A Meta-Synthesis of the Spiritual Experiences of Black Students in Predominantly White Faith-Based Universities in the USA: Implications for Global Christian Higher Education

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Presentation Outline

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Purpose of the Presentation

- This study present preliminary results of utilizing the methodology of qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS) to synthesize (20 years of) research evidence investigating the spectrum of the role and utility of spirituality, and religiosity in the academic experiences, success, and challenges of black students in (faith-based) predominantly white institutions (FB-PWIs, or PWIs).
- More specifically, two (2) cardinal research questions guides the aforementioned purpose of this study. These are:

1. What is the role of campus religious activities in the overall academic experience (such as admission, integration, retention, and graduation) of Black students in FB PWIs (and or, in S-PWIs)?
2. What are the deeper phenomenal and thematic campus religious experiences revealed by Black students in published studies that facilitated their better integration, and retention in either FB-PWIs (and or, in S-PWIs)?

Overview of the Literature

- The myriad of academic integration and retention challenges that assail Black students in predominantly secular white institutions (S-PWIs) are well documented in extant literature (Allen 1992; Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016; Sedlacek, 1999).
- Multiple studies have identified some of these recurrent challenges to include:
- Overt, covert, and institutional racisms (Beamon, 2014);
- Negative stereotypical perceptions, or type-casting (Robertson & Mason 2016);
- Micro, and macro aggressions (Njororai, 2012; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000);
- These microaggressions have been the source of stress related to acceptance or fitting in, cultural conflict, help seeking, coping, lack of resources, mistrust of the institution, racism, social support, and stigma (Grier-Reed, 2010).
- Racial isolation (Jayakumar, 2015);
- Belief that most minorities are less intelligent and admitted in PWIs based on affirmative action (Harper, 2015);
- Tokenism (Graham, 2015);
- Studentship based on athleticism rather than on academic aptitude (Hawkins, 2013; Hodge, 2015) to mention but a few.

Overview of the Literature (Cont'd)

- Consequently, these negative perceptions and corresponding attitudes that Blacks students' face in S-PWIS have been reported to be responsible for:
- Low enrollment of Black (minority students) (Segovia, Parker, & Bennett, 2015)
- Lack of integration (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2015)
- High dropout (Harper, 2015), and very unfortunately,
- Sky-high attrition rates of Black students in PWIs (Harper, 2013; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Robertson & Mason 2016).
- Perception of the campus racial climate as hostile, alienating, and culturally insensitive (Karkouti, 2016).
- However, promisingly, new evidence from nascent, and novel qualitative studies focusing on the comparative experiences of Black students in FB-PWIs vis-à-vis their counterparts in S-PWIs is revealing positive, and hopeful educational experiences for Black students in PWIs (Derrico, Tharp, & Schreiner, 2015; Young, 2013).
- Unsurprisingly, the difference-maker is the factor of spirituality, (or faith), which this study will best construed as spiritual capital.
- Spiritual capital without debate is often found to be more abundant in FB-PWIs relative to S-PWIs.
- It is against this promising development that this study's purpose is to better understand the role of Religious/spiritual capital in the this integration, and retention of black students in FB-PWIs

Definition of the methodology of qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS)

- Aguirre and Bolton (2014) defined QIMS “as a means to synthesize a group of studies on a related topic into an enhanced understanding of the topic of study wherein the position of each individual study is changed from an individual pocket of knowledge of a phenomenon into part of a web of knowledge about the topic where a synergy among the studies creates a new, deeper, and broader understanding” (pg. 283).
- Hodge et al (2012); Timulak, (2007); Lincoln & Guba, (2003) conceptualizes QIMS as providing a more in-depth, broader, holistic, meaningful, and synergistic interpretive meaning for intrinsically, idiosyncratic, contextually investigated phenomena.

Overview of Protocol of the QIMS Methodology

- Recommended Protocol for Conducting QIMS

  (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014, Hodge et al, 2012)

(1) Formulate the research questions

(2) Determine Sampling frame (Using keywords to search for qualitative studies from databases such as: PyschINFO, *PubMed*, *CINAHL*, *Medline*, *Social Work Abstracts*, SocINDEX, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), ATLA Religion, ERIC, etc).

(3) Screen the retrieved studies based on predetermined inclusion-exclusion using standardized extraction forms,

(4) Draw Sample (i.e. individual qualitative studies meeting condition 3 above)

(5) Translate through Cycles to synergistic understanding (Identifying overarching themes, triangulation, translate, assess for emergent pathways)

(6) Tentative Description of Phenomenon

(7) Analyze the extracted data for metaphorical themes

(8) Presentation of results.

