constantine et al. (2006) studied Black college student spirituality and career decisions, which was a study similar to this research. In that study, the term *calling* was used by the Black students to describe the process of integrating spirituality and work. This integration directs career behavior, including decision making. In addition, the Constantine et al. (2006) study found spirituality to be important to Black students' career decisions. This research was informed by the seven domains of Haworth et al.'s (2001) career calling concepts, as presented in Chapters I and II, to explore the influences on career decisions among a group of Black recent college graduates. The

faith/spirituality domain, most relevant to this research question, revealed struggles in making sense of spiritual identities. Self-concept development, as defined in Fowler's (1981) individual-reflective faith stage, was evidenced as they made associations between faith/spirituality and life purpose. This research found spiritual identity development to directly influence career decisions for a group of Black recent college graduates. The findings of this study affirmed the faith/spirituality domain of the career calling concepts, as spiritual identity was found to influence career decisions of the participants.

Question #2: How does race influence this recently employed population's career decisions?

The findings of this study revealed the participants used race to make sense of their identity and interpreted race as central to their self-concept. While this study did not set out to determine where the participants were in their Black racial identity development, from the data presented and situating the data within Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) and Sellers et al. (1998) Black identity concepts, the participants appeared to be in early adulthood with high race salience and assigned value to Black racial self-concept. As outlined in Chapter II, in Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (2001) early adulthood sector, racial identity traits can be demonstrated in one of three ways: (a) high race salience, where being Black is central to their identity accompanied by strong identification with Black culture; (b) low race salience, where race is unimportant; or, (c) internalized racism, where negative feelings exist about being part of Black culture.

Through the participants' reflection on their lives and telling of their stories, the process of establishing Black racial identity was observed. This identity development process involved developing an understanding of race and self-concept stability. This finding was supported by identity development literature relevant to this population (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968). The participants' stories about family, loss, racism, Black self-concept, and life purpose demonstrated their establishment of a personal identity, as described by Erickson (1968), when young adults begin to establish personal identity critical to exploring and developing personal relationships. They revealed self-concept stability as they discussed developing an understanding of race and spirituality. In addition, findings were supported by college student identity development literature (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) as participants demonstrated self-directed decision making and independent thought without the need for, and in absence of, approval. Participants articulated values, such as family, church, and community as influential to decision making, also indicating a positive sense of self.

Byars-Winston (2010) and Sellers et al. (1998) contended being Black was central to identity for Blacks. Moreover, similar to Super's (1990) iteration of self-concept, Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (2001) life span model of Black identity development illustrated self-concept as central to Black racial identity. Not only is Black racial identity central to the Black experience, but according to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), the experience of this identity was socially constructed. This socially constructed experience can be witnessed through Winston-Byars (2010) research

indicating career behavior to be situated within a cultural context dependent on how being Black fits into self-concept.

Of the seven domains of Haworth et al.'s (2001) career calling concepts, the identity development domain was most relevant to this research question. In examination of development influences, it was revealed the participants experienced self-concept development by constructing meaning associated with their Black racial identity. The most influential experiences involved racism, which revealed struggle to make sense of racial identity. Across each of the participants' stories, they emphasized the experiences to provoke thought, induce perspectives about being Black, and forge plans to contribute to their race through their careers. This research found racial identity development to directly influence career decisions for this group of Black recent college graduates.

Question #3: What major life events influence these Black individuals' career decisions?

The findings of the study revealed career decisions were influenced by racial and spiritual identity development, as a result of experiences with familial relationships and loss of family members. Through the data analysis process, it was determined this question to be best answered in two parts. The first part of the response focuses on the influence of interpersonal familial relationships and the second concerns loss of family members.

In response to the first part of this research question, Leider and Shapiro (2001) discussed the impact of close relationships in shaping one's understanding of career

calling. Parents, siblings, friends, and mentors were recognized as influential in forming understandings of self and careers. Of the seven domains of Haworth et al.'s (2001) career calling concepts, interpersonal relationships were extremely significant, making them relevant to this portion of this research question. While this finding aligned with the literature (Palmer, 2000; Parks; 2000), participants in this study experienced a higher degree of influence from familial relationships. More than any other experience with relationships, familial relationships influenced the participants and were fundamental to their racial identity, spiritual identity, and development of life purpose. The positions, perspectives, and expectations of family assisted participants in aligning their identities, life purposes and career decisions.

Family, as central for the participants, was supported by the literature framing this study. According to Falconer and Hayes (2006), issues of self-identity and family should be incorporated into concepts targeting Black college students, since "This could potentially initiate the introspection and examination that may be required for students of color to explore how their career futures interface with family expectations and their beliefs about themselves," (p. 231). In addition, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) described family as central to racial identity for Blacks. According to this framework, pre-adolescence describes the stage when identity development is influenced by family and in this stage, Black culture is of greatest importance. Further, in the early adult years, similar to that in pre-adolescence, identity traits exhibit high race salience in establishing identity groups based on Black culture. Since so much of culture is taught

to Blacks by their family members, the fundamental nature of family's influence throughout the participants' stories was congruent with the literature.

