

The Role of Faith in the Development of an Integrated Identity: A Qualitative Study of Black Students at a White College

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Using phenomenology and portraiture as a framework, the awareness and integration of multiple sociocultural identities, such as race, class, and gender were investigated in the experiences of five Black students at a predominantly White college. This article focuses on the particular findings concerning the role of faith and spirituality in this development.

Identity integration and wholeness are critical concepts for all people and especially Blacks and members of other cultural minorities, who hope to attain “true self-consciousness” in defiance of the “symbolic violence” (Luttrell, 1996) of schooling and educational practice. At the beginning of the 20th century, DuBois wrote, “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious [selfhood], to merge his [*sic*] double self into a better and truer self” (1903/1994, pp. 2-3). This longing also represents a spiritual consciousness that recognizes the inter-related nature of human existence and the desire to be whole within oneself (Baker-Fletcher, 1998). Researchers studying the experiences of Black students on predominantly White campuses have repeatedly pointed to the fragmented, disjointed nature of that experience (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Fleming, 1984; Gibbs, 1974; Hughes, 1987; Parham, 1989; Sedlacek, 1987). Moreover, this research has pointed to the

reliance on spirituality by Black students as a means of navigating through their educational experiences and developing a positive racial identity in the midst of a culturally hostile environment (Fleming; Hughes; Sedlacek). Drawing on this previous work, the author studies identity development in Black students to capture stories that are related to the social and cultural influences that help us to answer the question, “Who am I?”

Much of the previous work done on identity development in Black students has been focused on the process of developing a mature racial identity (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993; Cross, 1971, 1991; Helms, 1993; Parham, 1989; White & Parham, 1990). Identity integration, akin to racial identity development, represents an internal process of self-development. However, this level of cross-cultural, psychosocial development reflects an understanding of the self as inherently composed of multiple facets, in which the different forms or facets of self (race being only one of those forms or facets) come together and impact each other in potentially transformative ways. For example, a Black woman’s understanding of her racial identity is transformed by her lived reality as a woman, and vice versa. Definitions of the self as raced, gendered, and educated move from being externally imposed limitations to internalized, interlocking components through which self-actualization

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may be more fully realized. Such a symbiotic relationship means that each different sociocultural identity facet is identifiable and salient in all areas of the individual's life. Harkening to DuBois, "In this merging [the better and truer self] he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America. . . . He would not bleach his Negro [*sic*] soul in a flood of White Americanism. . . . He simply wishes to make it possible for a man [*sic*] to be both a Negro [*sic*] and an American" (1903/1994, p. 3).

Identity integration provides a way to transcend the societal tendency to compartmentalize everything, including the self, to smooth out the supposed contradictions between these faces or facets of self (i.e., sociocultural identities), and to provide a sense of coherency about who one is and how one lives in social context. The symbiotic resolution of these three sociocultural identities (i.e., race, gender, and class) represents one vision of identity integration and wholeness. To accomplish this task in an environment that may be hostile to certain resolutions of one or all of these sociocultural identities presents psychosocial and psychocultural identity challenges for Black students.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the awareness and integration of multiple sociocultural identities among upper-class Black students on a predominantly White campus. Sociocultural identities should be understood as those aspects or facets of self-identity that are shaped and influenced by the larger society and personal cultures of individuals. Sociocultural identities such as race and gender, which are biologically rooted, have inscribed meanings that are socially or culturally determined. The research focus on participants who were upper class refers to the students' collegiate

standing, not their socioeconomic position. The following presentation and discussion of findings focus on one research question which was part of the much broader study, "In what ways did spirituality impact the perception of multiple sociocultural identities and the development of an integrated and whole sense of self for these Black students?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

Developmental psychology, womanist theology, and student affairs practice combine to inform the interpretive analysis that follows. One of the inherent propositions of spirituality and faith is an understanding of the self and nature as inherently whole. As Joy James (1993) wrote, "Spirit is inseparable from the mundane or secular and bridges artificially and socially constructed dichotomies" (p. 35). The foundation of spirituality, then, is to deconstruct the fragmentation we have created in our lives. Wholeness and identity integration are not only consistent with faith and spirituality but are the core of it. Parker J. Palmer (1983) wrote about the role of spirituality in education. He describes Western educational institutions as places where students are taught to understand themselves as fragmented and incoherent as they learn the same thing about the world in which they live.

Love and Talbot (1999) wrote that spiritual development involved an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, continually transcending one's current locus of centrality, and developing greater connectedness to self and others. Moving from external definitions of self to internal ones (see also Baxter Magolda, 1999) and finally to divine definitions of self is critical for the development of an identity that is impervious

to external criticism and hostility. As Jones (1997) found, self-definition was a critical step in moving away from confining and fragmenting notions of the self toward self-concepts that were authentic and liberating. Connectedness to self and others is ideologically synonymous with the Afrocentric ethos that Nobles (1980) expressed and that McEwen, Roper, Bryant, and Langa (1990) used. Interconnection within the myriad forms of self-identity encourages connection with the myriad forms of humanity.

