

God Consciousness Enacted: Living, Moving, and Having my Being in Him

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Abstract

Spirituality, historically and contemporarily, has played a crucial role in African American women's navigation of the academy. Drawing on Cozart's (2010) conceptualization of spirituality as God consciousness, this article provides a personal account of an African American graduate student's journey towards her doctoral degree at a predominately white institution. According to Cozart (2010), God consciousness guides one in her interactions within her community and the decisions one makes within those spaces. The authors share how God consciousness provides a lens to perceive, understand, and overcome challenges African American women face in the academy.

For in Him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28 New International Version)

The academy can be a very unwelcoming and unsupportive space for African American women (Generett & Cozart, 2011,2012; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; White, 2008). African American women in the academy often report experiences characterized by unfriendliness, isolation, non-supportiveness, marginalization, and lack of mentorship (Generett & Cozart, 2011, 2012; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). As graduate students, African American women face an additional obstacle of insensitive and uncaring professors (Gay, 2004). It becomes an even more difficult space for African American women whose spirituality is at the center of their existence but who feel as if they must check their spirituality at the academy's doors in order to avoid a "spiritual crisis" (Cozart, 2010). When your spirituality is the lens through which you examine life and is the space where you live, move, and have your being, isolation and marginalization in the academy are magnified (Cozart, 2010)

Spirituality, an important component of our lives, is rarely discussed in our professional contexts (Dillard, 2000). As a junior faculty member, I remember how liberating it was as a graduate student having conversations about my individual spirituality with my graduate mentor. Having conversations about my spirituality in the context of the academy helped me negotiate my spirituality and counter any self-imposed marginalization. Instead of keeping my spirituality private, I used my spirituality as a lens to guide my graduate student work. I learned early in my professional career that my spirituality was a huge part of who I was as a teacher and scholar, and that my God consciousness would lead and guide my research, teaching, and service. I know that my early experiences with my graduate mentor continue to help me balance my spiritual, gender, and racial identities in the academy.

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One of my most important roles as a junior faculty member is the mentorship of graduate and undergraduate students of color. I met Mercedes for the first time during her master's program. After only a few conversations, I sensed she was driven by her God consciousness. I knew from her perspective and language around issues related to equity and social justice that we shared an unseen commonality, our faith in Christ. Over time, we found ourselves having more conversations about our challenges in the academy and how our God consciousness provided a perspective to overcome those challenges. We understood that what happened to us in the academy was not always about us, but a greater purpose beyond us. As spiritually centered African American women navigating our professional trajectories in the academy, it is the knowledge of living, moving, and having our being in a power beyond ourselves that causes us to persevere in the face of various hurdles strategically placed in our paths.

In this paper, we borrow from Clandinin and Connelley's (1989, 1990) concept of narrative inquiry, Critical Race Theory's tenet of intersectionality, and Cozart's (2010) conceptualization of spirituality as God consciousness to situate and make sense of the "storied life" of Mercedes, an African American female graduate student at a predominately white institution (PWI). Her narrative is used as a foundation to discuss the impact of race, gender, disability, and spirituality on her experiences in the academy.

The use of narratives continues to be fundamental to the analysis of African American women's various identities in and outside of the academy (Kwakye, 2011). "Narratives not only enhance our understanding of African American women's educational opportunities and experiences, but they expand our understanding of their lives and the society in which we live" (Kwakye, 2011, p. 37). Sharing her "storied life" provides Mercedes the opportunity to inform and enhance the educational literature by privileging her own voice in the telling of her story. Mercedes's and other people of color voices are required "for a deep understanding of the educational system" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14). In fact, given the complexities and difficulties of multiple identity markers, some scholars suggest that ignoring African American female narratives (Connor, 2009; Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006,2009) can limit the development of a strong identity and critical consciousness (Petersen, 2009,2012), which is needed in educational spaces.

Additionally, Mercedes's story shows how her God consciousness provides a lens through which she perceives, understands, and navigates challenges she faced at the intersections of race, gender, and disability. Moreover, the article highlights the role strong mentors can play in graduate students' ability to balance their personal lives and spirituality within the academy.