According to Baxter-Magolda (1999), influences of critical life events, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, or significant illness prompted self-reflection on life's meaning and purpose and developed self-concept. Of the seven domains of Haworth et al.'s (2001) career calling concepts, the critical life events component was most relevant to this portion of the research question. In examination of experiences deemed to be critical life events, it was revealed these experiences contributed to self-discovery and self-definition, which unearthed life meaning and purpose for the participants in this study. The participants made direct connections between loss of family and racial identity development, spiritual identity development, and development of life purpose.

Across each of the participants' stories, they stressed the impact of familial relationships and loss of family members to invoke self-reflection about who they are, how they see themselves, as well as their contributions to the world. The participants in this study accessed race and spirituality to construct meaning and make sense of their experiences. The outcomes of the experiences caused introspection about life purpose and work roles, in turn impacting career decisions. This research found experiences with familial relationships and loss of family members to directly influence career decisions for this group of Black recent college graduates.

Question #4: How do personal passions, talents, and values influence career decisions by this group of recent college graduates?

The fourth research question explored how passions, talents, and values influenced the participants in this study when making decisions about entering the labor force. The findings revealed the participants accessed personal passions, talents, and values to inform their identity and self-concept. According to Palmer (2000), a sense of vocation often arises from an awareness of one's unique, personal giftedness, and the desire to link these gifts, talents, and passions to serving others. Bolles (2001) explained personal values, including familial, social, cultural, occupational, economic, and intellectual, contributed to a process of self-definition. These self-definition processes are linked to understandings of career life purpose.

Of the seven domains of Haworth et al.'s (2001) career calling concepts, the: (a) passions, talents and gifts; as well as (b) values were most relevant to this research question. When examining the influence of values and passions were deemed influential to developing career life purpose. While this finding aligned with literature (Bolles, 2001; Palmer; 2000), these domains presented differently than illustrated by the career calling concepts informing this study. In the career calling concepts, the values and passions, talents and gifts components presented similarly to the other five domains of the concepts. In this study, values and passions and gifts emerged as influential to career decisions, as a result of being driven by racial identity, spiritual identity, family and life purpose.

Through the stories shared by the participants, the perspective emerged that passions, talents and gifts were provided by God to better equip individuals to make a difference in the lives of others and achieve life's purpose. Values revealed the regard

and meaning associated with what mattered in the participants' lives. Further, the participants in this study affirmed racial identity, spiritual identity, critical life events and familial relationships to provide a basis for their values.

Of the seven domains of Haworth et al.'s (2001) career calling concepts, the development domain is where race is found to be influential. For this group of participants, there was enthusiasm and pride associated with being Black, Black culture, and the historical struggles of Black people. Racism impacted their racial identity development and worked to construct their values systems. Based on the findings of this study, the participants' passions, talents and gifts, as well as value development processes were the product of the central nature of their race and spirituality, which fueled their perspectives and guided their decisions.

Thus to answer the fundamental question of *What are the impacts of spirituality and race on career decision making among a group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs and joined the work force?*

Black racial identity and spiritual identity are the most prominent influences for decision making for this select group of Black recent college graduates. Familial relationships, developing purpose, values, and passions and gifts also emerged as bi-directionally influential to Black racial identity and spiritual identity.

The processes of self-concept development contributed to the participants' desires for career identities (Meijers, 1998) that fulfilled spiritual and racial identity needs and supported life purpose. The anticipated career identities of the participants in this study involved the part of their self-concept that authentically connects to work.

Career and identity go hand in hand with needs to make a difference in the lives of others and reach their purpose in life. Participants discussed their Black self-concept to influence their desires to positively impact the Black concept of others through their jobs. They described careers allowing them to fulfill their purpose to work toward something impactful during their lifetime.

Participants' career aspirations included plans to advocate for Black youth through a psychology practice, conduct research and educate others about the effects of racial disparities for Blacks, enact change through Black youth community programs, and help people navigate oppressive systems, all with the intent to make a difference in the lives of others. Each career path demonstrated needs to engage racial and spiritual identity, as well as fulfill purpose in the lives of the participants. Terms such as career happiness and career motivation were relevant to these participants, as they described their anticipated journeys toward what they were destined to do for a career. Overall self-concept guided career decisions, which was in alignment with literature, and for this group of Black college graduates, being Black with a spiritual identity drives decision making in every area their lives, including career.

Conclusion

In summary, this research study was conveyed in five chapters per the Texas A&M University traditional dissertation formatting guidelines. Chapter I consisted of the overview of the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and conceptual framework. Chapter II presented relevant literature related to examining Black recent college graduates and their career decision making. In Chapter III, the

methodological framework used for this study was outlined. There was also specific detail presented about participants, methods, and analysis of data. Chapter IV presented the research findings and results. Chapter V provided a summary, discussion, and implications and recommendations concerning the study.

Implications And Recommendations

According to the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD), which is the professional organization for those in the field of HRD, it was "formed to (a) encourage systematic study of human resource development theories, processes, and practices; (b) disseminate information about HRD; (c) encourage the application of HRD research findings; and, (d) provide opportunities for social interaction among individuals with scholarly and professional interests in HRD from multiple disciplines and from across the globe," (n.d.). Based on the findings of this study, implications for expanding HRD in theory, practice and policy and informing units on college campuses, as well as recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Identity development concepts have provided a foundation for theory, research and practice in HRD for decades (Luzzo & Severy, 2009). However, these traditional concepts were generally applicable to the White, male, middle-class American (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008), not the Black person who socially constructs identity and develops a self-concept based on lived experiences. Fenwick (2004) commented HRD has provided an easy target for attack of its practices on the grounds of power, privilege, and social justice. Further, Preskill and Donaldson (2008) indicated the field does not effectively consider individual experiences with racial discrimination, meaning of work

from a cultural perspective, or the historically limited availability of racially diverse career guidance or information.