Womanism, emerging out of and parallel to Black feminism, is attuned to the intersections of identity because women of color are often situated in multiple locations within society and experience oppression in multiple ways (Cole, 1995). Within this tradition, womanist theologians emphasize the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit and the intersections of identity (Baker-Fletcher, 1998; Wade-Gayles, 1995). As Karen Baker-Fletcher wrote, they are “integrated and interconnected deeply and densely within each other like the molecules of a rock” (p. 62).

James Fowler (1981) has done extensive research on the development of faith throughout a person’s life cycle. Fowler described faith as people’s ultimate support when the other things they depend on in their lives collapse around them. Faith enables one to find meaning in the world and in one’s life, and is about making a commitment to what is known and living in a way that is informed by that commitment. Moreover, Fowler described faith as shaping who people are and how they see themselves.

It is from this last point that Fowler (1981) moved on to introduce the deep interconnections between faith and identity. He began with acknowledging that each human being has many “triads,” or centers

of value and meaning, that operate in people’s lives and shape how they see themselves. People live their lives in “dynamic fields of forces” that pull them in many different directions, and they are faced with the challenge of making meaning of their lives by composing some kind of “order, unity, and coherence in the force fields of [their] lives” (Fowler, p. 24). These layers of relationship between faith and identity inform a typology of faith-identity patterns that were initially conceived by theologian H. Richard Niebuhr (as cited in Fowler). These faith-identity patterns are clearly progressive and hierarchical, which is consistent with other developmental theories.

Sharon Daloz Parks (2000) built from the framework laid by James Fowler (1981) and other cognitive-structural developmental theorists to discuss faith as a way of making meaning for young adults. Parks highlighted the important ways that different social contexts such as higher education can influence and “mentor” that development for young adults. Parks, in a manner similar to Fowler, described faith as more transcendent than religion or spirituality: Faith is the primary meaning-making activity that all human beings share. Parks also defined faith as the “capacity and demand for meaning,” the self-conscious discovery of what is ultimately true and dependable in life (p. 6). Parks also theorized the interrelationship between faith and identity commitments through the lens provided by Niebuhr’s faith-identity patterns. Part of the meaning-making task is “to become at home in the universe,” to be at home within one’s self, place, and community in such a way that you know that you belong and that you can be who you are. “To be human is to desire relationship among the disparate elements of existence” (Parks, p. 19).

Despite the differing points of origin into this framework of faith, spirituality, and meaning making, it is significant to note that all of the scholars mentioned here agree that issues of faith and spirituality are ultimately issues that involve seeking coherence and wholeness among the myriad identities, responsibilities, and relationships that all human beings possess. Identity integration or wholeness is supported as a spiritual concept that is related to faith and the commitments that are made to certain roles, relationships, and concepts, and that is deeply relevant to the development of young adults. The work of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) were particularly helpful in analyzing the student interviews.

Methodological Framework

As Jones states in her article in this volume, there are four essential elements that construct and shape how research is done. Further, shaping the “how” of research begins not with the decision to use interviews over questionnaires, but rather with the deep consideration of what view(s) of knowledge and philosophical position(s) provide the clearest pathway(s) to knowledge(s) about our subjects. Likewise, this study was grounded in particular epistemological positions and theoretical perspectives that informed the selection of portraiture and phenomenology as a research methodology and the semistructured interview as a research method.

Epistemology. Afrocentrism understands the world as divinely ordered, inherently coherent, and the marriage of material (temporal) and spiritual realities (Myers, 1993; Nobles, 1980). An Afrocentric epistemology considers knowledge accessible to all individuals and shared within community. Constructivism, along with Afrocentrism,

privileges the interaction of individuals with each other and with their environments as fundamentally shaping how individuals understand themselves and their social worlds. Such an epistemology requires a subject-centeredness in the approach to research questions, data collection, and data analysis.

Theoretical Perspective. The theoretical perspective that follows from these epistemologies is heavily influenced by hermeneutics. Such a perspective results in a research attitude that privileges the voices of the subjects and their ability to make sense of their own lives and experiences and “looks for assumptions and meanings beneath the texture of everyday life” (Schubert, 1986, p. 181). Language use and meaning receive a primary focus and, logically coherent with the governing epistemologies above, view reality as “intersubjectively constituted and shared within a historical, political, and social context” (Schubert, p. 181). Further, the nature of an Afrocentric approach is critical and emancipatory and seeks to expose dominating and oppressive social and mental structures, while enabling both researchers and participants to reconnect to the core of their identity.

Methodology. Based on such an epistemology and theoretical perspective, the methodology employed in this study was a hybrid of portraiture and phenomenology, grounded in Afrocentric philosophy (Myers, 1993). It can be best described as a snapshot of experiences that is developed by both subject and researcher. The portrait becomes a place to voice and express the intuitive sociocultural realities of both researcher and subject, while making evident the ways that these lived realities interact to influence how the subject tells the story, how the researcher

hears the story, as well as the narrative of the story. Central to this methodology is the tenet that an in-depth authentic understanding of the particular is key to understanding the general (Chase, in press; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Myers, 1993; Stake, 1994).