Methodology : Step 1- Formulate the Research Questions

The two (2) cardinal research questions for this QIMS study seek to answer are:

1. What is the role of campus religious activities in the overall academic experience (such as admission, integration, retention, and graduation) of Black students in FB PWIs (and or, in S-PWIs)?
2. What are the deeper phenomenal and thematic campus religious experiences revealed by Black students in published studies that facilitated their better integration, and retention in either FB-PWIs (and or, in S-PWIs)?

Methodology: Step 2- Determine Sampling Frame

- **Data Sources**
- A purposive and comprehensive database search was conducted by the University librarian for retrievable published and gray studies between January 1996-December 2016 on spiritual capital/resources used by (Black) minority students in their overall academic experiences (such as admission, integration, retention, and graduation) in FB-PWIs
- At least (ten) 10 computerized databases searched include: PyschINFO, *PubMed*, *CINAHL*, *Medline*, *Social Work Abstracts*, SocINDEX, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, ATLA Religion, ERIC, etc).
- ***Search Strategy***

To identify eligible articles relevant to experiences of Black students in FB-PWIs and their overall academic experiences (such as admission, integration, retention, and graduation:

The following search terms (and combinations) were used :

Blacks OR African Americans AND faith-based Colleges OR Universities, AND religion, OR spirituality AND admission; African Americans or Black students AND Christian Colleges OR Universities AND integration; African American OR Black students AND Religious institutions AND retention; African Americans OR Black students AND Faith Institutions AND graduation.

Step 3: Screen the Retrieved Studies based on Predetermined Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria

- **Inclusion Criteria**

1. Peer-reviewed qualitative articles published (gray studies too) between 1996 and 2016;
2. Only studies whose population of focus comprised of only of the experiences of African Americans or Black students in FB-PWI in the USA
3. The methodology of the study must be a qualitative research approach (e.g. grounded theory, focus group, interviews, ethnography, etc) focused on the experiences of African Americans or Black students in FB-PWI in the USA
4. Religious or spiritual activities were used as an intervention to address the negative experiences of African Americans or Black students in FB-PWI in the USA
5. The study was published in English language.
6. Qualitative study was conducted in the USA

- **Exclusion Criteria**

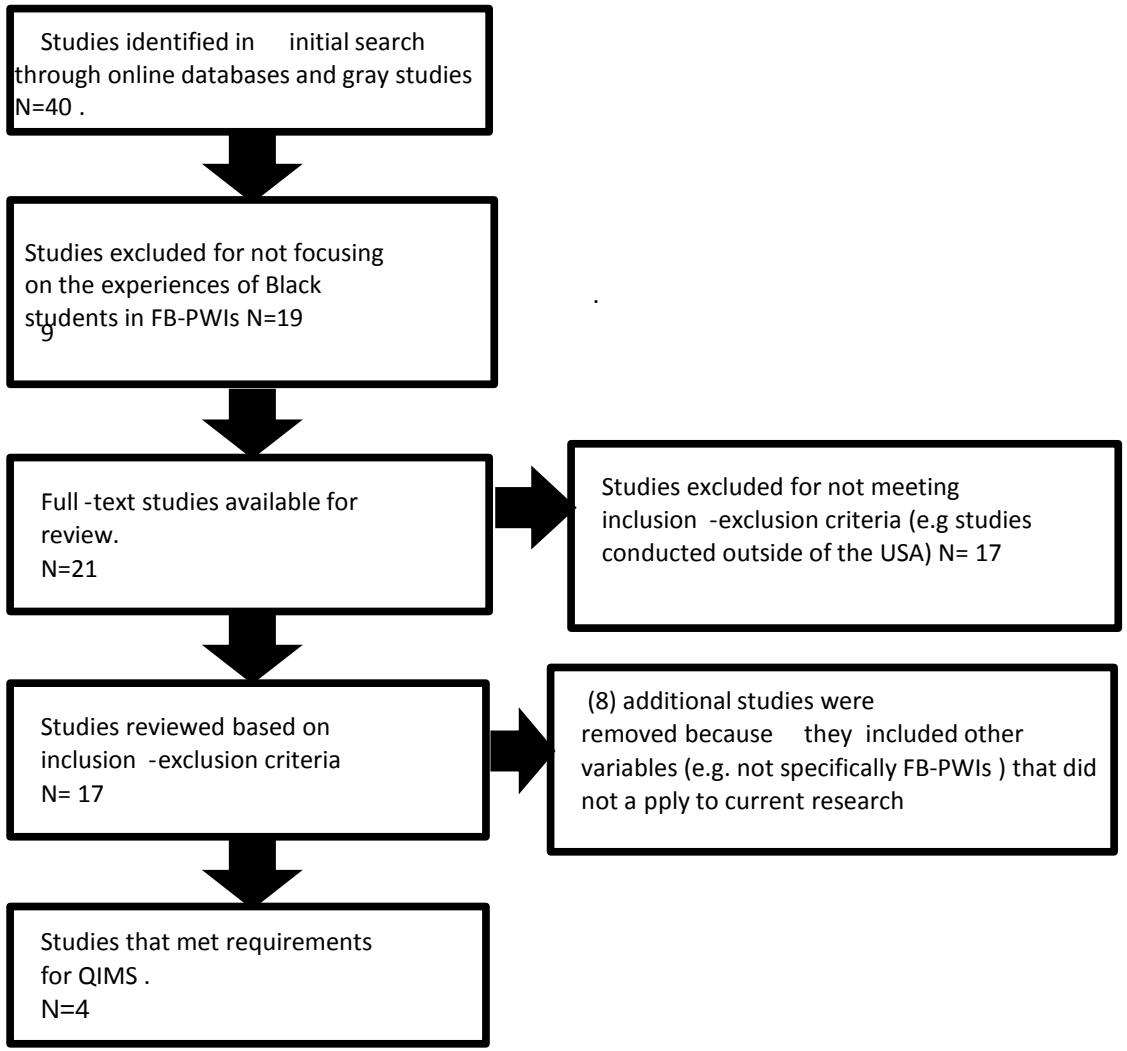
1. The population of interest were other minorities such as Latinos, American Indians, or foreign students
2. The research methodology was not exclusively qualitative. So mixed methods or quantitative approaches were excluded
3. Furthermore, articles not published in the English language;
4. Study did not use religious or spiritual activities on the campus of FB-PWIs as intervention, and
5. 5). Studies conducted outside of the USA