Theory in HRD. The theoretical implications inherent in Super's Career Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development (1990) involve it being one of the most commonly recognized theories in the HRD field (Luzzo & Severy, 2009). While Super's work is foundational in HRD literature, this study suggests there is value to the use of theory with concepts that can be applied to the socially constructed identities of Blacks with a spiritual identity.

Findings from this study imply expanding HRD theory by incorporating constructivist theory is timely and appropriate. Constructivist theory, such as Savickas' (2005) Career Construction Theory and Pryor and Bright's (2014) Chaos Theory of Careers (2004) could be useful for addressing the intersection of racial and spiritual identity in HRD. These theoretical approaches could assist in identifying and representing what matters to individuals, what attracts them to certain careers, and their rationale for their chosen work roles.

The findings of this study expand Super's (1990) Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development (1990) with respect to the theory's basic tenet of self-concept. According to the theory, career behavior is influenced as self-concept is developed over the course of an individual's life. While this study supports this tenet, findings also suggest this tenet be specific to Black self-concept and spiritual self-concept developed over an individual's life for Blacks with spiritual identities. Based on the findings of this study, a focus on the development of Black self-concept and spiritual self-concept would

allow the HRD field to gain a greater understanding of Blacks in the workforce. Within Black and spiritual self-concepts are the pivotal driving forces of family and life purpose in the lives of Blacks with spiritual identities.

The findings from this study suggest the role of racial and spiritual identity should be integrated into mainstream career development literature through research. As previously discussed, widely accessed literature focuses on performance and efficiency in the workplace and is limited on the relevance of racial and spiritual identity to workplace performance. However, the participants of this study embodied the racial diversity that exists and continues to grow in today's labor force. This study highlights the importance of personal skills as a factor in workplace performance. Efforts to grow in the field's knowledge of how to tap into the personal skills employees bring to the workplace, which ignite their purpose and motivate them to perform intrinsically, moves the field beyond a focus on just technical competency development to the recognition of more holistic personal and social competencies (Baron & Byrne, 1997).

Even though there is an abundance of career development literature indicating the importance of identity and self-concept, as well as numerous accounts of a void in the literature concerning the career influences of racially diverse populations, minimal empirical studies were found to explicitly address the career trials and triumphs of Blacks through contemporary methods. This would suggest a shift in paradigm for scholars, researchers and practitioners who primarily focus on traditional frameworks to explain career behavior could prove to be challenging. Considering the diversity of

today's labor force, research exploring the socially constructed career behavior of these populations can only contribute to the HRD field.

Practice in HRD. The findings of this study provided implications for practice in HRD. Associating and validating racial identity and spiritual identity in practice could contribute to the field's capacity to assist Blacks in identifying and working though their career needs, as well as support the organizational development needs of organizations employing these individuals. The findings suggest more constructivist literature needs to be incorporated into the curriculum of HRD academic programs. Curriculum development to integrate more diversity into the core curriculum could not only address institutional diversity mandates, but better equip future HRD scholars and practitioners by making them more culturally conscious and competent. For example, HRD practitioners who help organizations manage change, deliver training to employees, and provide career counseling could benefit from infusing diversity into the curriculum. There could be positive impact to the HRD field's work with Blacks if these practitioners were able to better recognize and validate Black racial and spiritual identity in practice.

Policy in HRD. HRD should have the ability to adapt quickly to new trends, and HRD policy should be flexible in order to respond to the industry trends generated by technology, economics, legislation, and the labor force. The labor force is increasing in diversity and desires to spiritually connect in their workplace (Bloch, 2000; Lindholm, 2007). Findings from this study imply Blacks with spiritual identities to be part of this growing population. Organizations might be looking to the HRD field to assist in the

process of understanding and addressing work place spirituality needs. However, HRD has traditionally focused on organizational needs for productivity based on output, efficiency and profit, none of which deliver the meaning and purpose associated with spirituality (Gull & Doh, 2004; Neal, 2000).

An individual's spirituality has growing implications for how they structure work to address personal needs (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Spirituality in the workplace is evidenced by individual experiences of transcendence through work, senses of being, and connections to others that provide feelings of completeness and joy (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Lips-Wiersma (2002) contended that careers have constructs of purpose, meaning making, and coherence. These careers are noted to inspire four purposes: (a) developing and becoming self; (b) uniting with others; (c) expressing self and serving others; and, (d) a positive effect on individual career purpose and development. Gull and Doh (2004) recognized the need to connect spiritually at work, since work is considered to be central to human existence, as well as essential to a sense of self-worth and an "inner sense of order" (p. 130).

Bloch (2000) noted career happiness terminology in explaining spirituality: "Career happiness can result from the sense of individual well-being that comes about through congruence among individual beliefs, individual behaviors, organizational policies, and organizational practices," (p. 71). Desires for spirituality at work are considered psychological, revealing aversion to how the "centrality of economics" has allowed day-to-day work to lack depth and fulfilled forms of compensation (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 114).