Methods. Through in-depth, individual interviews (Seidman, 1998), I sought to make implicit knowledges explicit and to transform habit to knowing as these students discussed the meaning they made of their identities through story. The larger aim here was to create a “vital text” (Denzin, 1994), one that enabled the expression of multiple identities and their intersections and interconnections (Peterson, 1998).

Participants

This study dealt with how 5 individual students negotiated and integrated their multiple sociocultural identities in their self-images. The students selected for this study were all Black students at Rosse College (a pseudonym), a rural, selective liberal arts college in the Midwestern United States. Rosse enrolls approximately 1,600 students in a residential setting. Founded by a cleric in the early 19th century as a seminary for young men, women were not admitted until the latter half of the 20th century. Beset with a conflicted history of both opportunity and exclusion, Rosse College has an enrollment of 54.6% women, 9.2% students of color (i.e., Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, African Americans) and 2.3% international students. Moreover, according to Sage (one of the participants), Rosse is the kind of place that knows it is an elite institution and wears that elite status with a sense of pride that is paradoxically unaware of how that elitism implicitly labels others as inferior. Nevertheless, Rosse seems

to be attempting to fashion a marriage of its isolated and distinctive character with the educative needs of a diverse intellectual community to produce a democratic elite with the same high idealism and stubborn determination of its clerical founder. The close examination of this “microworld,” created by narrowing my focus to students at one type of institution, afforded me the opportunity for greater in-depth study and understanding of the phenomenon investigated (i.e., identity integration and wholeness), and was consistent with the tenets of portraiture and phenomenology.

Student participants were selected using the following rationale. I first sought to recruit students at the junior or senior levels. This decision was supported by student development theory, which demonstrated that the capacity for critical self-reflection is connected to the duration of one’s college experience and general maturity levels. Secondly, within this group of Black students, maximum variation sampling and intensity sampling were used to select the participants for the study.

Maximum variation sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of Black students who were male and female, from working-class and more privileged backgrounds, from suburban and urban neighborhoods, and from public and private educational backgrounds. The data gathered through this sampling technique “document unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions and will identify important common patterns that cut across variations” (Patton, 1990, p. 182). Intensity sampling was then employed to narrow this pool of students to those “information-rich” cases that represented those students most likely to have engaged thoughtfully and intensely (but not ex-

tremely) with issues of sociocultural identities and identity integration and wholeness (1990). Based on a pilot study conducted during Winter semester 2000, I believed that students who were leaders of organizations or active in campus activities would provide the best “information-rich cases” for engagement with issues of race, gender, and class. With a sample of 5 students, I sought a more open range of experiences among a smaller number of people to achieve my purpose: the investigation of the awareness and integration of multiple sociocultural identities among Black college students (Patton). The students chose the following pseudonyms to refer to themselves to protect their anonymity: K.B., Kashmir, Ophelia, Poke, and Sage.

Procedure

Four semistructured, individual interviews were used to collect data from each participant. A demographic survey was also administered to the participants. The interviews were audio-taped with the consent of the students and took place on campus at Rosse College. The interviews were conducted between February and May 2001. The purpose of the first interview was to get a picture of the life history of each participant, clarifying and expanding upon responses given in the survey. The aim in the second interview was to procure the students’ descriptions of their own identities and to investigate the students’ understanding and acknowledgment of their multiple sociocultural identities and progress toward identity integration or wholeness. The third interview focused on the respondents’ self-knowledges of the ways in which race, gender, and class intersected and interconnected in their lives as Black college students on their campus. The last interview

centered more specifically around the issues of dependency and home place that Parks (2000) discussed. The first three interviews lasted 60 minutes on average and the fourth took 30 minutes to complete on average. Trustworthiness of the data was ensured through member checks and an inquiry auditor, who reviewed the data and subsequent analysis.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Although Fowler’s (1981) and Parks’s (2000) faith-identity typology theory is presented as a means of interpreting and understanding the students individually and collectively, the faith-identity typology was not used as an a priori framework; rather, in the midst of the interviews, I searched for more literature related to the area of faith and spiritual development. The faith-identity typology stood out as being the most responsive to the stories that the students were telling me. Therefore, the students’ identity commitments and self-images are discussed herein as spiritual issues.

Student Portraits

Kashmir. Kashmir is a biracial woman, the child of an African American mother and Caucasian father. She grew up in a predominantly White suburb and attended the affluent, public, predominantly White high schools in her area. Kashmir views her world through a Black/White prism and her identity commitments reflect that. Kashmir’s current pattern of identity commitments is different from what it was in high school and from what it looks like when she goes home. At Rosse, Kashmir’s world and the focus of her most intense commitment was very solidly African American. Her relationships with the Black sorority and her African American

boyfriend helped to cement her tie to the Black community at Rosse.

Kashmir confessed that she came to Rosse anticipating and expecting the opportunity to “change” to “be something [she had] never experienced before,” to be Black. In our first interview, Kashmir shared that she was never considered to be Black by her friends in high school, who were all White, until they met her mother. As she said,

I didn't associate much with Black students in high school. . . . A lot of the girls didn't like me . . . and a lot of the guys didn't want to talk to me because all I dated was the White guys. So that was a big issue, very much like I *wasn't* Black at my school.