Methodology: Steps 3 & 4 Screening Based in I-E Criteria and Drawing Study Sample

- The preliminary searches conducted by the University librarian using the search term and aforementioned databases revealed **40 potential studies** that were conducted based on the search terms and the inclusion-exclusion criteria.
- Thereafter, two authors (CA, and LT) screened the potential studies by utilizing a **three-step iterative process** as recommended for screening eligible studies in recommended in research synthesis methodologies (Littell, Corcoran, & Pillai, 2008; Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). The iterative process adopted the **Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA)** and it is delineated with a Flow Diagram (See Figure 1).
- **First**, after an initial review of the abstracts and titles of the **40 potential studies**, **19 studies** not focusing on the experiences of Black students FB-PWIS were found and dropped.
- **Second**, **21** of the studies were removed after elaborate reviews, and reexamined based on their irrelevancy to the topic and focus of the current study.
- **Third**, of the remaining **21** potential studies that met the inclusion-exclusion criteria, a full-text review was consequently conducted. Out of the **21 potentially eligible studies** we removed **16** studies for the not meeting the Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria as predetermined.
- **Therefore, five (5)** studies out of the 40 **(or 12.5%)** qualified as the study sample based on the inclusion-exclusion criteria. The PRISMA Flow Diagram below outlines the iterative process.

Step 4c: PRISMA Flow Diagram for Studies Screening and Inclusion Process

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram for Studies Screening and Inclusion -Exclusion Process



Step 6: Presentation of Result : Summary/Table of Evidence

Study (Author, Year, Title)	Sample/FB-PWI Setting/Qualitative Methodology	Thematic Findings
Hayworth, K (2014) Black Male Graduates' Reflections on their College Experiences at a Private, Faith-Based, Predominantly White Institution of Higher Education	12 Black Males/ Private FB-PWI in the Midwest/Phenomology /Dissertation ❖ *"That was the main thing that kept me going in college. There were people who were going to give me a chance to succeed. People gave me a chance; sometimes I didn't even deserve a chance. But they saw what I was about and they followed whatever God told them in their heart about me. I'm forever in debt to those individuals. I'm thankful; I shouldn't say in debt because it was a free gift".*	❖ *"A lot more easier for me being in a Christian environment. I never really initially got a feeling that I was like the odd one out, the people at Midwest, you know, were very receptive I had a great time in college".* ❖ *"I guess it had to be like third or second year and a lot of the African-American students wanted some kind of outlet, and now we had music but they were never able to really do anything or never put anything together. So we got together the Gospel Choir and tried it from there. I was trying at that point to get, umm, you know get the use of the rooms and the things like that and really started to evolve and really went well. And I was pleased we were actually able to do something in chapel and we were able to contribute to chapel instead of just being a participant…The first time we ever did Gospel Fest it was a very small event but it went well. It was wonderful because we had to get down in the trenches and get people involved enough to do something, so it worked out. I learned from that that all you have to have is idea and the people around you will support the idea"* ❖ *"A lot more easier for me being in a Christian environment. I never really initially got a feeling that I was like the odd one out, that the people at Midwest you know, were very receptive I had a great time in college".*