Intersectionality

"Intersectionality theory examines the interlocking nature of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 27). It is also a theory that is grounded on multiple identity markers that are independent yet interconnected (Crenshaw, 1995; McCall, 2005) to African American women's experiences. Thus, intersectionality is a useful tool for the examination of Mercedes's "storied life" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Giles & Hughes, 2009). Mercedes's "storied life" is not only about her multiple identity markers (i.e., race, gender, perceived disability, and spirituality). Her story highlights how issues of power, history, and

culture vis-à-vis her personal and professional identity, have shaped her overall human development.

God-consciousness: Safe in the Spirit's leading

And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.
(John 14:16-19 New International Version)

Wane (2002) points out that "spirituality is something so personal, unique, and individualistic that it cannot be captured in any neat definition" (p. 144), but in this article we draw from the Cozart (2010) definition of spirituality. Cozart (2010) defines spirituality as one's "inner-submission to her God consciousness" (257). She adds: "this definition is not meant to refute other definitions, only to add location to [her] relationship with [her] God consciousness" (p. 257). According to Cozart (2010), God consciousness guides our interactions with our communities and the decisions we make within those spaces.

We do not take away from Cozart's definition when we characterize God consciousness as the indwelling Spirit of God. We claim the Holy Spirit that moves beyond our humanity to supernaturally empower us to live lives of faith in God. We (the authors) recognize our God consciousness as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, which empowers us to live safely in the Spirit's leading.

Therefore, the focus of this article, alongside sharing a graduate student's journey to her Ph.D., is an attempt to answer the call of Cozart (2010) to "become engaged in public discourse about our spirituality and its relationship to education, to continue to invite others to the conversation, and to recognize how the discourse might influence our discussions as researchers/ educators" (p. 250). Thus, we (the authors) feel we are Spirit-led (led by the ways and character of God) and empowered not to ignore our personal God consciousness in relation to our Savior. Instead, we join Cozart (2010) to "embrace how [our] spirituality grounds [our] worldview" on "the safer ground" (p. 253). So not to grow weary, we seek a "place that allow[s], even encourage[s], [us] to present all of [ourselves] in the academy" (p. 254). In other words, we reject "competing agendas" that can suffocate the "spiritual lessons" learned in our "personal lives" (trusting God no matter what others think of us), thus allowing those same lessons to "permeate [our] thinking about [our] professional lives" (Cozart, 2010, p. 253). The good news of God's supernatural anchors us through faith in the safety of the Spirit's leading.

The journey: Giving Mercedes the space to tell her story

I have encountered several pivotal moments on my journey towards my doctorate. I present my story in four stages: (1) insecure beginnings, (2) returning to the academy, (3) the relabeling of self: my internal battle, and (4) ending the internal battle: finding safety in the Spirit's leading. These pivotal moments have defined my place in the academy.

Insecure beginnings

Two tragedies, the sudden death of my mother and being immediately placed into foster care, shaped my childhood. Immediately after my mother's death, I stopped communicating verbally. For a full year, my conceptualization, formulation, and articulation of language was non-verbal. Feelings of isolation, a lost sense of belonging, and lack of affirmation compounded this lack of verbal communication as my siblings and I were forced to live with strangers. Even though I began to communicate verbally one year after my mother's death, the sense of isolation and lack of affirmation and belonging lingered for eight years.

Upon starting elementary school, I was labeled as having a speech disability and was immediately pulled out of general education classes and placed in special education courses. I spent the first three years of my education segregated from the general school population. Except for these initial years of segregation, I completed my remaining K-12 education without verbal or written assistance for my perceived speech disability. After graduating from high school, I enrolled in a four-year college but quickly realized that I was not prepared for it. The reality of having no mentor or support system in place to offer guidance or no one to inform me of what was needed from or expected of me to succeed in college, I dropped out after only a few weeks. After leaving college, I disappeared into the world of work, marriage, and motherhood. It was during this time that I experienced the greatest defining moment of all, an experience that changed the way I would forever view life.