She generally was assumed to be White and therefore was related to as a White person. Rosse offered the possibility of a different experience, of exploring the other side of her racial identity in a way that had never been afforded her, despite her close connection with her mother's family.

As resolute as Kashmir's identity may seem as a Black female, further conversation with her during the second interview, particularly, demonstrated that this was indeed a transient identity. Her attachment to that Black female identity was dependent on others' feelings and attitudes, and her persistence in that identity was also dependent on her perception of others' attitudes and her relationships with certain individuals, particularly her boyfriend. This abrupt and discontinuous shift in identity from high school to college is reflected in the following quote. Here, Kashmir discussed what might have happened if her first interactions with the Black community at Rosse had been different.

If I wouldn't have felt the warmth and the welcome of the Black community

from the jump, I probably wouldn't have been so close and part of the community . . . and I would have been one of those, those “I think she's Black, but we're not sure, she doesn't associate with Black people,” it would have been like that.

The disassociation that Kashmir is referring to is what she felt in high school toward the Black community. Her identification with the Black community at Rosse and her corollary self-identification as a Black female were grounded reflexively in the reaction of the Black community to her as a visitor during her senior year in high school.

Secondly, her relationship to her Black female identity is acknowledged as completely external to herself.

So, ownership over being a Black female it would, it was a *title* given to me when I came here and, I've carried it with me over the last 3 years here . . . but I don't know how much it really is going to be with me when I leave here.

Again, Kashmir's comments strongly suggest that once she leaves Rosse, whether she carries the “title” Black female with her will be fully dependent on whether other Black females see her and relate to her as such. She has not internalized this identity, although she has over the last 3 years adopted it as part of her self-concept and credits it with having had influence over her developmentally: “It has made me stronger.”

Despite her current attachment to her identity as a Black female, Kashmir knew that this was a very unsteady rock on which she sat. She recognized the fact that she had been tossed to and fro with every wind, as it were, and had come to a peace about the process and had found an internal monitor by which to assess her development by the end of our time together.

Ophelia. Race and gender were the two primary value centers for Ophelia, along with her personal identity as a writer. However, her commitment to these two centers of meaning making was not consistent. Unlike Kashmir, who found her identity through her social relationships and then switched back and forth in an effort to please whoever was closest to her at the time, Ophelia rather consistently identified both race and gender as important ways that she made meaning of her life and of the world around her. As she said, “It’s intuitively obvious that I’m a Black woman.” Nevertheless, she was very loosely attached to those centers of meaning.

He’ll voice some issue about Blackness to me, and I’ll be like, you know what, it’s not time for me to be Black today, today I’m a feminist, [Interviewer: right] and tomorrow I’ll talk about Black stuff, and the day after that I’m off, I’m not going to talk about any of that stuff, I’m going to talk about fashion and makeup that day . . . , I just . . . I don’t know what to do with myself, and those are the days when I say, no, just screw it, I’m going to talk about Britney Spears’ clothes today or something.

Ophelia also confessed that although synthesizing the pieces of her identity was important to her, she was “seeing” the impossibility of it. This was resonant of Kashmir as well, and likewise was reflective of Ophelia’s lack of a more universal transcendent center of meaning to use to synthesize these subordinate identities.

Ophelia elaborated on her need to be cohesive, and this elaboration warranted further analysis. When I asked her how she wove together all the pieces of herself that others assumed to be contradictory, her answer revealed a deep sense of frustration,

confusion, and displacement.

I really don’t know how to synthesize everything. I don’t know what I want people to think of me as . . . at my worst . . . you know, I just, I don’t care about being a woman, I don’t care about being Black, I don’t care about being anything except for being in the bed and asleep and not worrying about any of it.

Despite Ophelia’s confusion, frustration, and “Britney Spears” days, she did recognize that the process of weaving herself together is important to her and that she “would really like to be able to do it.” She continued, “I think that’s part of the reason why I’m crazy because it’s kind of like I’m trying to figure out where my priorities should lie, you know . . . particularly where race and gender are concerned.” To achieve her goal, however, Ophelia will need to search for a center of meaning and value that is capable of transcending and including her identities as woman and Black.

Poke. Poke seemed to rely on his openness and ability to function as the “man in the middle,” as a bridge between White and Black students, as the primary mode of meaning making for his life and the center of his dependency. This is illustrated in the following quotes. Discussing his reason for choosing Rosse, Poke commented, that if he and other Black students decided not to go to Rosse because of the lack of cultural and ethnic diversity on the campus, then the situation would never improve:

But I figured if everybody who gets in, like me, decides they’re not going to go . . . , nobody’ll be there, so if I go somebody else will say they will go. You know what I mean? So I was like if we all . . . get there and really have a good time, like we can leave our mark, change some minds and that’d be cool.

Later in the interview, he posited that “God” put him here to be “a teacher.” Specifically, he said,

I’ve noticed all throughout my life I’ve been in the situation of being the man in the middle. I have friends on this side, friends on this side and then I’m in the middle and through that I’m teaching these people.