To remain relevant, HRD would need to adjust policy to incorporate growing desires for workplace spirituality, such as "personal development, authenticity and genuineness, engagement, managing to a higher purpose, compassion, and community activity," (Gull & Doh, 2004, p. 130). This study's exploration of spirituality "sheds light on the growing importance of creating an environment encouraging the full utilization of an individual's capability," (Gull & Doh, 2004, p. 129). Creating environments involves adjustments to HRD policy to be responsive to workforce developments and trends, as well as continue to engage the field's stakeholders.

College student services. College student services units, including those within student affairs such as "housing and residence life, student unions, student activities, counseling, career development, orientation, enrollment management, racial and ethnic minority support services, and retention and assessment," (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], n.d.), as well as first-year and student success programs, work in partnership with academic degree programs to support the mission of higher education institutions. According to NASPA, these types of units "help students begin a lifetime journey of growth and self-exploration" (n.d.), during complex stages of identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Since racial and spiritual identity were found to be central to self-concept in this study, there are implications for student services units on college campuses.

This study focused on recent Blacks college graduates of a PWI, therefore specific implications would be more relevant for comparable institutions. For example areas within student affairs could be informed by increasing understandings of how

college student identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) might be forming and influencing Black students. Additionally, career services units could gain insight into guidance and counseling activities to better assist Black college students in navigating the career placement process.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through the participants' stories, they articulated their life purposes as they related to career identities, motivations and callings. Therefore, I view racial and spiritual identity development as most influential in shaping the self-concept of these Black participants, which in turn informed their career decisions.

Considering this finding, the first recommendation is further research on the influence of racial and spiritual identity development among Blacks. In an effort to remain relevant and maintain our global position as a country, more research is needed to progress the field and make strides to understand the career decision making of racially diverse populations. Findings from this study suggest further research, incorporating constructivist career approaches into traditional frameworks, could add to career decision making literature for Blacks with spiritual identities. Similar to the Hauber's (2007) description of "subjective meaningfulness", described as the way an individual engages their identity as a reference point for prioritizing the relevance of "experiences and motivations" (p. 17). For example, a study examining the influence of racial and spiritual identity development on Blacks across each of Super's career life stages utilizing narrative methods could be undertaken with a larger group of participants. The study could focus on how Blacks categorize experiences to provide

insight into the degree to which they are, as well as their methodology for assigning meaning. This recommendation would allow expansion of literature on the use of traditionally utilized frameworks through more subjective methods.

A second recommendation focuses on the concept of mattering. Mattering, as discussed by Pryor and Bright (2014), is considered to be fundamental to constructivist thinking in HRD and appears to be suitable for conceptualizing the career decision making of individuals with racial and spiritual identities. Mattering was not a focus for this study, but additional research on constructivist theories with a focus on mattering could expand literature for racially diverse groups. Therefore, a recommendation to research mattering and career behavior, with Blacks as a population of study, could reveal useful results for the HRD field.

Considering findings from this study suggest racial and spiritual identity is central to self-concept, a third recommendation of this study is directed toward higher education. Further research on minority college student populations could inform practice in student services units on college campuses. The identities of students on college campuses are actively developing and evolving during college years (Chickering & Reisser). Gaining a greater understanding of the identity development processes of Blacks and other minorities could assist student affairs and other student services units support and prepare this growing population for their entry into the labor force.

Although this study was informed by Haworth et al. (2001) vocation/call concepts, a fourth recommendation is an alternative model based on the results from this study on Blacks as they think about life and career. In the concepts guiding this study,

vocation and call are at the center for career decision making. In my study, however, The Career Purpose Framework, illustrated in Figure 2 by a diagram similar to the nucleus of a plant cell, the center of career decision making has to do with Black racial identity, spiritual identity and the intersection of these two. While the vocation/call concepts guiding this study suggest career decisions are influenced by different domains, in my study the influences are bi-directional, fluid and inform one another. The areas most central to decision making are named spheres and considered to influence the development of self-concept for Blacks. As a result, the process of self-concept development leads to career purpose, which influences career decision making.

The development of racial identity and spiritual identity represent the most influential identity layers. These layers are represented by spheres of influence and have been centered to reflect the fundamental influence of these layers on career decisions. These spheres overlap to indicate they intersect, inform and influence one another to form Black self-concept. The interplay between racial and spiritual identity are what motivates the participants in this study and was reflected in their stories about being Black and looking to a Higher power for clarity of who they are and how they see themselves. There are driving forces influenced by racial identity and spiritual identity, including family, purpose, values, and passions and gifts. Family is definitive of familial relationships, participants included immediate and extended family in their definition, with parents being the most influential to racial and spiritual identity. Purpose represents what participants feel their Higher power has destined for them to do or be in their lives. Values symbolize the participants system of standards, morals, principles

and beliefs that guide their behavior, which are informed by Black racial and spiritual identity. Passions and gifts represent what intrinsically motivates participants and/or what participants are naturally talented to do, perform, accomplish or achieve.