As a child, I always had an inner sense of the presence of God. I always knew that there was something/ someone bigger than and outside of others and myself. Many years after leaving college, this inner God sense and awareness transformed into something more. In 1996, at the age of 32, I confessed my faith in Jesus as the Son of God who died for my sins (Romans 3:23 New International Version). Afterwards, my Spirit felt more alive than ever before in my life! Since 1996, I have believed the word of God as my God consciousness through my personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ- my Lord and Savior. Cozart (2010) explains her relationship with her God consciousness similarly to the way I see my own. She "[acknowledges] that [she] cannot live within [her] own power but through the power of her God consciousness" (p. 257). Unlike Cozart, I bind my God consciousness to my relationship with Jesus and His Spirit. In other words, the power of God has carried me through the past twenty years and today, keeps me conscious of Him and of the reality that I cannot live within my own power but through the power of His Spirit living in me. Therefore, my living and having my being in Him has deepened my own self-awareness (i.e. consciousness) of how my God consciousness lives in me.

As I continued to interact with other African American women through my work as the owner-operator of a salon and a church and community volunteer, I started to have a growing desire to counsel and become an advocate and activist for African American women. This desire served as the catalyst for my decision to return to college to become a counselor. Returning to the academy took strength, which I derived from the empowerment of God's spirit. My God consciousness empowered my whole self to depend on God to lead me as I live, move, and have my being in Him.

Returning to the academy

Since my return to post-secondary education, I have attended a predominately white institution (PWI). As a doctoral student and education researcher, I find myself struggling with my own God consciousness, the Holy Spirit's empowerment, in the context of my educational life. Cozart's (2010) autoethnography of the conundrum she experienced between her intellectual and spiritual life resonates with me. Like her, I experience my God-consciousness, the Holy Spirit's empowerment in my life, as a supernatural occurrence in the context of the whole of my human self (i.e. mind, body, and soul).

Therefore, my God consciousness naturally problematizes the race, gender, and ability experiences of African American women labeled as having a disability and pursuing post-secondary degrees differently than I am taught to do academically. I struggle spiritually and personally with intersectionality of race, gender and perceived disability. In other words, through spirituality I gained confidence in God and of my stance before Him in spite of my race, gender and disability! However, as I move through everyday life as a African American woman, I am faced with my race always being before me, and in stereotypical ways as in misrepresentation of images of Black and Brown women (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 2000) juxtaposed to White women's images (Frankenberg, 1993). Although, I am aware of social injustices and inequalities, and in light of my God consciousness, I am not constrained by the oppressive ways in which I am represented in the broader society. Although I knew that I did not need to succumb to dominant group values systems represented in the literature, as an African American woman, I find myself consistently faced with my race in stereotypical ways.

The materials I read in my master's program coursework assaulted my mind and tagged my character with insulting stereotypes, which in turn, pulled my emotions and scattered the logic gained from my faith. In retrospect, I do not believe that the women I served for twenty years as the owner-operator of a beauty salon are privy to such insulting and dehumanizing literature, which supposedly represents them. However, since the beginning of my program, I can honestly say that I have been made more aware of social injustices and inequalities than ever before in my life! Yet, I am excited about learning and growing together with others beyond the boundaries of labels and insults. I am committed to my responsibility to participate in collective efforts to share educational experiences in general with other women, and more specifically, African American women seeking to learn, grow and share the freedom they find in both educational and spiritual content/contexts. hooks, (1994) suggests that generated excitement is education to transgress that "requires movement beyond accepted boundaries", to deep interest "in one another, in hearing one another's voices, [and] in recognizing one another's presence" (pp. 7-8)

In light of this, my God consciousness thoughtfully deals with the reality that as an African American woman of faith, I am not spiritually constrained (i.e., quieted) by such problematic and despotic ways in which I am represented in the broader society. Actually, the way my interactions with the readings tossed me into internal warfare between my faith and my humanity, helped me to gain a greater sensitivity for the unique and peculiar ways in which the Father has sent His Spirit as my "Helper, that He may abide with [me] forever"(John 14: 16). Specifically, in the last year of my master's program in counselor/counseling education, while reading disability

literature, my natural consciousness was awakened to language usage and special education classes.

The graduate school readings about disabilities triggered an emotional flashback to my early school experiences. The memories of how my perceived disability as an elementary school student made me feel like I was suffocating personally and academically reemerged in the present. The clarity of my memories of what it felt like to be labeled as having a speech impediment was striking. Not considered "normal" according to the medical model of disability, I needed fixing (Reid & Knight, 2006). Being safe in the Spirit's leading, trusting in my God conscious empowerment to lead me through these memories, was not my immediate choice. Instead, my inner inquiries left me wondering whether I should embrace my memories' labels or not. Gold and Richards (2012) argue it is "not advantageous and can even be counter-productive" to label African American students (p. 144). Existing stereotypes of African American children can hinder their educational progress by weighing on their identities and implying a sense of inferiority. Thus, "dis" implies lack of, and "dis" coupled with "ability" asserts the lack of ability to learn (Gold & Richards, 2012). I was experiencing a crisis at the intersection of my spiritual and educational identity. The label of my perceived speech disability threatened to shape the rest of my educational experiences such that they would resemble deficit ideologies (Valencia, 2010) assigned to African American women in the academy.