Through these examples and numerous others in the interviews, Poke relayed his consistent trust in his own ability to act as an ambassador to White people and to bridge Black and White people together through educating each group about their commonalities. This is augmented by his feeling that the reason he was born may have been to be just such an ambassador. Particularly in assessing his decision to attend Rosse College, paramount in his mind was his responsibility and ability to be an effective change agent, and he cited this as the real reason he decided to attend Rosse, although he also described it as “the corniest.” Further, he treated another question about whether he ever felt conflict about his identity completely as an issue of his ability to make and maintain relationships. This suggested that Poke put a great deal of value and power in his openness and “man in the middle” status as a locus of his identity. One could infer that if he were to suddenly find himself in a situation in which he was not able to make friends, his identity might begin to lose focus as well.

However, Poke also seemed to recognize the insufficiency of this value center. During the interviews, he often pointed to a more transcendent center of meaning making that is capable of sustaining him when his ability to be a bridge or to be the “man in the middle” fails him. Poke relayed two stories

of when he should have died or at least gotten into pretty serious trouble, but did not “for some reason.” One of these experiences was a very bad car accident that nearly totaled his car; he hadn’t been wearing his seat belt, but yet he was able to walk away from the accident with “no scratches, no bruises, no soreness, no nothing.” He told me that as the car was spinning, before he finally crashed, trunk first, into a tree, that he was praying to God. Also, Poke was aware that his ability to form friendships even “under the ocean” is totally irrelevant in the face of possible injury or death, “like in serious times.” Nevertheless, he did not seem to see the relevance of God in negotiating his relationships with others. He remained “frustrated” by the fact that he will be incapable of teaching some people or protecting the people he cared about from other’s closed-mindedness. Moreover, he seemed to explain that closed-mindedness as defying his best efforts at being “well liked” or financially successful. The issue of financial success came up earlier in his second interview when Poke described what it meant to him to be a Black male and that, in spite of the Black comedian Chris Rock’s wealth, there were no White people who would be willing to trade places with him. Further, he seemed to feel that there was no hope for those people who remained unswayed by the force of his personality.

K.B. For his first 2 years at Rosse, *K.B.* described himself as “doing everything.” Now, since his return from a semester abroad experience at another institution, he has limited himself to only three organizational involvements: the Black fraternity, the Black student organization, and the campus multi-cultural center.

K.B. seemed to have a transcendent value center in racialized discourses and had

committed himself to what could be termed a “Black agenda” for his time at Rosse. However, this noble commitment was joined with what appeared to be a very diffuse orientation to understanding both himself and the world around him. Like Kashmir, K.B. was also very dependent on receiving positive affirmation from others and filtered his self-assessments through how he felt he was being perceived by others. K.B. pursued his involvement with “anything multi-cultural” to the point that he was suffering from overexhaustion. This narrowly focused commitment was reflective of his worldview.

The way that I look at things or see things in terms of issues or things that we’re talking about, things that [happen] on campus is different than some people, because I definitely see things through a “racial lens.”

According to K.B., the primary difference between himself and most of the other students at Rosse was that he saw things in a racialized context. This also was the foundation of one of his main reasons for joining the Black fraternity. “I think it’s important to showcase that we could all still be Black men unified under that moniker, but still be diverse within themselves, I think it was important to showcase that.” K.B.’s “Black agenda” represented his primary way of making meaning at Rosse and is his primary, if not sole, analytical lens of his experiences there.

Yet, as described earlier, the racial lens was not the orienting structure for his sense of affirmation in the area of his identity he feels most strongly tied to now, being a Black male. In fact, K.B. admitted that he also joined the fraternity because “to an extent it largely did feel like it was expected of me, that I [was] looked at and hoped I

would do it.” Along with this, it was a close friendship he had formed with another Black male that also “had a lot to do” with him deciding to pledge. The importance of external expectations resonated throughout my sessions with K.B. and was reflected in the following passage, in which he told me about a time when he thought seriously about deactivating from the group but chose not to because it was also a time of great organizational stress.

I thought of deactivating and everything and, but I just couldn’t . . . they wouldn’t have taken it very well at all. I really think my brothers would have taken it as a snub and that would have been the end of our friendship period. I would not have been able to talk with them or anything like that for the remainder of my time here. And I mean honestly, I care about them a lot, so I couldn’t abandon them.

Despite his final comment that re-centered his decision to remain in the group as an internal resolution of his attachment to them and concern for his fraternity brothers, the major impetus of the passage cannot be ignored. The major reason he maintained his membership in the group was that he could not face losing that connection with them. Their opinion of him was more important than his own mental fatigue or the lack of care they showed him by letting him do all the work of the organization alone.

In our last session together, K.B. did express to me that his dependence on other people was shifting. He acknowledged that he had become too dependent on the Black man who was his best friend here and that he was beginning to “try to solve [his] problems [him]self.” Nevertheless, there was still a struggle with relying on and trusting in other people.