This diagram illustrated the impact of racial and spiritual identities on the driving forces, as these forces are pictured orbiting the central influences. While these driving forces also influence decision making, the interaction between racial and spiritual identity is fundamental to these driving forces. These driving forces are in constant orbit as there is a reciprocal exchange between the driving forces and the central influences, as Black self-concept develops over time. Each of these driving forces is directed by Black racial and spiritual identity to develop purpose in an individual's life, including career purpose. Career purpose is represented by the bold ring orbiting the entire diagram. As individuals develop and refine their career purpose through the interchange between the central influences and driving forces, they make career decisions that align with their career purpose. The small spheres along the career purpose ring represent moments in time when the interplay of the central influences and driving forces work to develop career purpose and cause an individual to make a career decision.

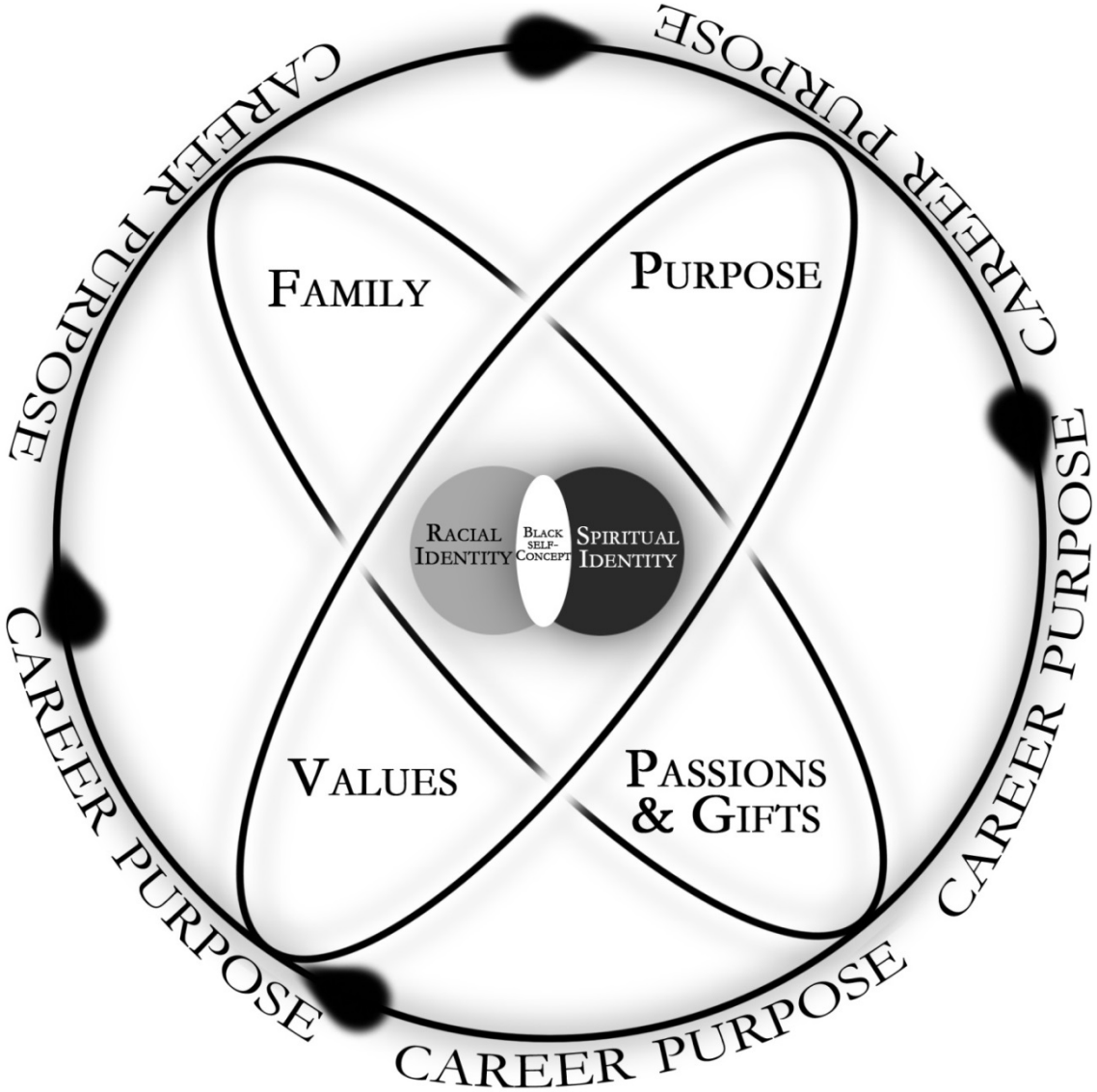

Figure 1. Career Purpose Framework

Final Thoughts

The need to gain discerning wisdom is an outcome of the "Leading HRD through Research" vision of the AHRD. Through the "study of HRD theories, processes, and practices" and "application of HRD research findings", HRD practitioners will come to embrace a variety of theoretical foundations addressing improvement, gaps, and patterns, enlarging the practice and rising to the challenge of meeting the needs of the complex, evolving, and heterogeneous labor force (AHRD, n.d.; Swanson & Holton, 2001).

The findings based on the study of a group of Blacks who recently graduated from college is an example of the complexity we can expect as workplaces grow more diverse. This population has specific underexplored identity and self-concept needs that contribute to their career decision making. Traditional career development frameworks are being labeled as deficient in explaining their career experiences and career decision making. In efforts to expand previously narrow views of career decision making and remain globally relevant in an increasingly multicultural world, HRD scholars are not only diversifying populations of study, but also increasing the scope of research to reflect the racial diversity in the labor market. Given the shift toward needs for spiritual identity in the workplace by recent college graduates, spiritual identity is also a growing area of exploration. The gap in literature will begin to close when a Black recent college graduate can be represented by theory and understood in practice as he or she communicates "everything I do is pretty much because I'm Black" and asserts their career decisions guide them to "where they were destined to be".