This verifies that deficit thinking is imbedded in our daily living, moving, and being as non-whites. Notably, it is not until we read and interact with opposing literature that we discover language that gives us words to express our experiences. W.E.B. Du Bois's (1903) notion of double consciousness shows an inverse affect of knowing the value and importance of self while living in a society that continuously minimizes your value or importance. My internal struggles with deficit thinking were threatening my educational health.

This threat to my educational well-being continued into the first year of my doctoral program, and I recognized that I was losing the battle within over whether or not to label myself as someone with a presumed speech language impairment (SLI). While reading and attempting to understand the nuances of Guo, Tomblin, and Samelson's (2008) work on language impairment and speech disruptions, I started the process of relabeling myself.

The relabeling of self: my internal battle

The process of relabeling was triggered by my unconscious acceptance of a deficit view of my intellect as an African American woman. At intersections of my race, gender, and presumed dis/ability, I thought, "Something must be wrong with me because I am having so much trouble articulating my thoughts. I must be dyslexic!" I began targeting readings regarding how to identify a person as dyslexic (Gardner, 1987; Riddick, 2000; Rosen 2003). This led to further confusion, and I decided to speak with my advisor about my concerns. She listened intently and explained her understanding of dyslexia. In the context of her experiences with my current scholarship, she encouraged me against hastily labeling my struggles as indicative of something being wrong with me, rather than something illustrative of deficits in educational institutions

(Thorius & Stephenson, 2012). Nonetheless, spurred by my unconsciousness around my own special education experiences, I internalized the deficit literature.

Amidst my struggle with the disability label, I read Petersen's (2009) study of four African American women who developed a critical consciousness as they participated in her study. Petersen found that the four women rejected deficit ideologies and resisted labels as part of navigating their educational experiences (Petersen, 2009). Educational literature on underserved students with disabilities suggests that they experience inequities in resources and opportunities to learn in schooling contexts (Artiles, Bal, & Thorius, 2010; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Thorius & Stephenson, 2012). My journey brought me to a watershed moment where I had to decide if I would internalize or resist deficit views in the literature about African American women and the deficit view I had of myself.

Moreover, the content I was learning still left me with a sense of anger (i.e. a natural God-consciousness, a self-righteous one). My anger stemmed from deficit claims made in the dominant literature. The perceived images of African American women (e.g., loud, bossy, over sexualized, strong, etc.) were nothing like the perceptions I had of myself. In addition to race and gender intersections, I remained cognizant of the fact that African American women experience gender in a unique way when compared to their White counterparts (Fordham, 1993; Frankenberg, 1993) in society and within our schools. The clashes between my defining of myself versus the identities others imposed upon me left me with contempt for all literature that reinforces stereotypical views of African American women (Collins, 2000). For example, in the context of the academy, "White womanhood is defined as cultural universal ...in striking contrast, black womanhood is often presented as the antithesis of white women's lives, the slur or 'the nothingness'" (Fordham, 1993, p. 4).

W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term double consciousness to attempt to explain his internal battle with his true consciousness (i.e. true awareness) and that of the American world. "It is a peculiar sensation, this *double consciousness*, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3). Du Bois's words convey how Western society's perspective of African Americans as inferior and intellectually incoherent left him with a desire to know who he was beyond that lens. Similarly, my view of self encountered an internal conflict, one that brought me to my knees the summer after I completed the first year of my Ph.D. program. I prayed that God would help me balance my true spiritual self with my academic self; God did just what I asked of Him!