Sage. The all-encompassing and foundational center of value and power for Sage was her faith in the ultimate purpose of her life and her belief that God's hand was directing her. This was not a fatalistic faith, where she believed that she had no choice in the direction her life took her. Unlike Poke, she did not simply fall into decisions because "there was nothing I could do," as Poke indicated in his first interview. Rather, she fully believed that everything had a purpose to it and that everything she did must also have a purpose. "I think things should have a purpose, not just necessarily for the sake of doing whatever," as she stated. This purpose was God's will for her life, as she saw it.

My conversations with Sage continually revolved around the importance of being whole, of being able to weave the pieces of herself together, of finding herself constantly having to explain groups of people to each other, and thereby constantly explaining pieces of herself, because "people . . . pick and choose what they like to see." She almost relished the opportunity to discuss these issues because, as she stated in her second interview,

This has not been a good semester for weaving things together." Sage also stated that "a lot of the way that I reinforce [my spirituality] is by being among other people who encourage me to think about it [pause] and if I feel out of sync with those people, then I'm out of sync with myself, and it just perpetuates problems I'm having elsewhere.

Sage had trouble maintaining her faith in God's purposefulness as the primary and prioritizing center of value and meaning in her life. For Sage, the priority she placed in relationships and her need to be in sync with

the Christian community at Rosse continually threatened to pull her away from her central commitment to her identity as a Christian, into a faith commitment and self-identity that would be reliant on maintaining positive, harmonious relationships with the Rosse Christian community. Later in the interview, Sage revisited this theme, specifically regarding how her faith impacted her ability to see herself as integrated and whole.

It's just a feeling of not in it [i.e., not a part of the Christian community at Rosse] and as long as I feel out of discord with people that I relate with spiritually, as far as I can't communicate openly and honestly with people that I look to for guidance, for discourse about where I am in my faith, I think in a lot of ways [that] hampers my ability to look at myself.

Sage clearly acknowledged that this struggle with her relationships with other people was problematic, but she was unclear as to how to make them less important and was not sure if she really wanted them to be less important. Sage continued from the last quote, "Maybe that's part of the point, that I'm focusing too much on the people and need to stop, like, holding onto people." At the end of our last conversation, Sage reflected on her desire to have the kind of outlook where "you could be poor and butt-naked in the middle of winter with nowhere to live and you wouldn't care" and her inability to attain that state of what she called "joyfulness."

An Analytical Lens

Individuals accentuate those facets of themselves with which they are most comfortable or that they have more fully developed. An extension of this is that they gravitate toward friendships and organi-

zations that voice those aspects or facets of their identities. For instance, a woman who has a strong commitment to her identity as a gendered being is likely to become highly involved in a feminist organization or club. Therefore, the students' organizational commitments provided some clues as to what facets of their sociocultural identities were central for them in their daily lives at Rosse. Also, the degree of "crossover" and overlap between and among those organizational commitments indicated their abilities to integrate their multiple worlds, and thus integrate their own self-identities.

As introduced in the literature review, a threefold typology of faith-identity patterns has been used to discuss the differing ways that individuals negotiate the multiple commitments in their lives (Fowler, 1981) and prioritize their sources of dependency and meaning making in their lived experiences (Parks, 2000). There are several theoretical frameworks that could be used to understand these students' identity developments; however, the faith-identity typology is used here because of the unique connection made between relationships with others and the ability to integrate multiple roles, contexts, and identities within one's own self-image or identity.

The patterns (polytheist, henotheist, and radical monotheist) represent increasingly theocentric and more optimal value centers and modes of meaning making. Fowler (1981) demonstrated the progressive development implied by this typology when he asserted that radical monotheism is of "extreme importance" for the future of humankind, which "[will require] our learning to live in an inclusive, global community" (p. 23).

The first pattern of faith and identity is characterized as polytheistic faith. As its

name implies, this pattern of faith and identity is exhibited by persons who have interests in many nontranscendent centers of value and power (Fowler, 1981). Parks (2000) further described the polytheist as one who may comprehend the whole of his or her life, but has only been capable of composing an "assortment of isolated wholes" (p. 22). Kashmir and Ophelia represent polytheistic faith and identity patterns. Polytheism has two possible manifestations in the patterns of faith and identity. The first was described through an analysis of Kashmir's commitments. Kashmir is an individual whose value commitments are transient and shifting, moving from one faith-relational triad to another depending on her circle of associates. Fowler described the second as a diffuse attachment to several relational triads and centers of value. This diffuse attachment is not intense; the diffused polytheist can withdraw from any of those commitments at any given time (Fowler). Ophelia's many value commitments lack the intensity of Kashmir's and thus she exhibits a more diffuse form of polytheism (Fowler; Parks).

Although I have suggested that both Kashmir and Ophelia are most appropriately read as polytheists in the faith-identity typology, this should not be taken to mean that Kashmir and Ophelia's life experiences are similar or overlapping. By contrast, Kashmir and Ophelia have led very different lives, with the exception of their admitted discomfort and estrangement from other Black students before coming to Rosse. Indeed, it is this very differences in their life histories that makes their parallel faith-identity relationships both compelling and significant.