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APPENDIX A

EMAIL FOR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Hello! I am in need of your assistance in examining the views and experiences of Black recent college graduates in the work force. As a former student, within one to two years of graduation, you are eligible for participation. The survey is the first phase of a researc h study, and I hope to have your input and honest account of your experiences in both ph ases should your survey deem you a prime candidate for continuing in the study. This qu estionnaire will inform the second phase of the project where I will conduct interviews i n efforts to explore results identified from responses to the survey. In order to participate I will have to college identifiable information, including your name and email address so I may follow-up with you should you be a prime candidate for continuing with the study.

To complete the survey, simply click on the link below and you will be immediately dire cted.

Link: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Q5GTCHV

Once you have completed the survey, if you are interested in participating in the intervie w phase of the research study, please contact me directly at tonyaturner@tamu.edu.

APPENDIX B

INFORMATION CONCERNING QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPATION

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the views and experiences of Blacks who recently graduated from college. This study will focus on connections between identity, meaning and career decision-making resulting in explanations for career decisions germane to Blacks. This investigation will provide perspective on how Blacks recent college graduates view and articulate aspects of identity and allow their viewpoints to impact career decision-making. Viewpoints will be collected from randomly selected individuals, which are under two years from undergraduate program graduation and identifying as Black. Should scoring of a questionnaire deem you a fitting participant for the study, there will follow-up including further information and request for consent for continued participation. This study is being conducted to contribute to understanding perspectives among Blacks. Better understanding of the phenomenon will likely provide knowledge about the meaning and decision-making processes of the population, which may result in an understanding of human behavior in efforts to learn how to affect it. The outcome of this study could heighten the literature base in this area and inform practice.

As a voluntary participant in this study, I understand there will not be any benefit for my participation and at any time I may opt to withdraw participation. I also reserve the option of not responding to any question making me feel uncomfortable.

As a voluntary participant in this study, I understand the principal investigators will not be able to identity me or use my name in the final report due to the anonymous survey structure. In addition I understand the results of the study or final report will only be used as a research product.

As a voluntary participant in this study, I understand this research study have been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board - Human Subjects' Protection Program at Texas A&M University. If I need to address any research-related issues, concerns, questions, or needs for clarification regarding subject rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Catherine Higgins, Research Compliance Manager, Office of Research Compliance at (979) 458-4117 or irb@tamu.edu.

I have read and understand the specifics provided to me concerning this study. All issues, concerns, questions, or needs for clarification have been provided to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I acknowledge receipt of the consent form and by completing the survey I affirm my agreement and consent to be a research participant.

Contact Information

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IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/16/2013

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the views and experiences of Blacks who recently graduated from college. This study will focus on connections between identity, meaning and career decision-making resulting in explanations for career decisions germane to Blacks. This investigation will provide perspective on how Black recent college graduates view and articulate aspects of identity and allow their viewpoints to impact career decision-making. Viewpoints will be collected from randomly selected individuals, which are under two years from undergraduate program graduation and identifying as Black. This study is being conducted to contribute to understanding perspectives among Blacks. Better understanding of the phenomenon will likely provide knowledge about the meaning and decision-making processes of the population, which may result in an understanding of human behavior in efforts to learn how to affect it. The outcome of this study could heighten the literature base in this area and inform practice.

You have been asked to participate because you identify as Black and are currently enrolled as a junior or senior in college.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two 90-minute (estimate) audio-recorded interviews, answering a series of questions regarding your experiences and influences, including detailed information about your career decisions. Questions will also include how race has impacted your experiences and decisions in relation to your desired work. A third meeting will be scheduled for review and verification of the transcripts of the interviews to confirm the content.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

This study is being conducted to contribute to the understanding of perspectives and experiences among Black professionals. Better understanding will likely provide knowledge about the identity, meaning-making and decision-making processes of Black students. The results of this study will heighten the literature base in this area and inform career practices.

Do I have to participate?

Absolutely not, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University being affected.

Will I be compensated?

As a voluntary participant in this study, I understand there will not be any benefit for my participation and at any time I may opt to withdraw participation.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?
This study is confidential. Your name will not be identified in this study and any information obtained will be reported only in the transcript and, in aggregate form, in the study report. As a voluntary participant in this study, I understand the principal investigator will not be able to identify me or use my name in the final report due to the confidential data collecting structure. In addition I understand the results of the study or final report will only be used as a research product. I also reserve the option of not responding to any question making me feel uncomfortable.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?
As a voluntary participant in this study, I understand this research study have been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board - Human Subjects' Protection Program at Texas A&M University. If I need to address any research-related issues, concerns, questions, or needs for clarification regarding subject rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at 979-458-4117 or irb@tamu.edu.

Informed Participation Agreement
I have read and understand the specifics provided to me concerning this study. All issues, concerns, questions, or needs for clarification have been provided to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I acknowledge receipt of the consent form and I affirm my agreement and consent to be a research participant. I have also been given a copy of the consent form.