Ending the internal battle: finding safety in the Spirit's leading

After the first year of my doctoral program, I experienced another pivotal moment where I worked through the internal crisis I was experiencing. I embraced the reality that my God consciousness, which helped me negotiate and overcome obstacles in my personal life, was more than sufficient to help me overcome the obstacles I faced in the academy. My interpersonal interactions and level of confidence in church stood in stark contrast to my internal battles in relation to the academy. I reached a place where I understood that the only way to address my

struggle with my early academic life and others' insinuations regarding my speech and intellectual competencies was to allow my God consciousness to guide my being within the academy just as it did in my church and elsewhere. For instance, at one point I was struggling to write a course-assigned blog entry about a chapter in Tyack's (1974) *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. As I continued to struggle, I began to say things to myself like, "You are so stupid. You can't even write a sentence. You need to quit and go back to doing hair." I began to cry. Then I did what I had always done when I felt hard-pressed and confused by life; I prayed. The scriptures poured forth from my mouth based on years of spending personal time interacting with and reflecting upon my Savior's love and acceptance of me. The empowerment of God's Spirit cleared my mind as I sat and composed myself. I then sat down at the computer and wrote the blog entry, entitled: People first. The title represented my own and other peoples' internal struggle with dis/ability labels where people are not seen as people first.

My internal conflict has lightened, but not totally vanished. However, I am now countering the impacts of labels and deficit ideologies on my consciousness. In doing so, I repeatedly work to reclaim my narrative, the "fundamental structure and quality of experience, ... personal and social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 2), and emotional, which gives me a chance to tell and retell my story. In this way, I infuse agency and power into my interdisciplinary scholarship, positioning myself to counter deficit labels and ideologies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Valencia, 2010).

This pivotal moment awakened a critical consciousness that forced me to become reflective about who I truly believe myself to be in Christ (i.e. His child). As Petersen's (2009) participants developed a "critical consciousness" about labels, I too, moved into my own critical stance against the appalling representations of African American women in U.S. society and educational content, which is filled with discourses of our perceived differences and the meaning of those differences - evolved from historical and situational variability (Collins, 2000; Giles, 2010; Ogbu, 1987; Petersen, 2006, 2009, 2012).

I have learned to take the literature in while grounding myself in the source of my strength, my God consciousness, in this case, the Spirit's power. Such spiritual practices empower me against ignoring or hiding my whole self when I am frustrated by literature that perpetuates lies and stereotypes, or my struggles with the literature. In addition, I have had spiritual mentors who helped me navigate scriptural teachings which benefitted my daily decision-making. Likewise, in academia I have mentors that provide enormous support towards my intellectual and professional advancement.

The power of mentorship

Mentoring is a valuable tool for providing graduate and undergraduate students the multiple levels of support needed to be successful in the academy and life. Maryann Jacobi (1991) found that mentoring relationships can positively impact student retention and achievement, and Lori Patton (2009) highlighted the multiple benefits of African American females having an African American female mentor. Some of these benefits include having a mentor that can share advice based on experiences in the academy as a woman of color, which may help students avoid

pitfalls and costly mistakes. Mentorship from African American women can also provide "a counter space for graduate women to deal with the daily challenges they face in pursuing their degrees" (Patton, 2009, p. 530).

My mentors played a pivotal role in deepening my understanding of systemic oppression and political powers that fuel inequalities. Additionally, my undergraduate and doctoral program mentors have and continue to challenge and guide me as I move through my educational trajectory. They push me intellectually in ways that I never imagined, offering me rewarding and encouraging experiences. I know God has strategically placed each of my mentors in my life to nurture and push me to not give up or walk away from this new and different educational journey. My mentors have suggested approaches to the literature that address my concerns and are tailored to my unique set of skills and past experiences. Coupled with this, I have learned how to sit with course readings the way I do with the word of God, to take the material in while grounding myself in the source of my strength, my God consciousness. Such spiritual practices empower me to not ignore or hide my whole self when I am frustrated by horrible literature that perpetuates lies and stereotypes or by colleagues who communicate in ways which imply that I am not intelligent enough to participate in the academic practices of my field. My God consciousness empowers me such that I refuse to allow these experiences to break my spirit.

Having my being in Him grounds my God consciousness and spiritual worldview in spite of intersecting inequalities experienced in education institutions. Similarly, Cozart (2010) discussed how her spiritual worldview in academic spaces was private and how that prevented her from revealing her true self there. "I privately embraced how my spirituality grounded my worldview, but publicly ignored how it impacted my scholarship" (Cozart, 2010, p. 253). Embracing the impact and role of my God consciousness in academic spaces helped me to balance the assaults, insults, and the frustrations I felt from literature that dehumanized African American women. My God consciousness ignited a fire in me to move forward in my education program.