The second faith-identity pattern discussed by Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000)

is called henotheism. Henotheism, from the Greek for “one god,” suggests that the individual has identified a single source of value, meaning, and dependency. In other words, as Fowler characterized it, the henotheistic pattern of faith and identity reflects a deep investment in a transcending center of value and meaning making through which one focuses his or her personality and outlook, but this center is inappropriate and incapable of supporting the individual in the face of crises and loss (Parks). Among this group of students, both Poke and K.B. stand out as reflections of faith and identity grounded in henotheism.

Poke described his social relationships through the character of his relationships with people as family, friends, or associates, and not through his organized campus involvements. The one exception to this was his membership in the Black fraternity on campus, which he firmly positions as part of his circle of family on campus. Within this, Poke identified his involvements as either with Black people or with White people. He describes himself as the man in the middle in these relationships. Yet, Poke also acknowledged that this ability was not adequate to sustain him in times of crisis. It was Poke’s inordinate faith in his own ability to serve as a teacher and connection between diverse people that warranted his categorization as a henotheist in the faith-identity typology.

At the time of our discussions during the winter and early spring of 2001, K.B.’s comments suggested to me that he would be more accurately interpreted as falling between two faith and identity patterns, instead of fitting neatly within one. His dependence on race as an interpretive lens for his social world combined with his reliance on external support and validation

for his self-image and decision supports such an interpretation. Nevertheless, K.B. definitely seemed to be heading more firmly away from a polytheistic faith-identity pattern. Indeed, he still had another year at Rosse, and there were more challenges ahead for him. He told me that our sessions were “therapeutic” for him, yet, he admitted that he was still holding back. He had not told me everything. It was clear, however, that K.B. internalized his feelings and emotions a great deal and so I was not surprised that our interviews, although they almost always went over time, barely scratched the surface of his feelings, reflections, and hopes about the issues that we discussed.

As stated above in relation to Kashmir and Ophelia, the categorizing of Poke and K.B. as henotheists should not be used to obviate the very deep differences in their perspectives and life histories. These two young men have almost nothing in common beyond their involvement in their fraternity, and the motivations for their involvement differed as well. Nevertheless, as was said earlier, the very difference between them makes their commonality within this interpretive frame significant.

Radical monotheism, in contrast to both polytheism and henotheism, displays an ultimate trust and loyalty in a center of value and power that is neither an extension of individual or organizational ego, nor can be inhabited within any finite cause or institution (Fowler, 1981). In other words, that center of commitment is the lens through which all other commitments are analyzed. It reveals a consciousness of the foundation of the universe, of something that not only transcends us but also inhabits our very being (Parks, 2000). This is not to say that radical monotheists negate the importance of other less encompassing commitments

and value centers, but rather that these centers are prioritized according to their ability to commune with an all-encompassing, foundational center of meaning (Fowler).

Consistent with the typology, my reading of Sage as an exemplar of emergent radical monotheism is not based in her Christian faith or in her active involvement with the Christian community at Rosse. Instead, it is based in her trust and loyalty to something both transcendent and intimate. However, as Fowler (1981) explained, this pattern of faith, radical monotheism, is rarely consistently actualized in persons or communities. Instead, it is too easy to lapse into henotheistic or even polytheistic forms of faith and identity because those pulls constantly surround people (Fowler). Sage believed that God created her Black and female and working class and spiritually centered, and she recognized that the intersection of all those identities had made her who she was. Yet, it was logical that Sage vacillated between allowing the opinions of others to determine how much of herself she gave voice to in particular settings and standing firm in the multiplicity of her identity.

Through the patterns of faith and identity, very interesting portraits of the students were developed. However, this was only one way to read these students' lives. Indeed, this was just one of three analytical frameworks that were initially applied to the data. This particular lens, like the others, made a different and unique understanding of the students more accessible. However, no one lens could provide the most complete or definitive analysis (Honan, Knobel, Baker, & Davies, 2000).

DISCUSSION

Literature in spiritual development and womanist theology suggest that an integrated

perception of the multiple aspects of one's identity is related to a mature and developed sense of spirituality and concept of God (Baker-Fletcher, 1998; Cannon, 1995; Fowler, 1981; Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 2000). In this study, therefore, I included a focus on the ways in which the students' understandings of their spirituality impacted or influenced their perception and development of integrated or whole identities. Four out of the 5 students indicated that spirituality was a central component of their identity make-up, which supports earlier findings by Fleming (1984), Hughes (1987), and Sedlacek (1987). However, there was wide variation in what spirituality meant to each of them and how it operated in their lives for the goal of identity integration.

There are two related assertions I would like to make based on these findings. The first assertion is that there is a general lack of mature spiritual development as assessed according to Fowler (1981) and Love and Talbot (1999) among these students. The students tended to portray their spirituality as merely oppositional to religious observances or organized forms of corporate worship. Some of the students spoke of being "forced" to attend church as children and still when they returned home from college. For instance, Poke stated, "When I was real little, I was in church a lot; as I got older, it was more just the Sunday, [until] now." Similarly, Ophelia commented,

Well, because my mom is a reverend she has a lot of involvement in the church and because of that, that really affects where I'm going to be on Sunday. . . . I think the only time I think about church in my life here is when my mom calls and asks, "Did you go to church this Sunday?"