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction.

_____	_____
Participant's Signature	Date
_____	_____
Principal Investigator's Signature	Date
_____	_____
Co-Investigator's Signature	Date

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

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APPENDIX D

PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey draws from the Higher Education Research Institute's College Students' Beli efs and Values Survey published in Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2010). The survey is de signed to help gain a better understanding of your personal beliefs and values. I recogni ze not all questions may seem equally relevant to your personal experience. However, I a ppreciate each viewpoint and value all responses. Should scoring of this questionnaire de em you a fitting participant for the study, I will follow-up with further information. Your responses will be held in the strictest professional confidence.

1. Did you graduate within the past year from an undergraduate college program? (If y es proceed to question #2)
   If no, exit questionnaire

2. Do you identify as Black and/or African American? (If yes proceed to question #3)
   If no, exit questionnaire

3. Please specify your undergraduate major:

4. Please specify your (probable) career/occupation:

5. Please indicate the extent to which each of the following describes you.
   Having an interest in spirituality
   Believing in the sacredness of life
   Feeling a sense of connection with God/Higher Power that transcends my personal se lf
   Feeling a strong connection to all humanity
   Believing in the goodness of all people
   Being thankful for all that has happened to me
   Seeing each day, good or bad, as a gift

Scale: Not At All, To Some Extent, To A Great Extent

6. Do you agree with the following statements:

   Spirituality helps to develop my personal beliefs.
   Spirituality helps to develop my values.
   Spirituality helps to develop my philosophies about what I believe is right and wrong .
   Spirituality gives my life meaning.

Scale: Agree, Disagree

7. The ultimate spiritual quest for me is:
   To discover who I really am
   To know what God requires of me
   To become a better person
   To know my purpose in life
   To make the world a better place
   I do not consider myself to be on a spiritual quest

Scale: Agree, Disagree

8. Please indicate the extent to which you engage in the following activities:
   Searching for meaning/purpose in life
   Trying to change things that are unfair in the world
   Accepting others as they are
   Having discussions about the meaning of life with my friends

Scale: Not At All, To Some Extent, To A Great Extent

9. My spiritual/religious beliefs:
   Have helped me develop my identity
   Are one of the most important things in my life
   Give meaning/purpose to my life
   Help define the goals I set for myself
   Provide me with strength, support, and guidance
   Lie behind my whole approach to life

Scale: Disagree Strongly, Disagree Somewhat, Agree Somewhat, Agree Strongly

Source: *A National Study of Spirituality in Higher Education: Students' Search for Mean ing and Purpose*, by A. W. Astin, H. S. Astin, & J. A. Lindholm, J. A., 2010, retrieved fr om http://spirituality.ucla.edu/findings/. Used and reprinted with permission.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date/Time: Location:

Introduction and Description of Process:

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial and spiritual identities influenced career decision making among a select group of Blacks who recently graduated from undergraduate programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the southwest region of the US. This study will focus on connections between identity, meaning and career decision-making resulting in explanations for career decisions germane to this population. This investigation will provide perspective on how Blacks view and articulate aspects of identity and allow their viewpoints to impact their career decisions.

Viewpoints will be collected from selected individuals, who graduated from an undergraduate program within the past two years and identify as Black. This study is being conducted to contribute to understanding perspectives among a group of Black recent college graduates. Better understanding of the phenomenon will likely provide knowledge about the intersections of identity and meaning-making processes and the intersection's impact on career decision-making. The outcome of this study are meant to increase the literature base in this area and inform practice.

For this interview I will be tape-recording and taking notes, as we have a discussion about your experiences. This is an interview, but there will be dialogue and free flow of communication, as I will facilitate and participate in the interview.

Consent Process & Ground Rules:

Review and sign consent form, review confidentiality practices, as well as agree upon interview ground rules to include:

Speaking from personal experience and perspective
Communicate in your own way
Responding with honesty

Entry Interview

Part A – Background and Family

1. Thank you for completing the survey to identify you for this study and thank you for participating. I would first like to learn about your family background. Tell me a story about your family and background? Is there something that will help

me better understand your story and who you are? How does being Black have any influence on your background?

2. I am very interested in the story of why you chose to attend your institution of study. Tell me about what made you interested and why you eventual choose to attend?

3. What was your major? Tell me how you determine this major and what influenced your decision? What other areas of study did you consider? What was attractive about that field?

4. What are you currently doing? Was this what you expected to be doing after graduation? Why do you think this is the path you have chosen for now? What are your current thoughts about where you will go or what you will do next?

5. Most parents and other family members have hopes for their children, such as what they would like to see them do, become or experience. Tell me about your parents' hopes or plans for you? How did/do you react to these plans (probe if participant and parent plan conflict)? How did your parents express how they felt about your choice of major? How about your plans since graduation? Have you discussed future plans with them? If so, how do they feel about those?

6. Let's pause and talk about parents for a second. Tell me about their attitudes toward their work or career?

Part B – Basic Understanding of Calling

1. What is your definition of calling or having a personal calling? Using this definition, would you say you have a calling? If so what does this calling mean to you, to search for, listen to, or follow a personal calling? If no would you share why you don't see calling?