As a rising researcher, I am often reminded of my own feelings as an adult returning to education after over two decades away from a structured learning environment. I desire to address the research that does not privilege the voices of African American women and their marginalization at the intersection of race, gender, disability, and spirituality. I wonder: how many people labeled with speech impairment, emotional disturbance, or learning disability are simply different learners? I continue to ponder critical questions such as why their educational experiences are not told from their own lived-experiences. I also ask: How can educational researchers help provide a safe and equal space for that to happen? When are the voices of African American girls/ women heard on questions of inequality and injustice? What actions are put in place to respond to what they share? And how, if at all, is this group as a whole being kept out of the spaces that have the ability to privilege their voices and experiences in educational literature?

Summary

I have begun my own journey through a doctoral degree program, and my life is also ever changing. In contrast to Cozart's crisis with the academy and her "journey toward the reconciliation of her spirituality with the academy" (2010, p. 250), I am at the beginning stages

of becoming an educational researcher and activist for equity, justice, and human rights for African American women in crisis. I know that balancing the strengths of my God consciousness displayed in my submission to the Holy Spirit's guidance will ground my service to others as a professional researcher and educator. I believe love, respect, and even conflict shared in educational settings open spaces for innovations in education that are essential to seeing, hearing, and exposing inequalities and injustices that must be countered.

African American and other women of color, myself included, are ignored, despised, talked over, and dismissed in educational literature regarding women as a whole. However, there are small pockets of White and Other-ethnicity educational researchers who are intentional about using their scholarship to challenge their own and others' biases for the sake of learning, processing, and challenging the dominant discourse of inequitable educational opportunities and inhumane treatment of women of color in education research literature. Critically examining, describing, and interrupting powers of domination will take courage and critical/activism research that addresses the inequitable and unjust treatment of marginalized groups such as African American females and women of color.

As one person, I realize my intentional pursuit will always include volunteering my time in support of women who are seeking spiritual, personal, social, and intellectual growth. I will share in the work and describe my natural and supernatural lived-experiences in hopes of inspiring others to persevere in the face of oppressive forces that seek to destroy them. I will tell about my God consciousness, a supernatural force moving in my life in the context of my education to help provide a counter-narrative to the unreasonable marginalization and representation of African American women and women of color in education literature. If I spend the remainder of my life intentionally pursuing the essential characteristics made visible through my refining process and help others tap into and profit from those characteristics, then I would have lived and served others well. As Cozart (2010) said, "My Spirituality ... [has] dominate[d] my thinking about knowing and becoming" (p. 253), and will continue to do so as I walk through my God consciousness in my personal life and in academia.

Conclusions

Mercedes's "storied life" provides an example of God consciousness enacted. Her God consciousness, coupled with strong mentorship, guided her through the internal battles she experienced during the first year of her Ph.D. journey. Her God consciousness continues to empower her to learn more about herself in order to positively impact the lives of African American women. Mercedes is still in the early stages of her journey towards a doctorate, and it is imperative for her to have mentors that support her natural and spiritual development. She needs mentors that will continue to offer strategies for balancing her spiritual and academic lives. This level of support can help prevent or reconcile a "spiritual crisis," and it provides a space for discourse about her spirituality and how it impacts her scholarly work.

Cozart (2010) offers ways in which spiritual discourse may serve the educational community. Two of these include: (1) continuing to have discourse about one's spirituality and education to help alleviate self-marginalization, and (2) continuing to engage in discourse about spirituality

because these conversations provide the foundation and space for others to articulate theirs. As an African American professor who mentors African American female undergraduate and graduate students, I strive to help mentees: (1) find symmetry with their public and personal lives, and (2) to include a spiritual dynamic to help sustain students in and outside their respective institutions (Cozart, 2010, pp. 266-267). Providing Mercedes the space to share her story was an opportunity for her to find the synergy between her personal and academic life. In fact, our collaboration for this paper has helped us both with that reconciliation. We have discovered a new desire to foster more discourse around the interplay between our public, personal, and spiritual lives and how our God consciousness shepherds us as we traverse our professional trajectories in the academy.

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