Step 6: Presentation of Result : Summary/Table of Evidence

Study (Author, Year, Title)	Sample/FB-PWI Setting/Qualitative Methodology/Source	Thematic Findings
Young, T.P. (2014) The Invisible Wall: Exploring the Experiences of African-American Students at CCCU Institutions ❖ Alexa summarized what six other students identified: *"I cannot fully understand why it's so frustrating, I definitely see the difference, in terms of how the preacher is, and we have a whole different kind of worship style. I feel like when people, their culture is challenged, and they come to a new environment and they're told, this is the way thing are, cause this is how everyone does it, you start to doubt yourself as a Christian."*	51 African Americans/3 CCCU institutions in Southern California/ Private FB-PWI /Case Study Methodology /and Cross-Case Analysis/Dissertation (Woodson 18, Clegg 17, Bentley 16 participants in the interviews/Focus group) ❖ "*My church background is an all-Black church, so the music was completely different, the people were different and we were dancing, screaming, and it would be Black church. When I came here, I was really confused because I thought the way we worshiped was the only way to worship".* ❖ Two-thirds of the students reported difficulties navigating the spiritual climate. Confusion and dissonance consistently described the experiences of students whose spiritual expectations were not met. Shevon agreed with Halle, *"I thought the way I did church was the way everyone did church"*. Maya added, *"I feel like chapel is aimed at one type of person".* ❖ Spirituality was identified by participants as an important aspect of their success at Clegg. Eight (44%) students believed they had grown spiritually and did view it as important. However, spiritual growth was described as a personal process. Scarlett described growing spiritually on her own, "*I grow by myself, we'll just listen to worship, pray and then talk about how it relates to our life".*	❖ *"I feel like it's a facade, what they advertise on the website and even in the commercials, people are nice to you, but then when you get here, it's something different".* ❖ *"When you visit the campus, everyone is nice to you because they want you to come here, but once you're here, you're on your own"* ❖ "*I can walk around campus and I will wave at someone and I will try to go out of my way to be nice. I'll say hi and they give you this look like, what is this black guy doing trying to talk to me? It's like okay, then, move on, and it doesn't help when people try to say, oh, racism is dead, well, bull crap, just because I'm on a Christian campus doesn't mean it doesn't happen".* ❖ Hilda described why she perceived students leave: *"If you don't play sports, you just leave, because you don't feel comfortable. If you came from a place where you were comfortable, why put yourself here where you are uncomfortable? You can choose to go to a school that is more diverse and feels comfortable".* ❖ Spirituality and faith were another strategy utilized by eight students to navigate the difficult environment. Shevon described her response to the difficult environment at Woodson, *"I've used spirituality when I was feeling alone, like sometimes all you have is prayer, when you're like, I can't believe you just said that."*

Interpretive Synthesis: Umbrella Themes

- Audience Participates/suggests….

1. Façade, Pretense, Cliquey
2. Welcoming/Alienating
3. Mentoring/Abandoned
4. Frustrating/Disappointed
5. Unsupported
6. Different Worship Style
7. Spiritual Indifference
8. Other suggestions

Implications of Findings

- Against the backdrop of the preliminary findings this study has a number of practice, teaching, research, and policy implications for Christian Higher Education
- **First,** the study undergirds the importance intentional spiritual or religious worship practices (and IFL) on Christian Campuses
- **Second,** religious action: generational repentance, forgiveness, racial reconciliation, and consistent prayers on this divisive issue
- **Third,** deliberate effort of white faculty to disciple (not only teach) Black students
- **Four,** University-wide diversity and integration strategy for inclusion- and diversity
- **Five,** Commitment to recruiting faculty of color, and also commitment of resources to counseling, diversity centers, and regular dialogues
- **Six,** partnership between the black church and colleges to bridge gaps and provide a channel of interactions and trust-building

Discussion, Questions & Answers

Thanks for Listening and Participating

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