2. Based on what you just shared, it sounds like you do/do not buy into people having a purpose, or calling in life. If yes, ask – Would you agree hearing or responding to a call implies someone or something is calling? From your own perspective, who or what is the source of that call?

3. Sitting here today, what do you think you are being called to do with your life?

   For those identifying a concrete call:
   How people discover their call can happen in different ways. Some hear an inner voice loud and clear, while others just happen upon their call. Can you give me some examples of how you discovered or picked up on hints about your calling? Have you chosen to act on this call or answer this call in any way? If so, what

have you done? If not, why have you chosen to keep the call waiting? Can you think of any barriers to prevent you from following or responding to your call? What might some obstacles be?

For those not identifying a concrete call:
If you haven't identified your calling, what are you doing to discover a sense of calling on your life? If you are/are not doing taking a particular action, can you help me understand why you are making this choice?

4. Tell me about most recent career decision. When you are thinking about that job, how did spirituality influence that decision? What were some of your thoughts as you were making that decision, related to race?

Part C – Critical Life Events, Educational Experiences, Encounters with Others, and Relationships Shaping Self-Definition

1. Tell me about the most important event in the past five years that you believe has really helped to shape who you are and how you see yourself? Can you recall one before that? Why do you think these events were so impactful? What did they teach you about your identity? How did these events have any less or more critical impact because you are Black?

2. Can you recall an educational experience or two that had a significant impact on how you came to view yourself as a person? Describe the experience for me and the impact it had on you. Why was the experience meaningful for you? Did being Black play any role in the impact of the experience?

3. Tell me about an experience, not already mentioned, about a critical incident related to your behavior at work. How did being Black play any role in the impact of the experience?

4. Tell me about a time when you experienced loss or some other form of suffering that shaped your life in an important way? Similarly, tell me a story about when you experienced moments of joy that had an important influence on your life? How have these experiences affected you and what you find meaningful in life? Phrased differently, how have these experiences helped you make sense of "this is who I am and what I think my life should be about"?

5. Of all the people you know, and this can be more than one, who would you most with to be like? Why? What is it about this individual(s) that appeals to you?

6. Tell me about the most important people in your life so far? Why are they important? What have they taught you about yourself?

7. A mentor is someone who cares for your inner being, recognizes your potential, supports your development, challenges you to become more than you think you can be at the time, inspires you, and is someone you feel very comfortable having a conversation. I would like to hear about tour mentors if you have them. Without names, how would you describe your mentors? What did/do you like about them? What did he or she help you see in yourself that you possibly did not see before? How has your mentor(s) influenced you and you future plans? How did your mentor's role connect you being Black?

Part D – Self-Understanding of Current Passions, Talents/Gifts, and Values

1. Think back to being a child. Can you remember loving to do or spending lots of time doing a specific thing? What was it and how did you feel when you were doing it? Why was it so enjoyable? Now think back to high school years. Did you love to do or spend time doing something specific related to what you loved as a child? What was it and how did you feel when you were doing it? What about now? Is there something you love to do or spend time doing? How do you feel when you are doing it? What makes it so enjoyable? Did anything about what you love connect to you being Black?

2. Have you ever been so focused on thinking or doing something that you lost track of time? If so, what were you doing?

3. Calling has been typified by Richard Leider as an "inner urge to give your gifts away". Tell me about your special gift or talent that you have to share with others? How do you feel about the gift, and how do you feel when you share it? What about your gift relates to being Black.

4. Take some time to think about what values really matters to you, what you deeply care about. Talk to me about what you thought of? Why are these things important to you? How do you act on these values in your daily life? What about these values relate to being Black?

5. Tell me about how make important decisions? Can you recall an important decision and lead me through the steps you took to make the decision. What influenced your decision making process? (people, context, values, talents, other)

Part E – Faith/Spirituality and Meaning Making

1. Tell me about your belief in God or some kind of Higher Power? How would you describe that belief? How does it impact how you live your life?

2. Tell me story about a time when you experienced failure. How did you respond to the failure? What if anything kept you going in the face of adversity? Did you

learn anything from the experience that may be currently influencing how you think about what you want out of life and your work life?

3. Is it important to you that your life make a difference? If so, what kind of difference would you like your life to make? What criteria would you use to measure a life well-lived? Tell me how being Black connects to any part of your life making a difference?

4. Oliver Wendell Holmes stated "Most people go to their graves with their music still inside of them." If you had to describe what you think your music is, what would you say? Is your music playing loud and clear in your life, or is it muffled or playing quietly for only you to hear? If playing loud: What has helped you let your music out? If playing low: What would help you let your music out so others?

5. All of us have hopes and dreams as human beings. Tell me about some of your hopes and dreams? Do you have a hope or dream that you think about consistently, something that your mind skips to when you are alone, or listening to music, or just hanging out? Are you doing anything right now to act on this hope or dream? Why or Why not? What is keeping you from pursuing it? Tell me how your hopes or dreams connect to you being Black?

Conclusion

1. Is there anything you thought we might discuss today that we did not? Is there anything else you would like to share that you believe is important for me to know about you, and how you making meaning of having purpose or calling in your work life.

Thank you for participating. The next steps will involve member checking to ensure true representation of what you shared with me.

Adapted from *The Caller and the Called: How Young Adults Understand Vocation in Their Lives,* by J. A. Dahlstrand, 2010 (Doctoral dissertation), retrieved from http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/148