These experiences with religious dogma

have pushed them to resist formal or organized expressions of faith and spirituality in favor of individualized articulations that are expressed as cultural ties, emotionality, or individual moral codes. Generally, the students confirmed the existence of a supreme being that they referred to as “God,” but spirituality was generally an amorphous variable that did not live for them as a central organizing principle, as Fowler has theorized mature faith.

However, Sage disconfirmed this assertion and demonstrated a more developed understanding of the difference between faith and religion, and wove a spiritual perspective into her understanding of herself and her relationships with others. As she said in this quote, “It’s faith on one hand . . . and on the other hand, I think there’s something to be said for religion, for having a concrete mode of expressing.” Although she also admitted that spirituality was closely knit to ethnicity for her, she had not allowed the different modes of religious expression at Rosse to keep her from continuing her pursuit of God. She said that her “faith ha[d] done some interesting things,” among them investigating what it was she really believed about God and why. Yet, she “still judge[d] what she [saw] through her understanding of what God want[ed] her to be.” The self-reflexivity of Sage’s spirituality represented a more mature approach than what was suggested by the other students.

Perhaps as a consequence of their generally amorphous grasp on spirituality, K.B. and Ophelia saw little relationship between spirituality and their perception and development of themselves as integrated, whole beings. As K.B. stated,

It works, see that, it’s not like, it’s not like it helps me put it together, it’s kind of like I’m giving my problems to God

in that sense, and He would just handle it and it would get done, not that it has anything to do with me.

The following comment from Ophelia also supports this interpretation:

So it [spirituality] doesn’t really seem to factor in. . . . I guess you can think of it in this way, that when I’m here I don’t go to church, I don’t think about going to church.

Again, Sage and Poke stand out from the group in their more firm belief in a spiritual or divine purpose to how they were put together as individuals. Sage and Poke both firmly believed that there was rhyme and reason to everything in the universe, including themselves, although for Poke this was more fatalistic. Interestingly, the other students also tended to share the hope and trust that everything would all work out, including their present confusion or frustrations with their identities. As Kashmir stated,

Everything happens for a reason and things are going to work out the way they need to and just kind of evolve into what they need to be and I’m going to eventually be at a point where I know me and I have an identity.

In sum, the students recognized that there was a more optimal way of being and seemed to innately trust that they would eventually reach that point.

These conflicting findings could be used to suggest any of three things. These findings could suggest that spirituality is not a critical factor in the perception or development of an integrated self-identity and that Sage’s example stands as an anomaly. This interpretation would contradict the assertions made by the spiritual development theorists

mentioned earlier. Secondly, these findings could also suggest that the lack of a mature spiritual sensibility is masking the possible impact spirituality could actually be having on this issue. Such an interpretation would call for an assessment of spiritual development correlated with the student's degree of identity integration, which may assist in sifting out any relationship between these two variables (a limitation of this study). However, a third interpretation is suggested by these findings. A certain level of spiritual maturity may be required for an individual to appreciate and integrate multiple identity facets. Such an interpretation would be consistent with the spiritual development literature, especially Fowler's (1981) work. After talking with these students over an extended period and reviewing the literature, I posit that this third interpretation is the most reasonable one and best fits the data that I have collected and presented. Nevertheless, a more thorough inventory of spiritual development that could be correlated with levels of identity integration is warranted and would provide more support for this interpretation of the data.

This study has several limitations. The small sample size, though justified in both portraiture and phenomenology, restricts the generalizability of these findings beyond the variation of experiences represented. Also, the focus on student leaders silences the relevant experiences of other members of the campus community. Lastly, only Black students were included in this study. Identity integration is relevant for individuals of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The inclusion of racial and ethnic variation among the sample would likely reveal important themes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

What do these findings suggest for student affairs administrators and others involved in the lives of college students? The stories told by Sage, Poke, Kashmir, K.B., and Ophelia suggest some courses of contemplation and action for higher education. "Space" was a recurring theme for the students. The students often spoke of a hunger for a space to talk about themselves with someone who could help to nurture and mentor them and space to weave together the multiple facets of their identities. The lack of adults who were willing and capable of serving as mentors was highlighted by several of these students. This resonates with Hughes's (1987) findings that PWIs were often unprepared to deal with the differing needs of Black students. This finding also resonates with Parks' (2000) work, which showed the central role that institutions of higher education should and do play in the mentoring of young people's lives.

Moreover, these students bemoaned the dearth of spaces—in organizations, in campus recognitions, and in classrooms—in which multiple aspects of their identities were acknowledged and welcomed. Sage and Kashmir spoke particularly of their sorority as the only space where such a sanctuary was available to them. Further, the students were hungry for a space to discuss spirituality and the meaning of having a center of value and meaning that is transcendent. All these students leapt at the opportunity to discuss these issues and several of them indicated that they had not considered these issues before, because they had never been asked.

The application of spirituality and spiritual development is necessary and important within student affairs research and theory. As Love and Talbot (1999) pointed out, attention to all the salient aspects of an individual's development will afford those

who work with students a better and more well-rounded understanding of them.

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