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# A Phenomenological Study: African American Clergy Response to Violence against Women

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Milicia Antoinette Tedder entitled "A Phenomenological Study: African American Clergy Response to Violence against Women." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

Delores Smith, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Priscilla Blanton, Elizabeth Johnson, John Orme

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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A Phenomenological Study: African American Clergy Response to Violence against  
Women

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Milicia Antoinette Tedder

May 2015

## **Dedication**

As any accomplishment is seldom done in isolation, I dedicate this dissertation to a group of very important people in my life. To my daughters Miah and Makayla—you two have taught me so much about life and love. You have been extremely patient, helpful, and loving throughout this process. You are truly evidence of God’s blessings and I thank God for picking me to be your mother. To my loving mother, thank you for sacrificing your time to travel to Tennessee during the times that I needed you most. You have been a constant source of love, care, and support. To all of my extended family and friends—thank you listening, encouraging, and inspiring me. I also dedicate this work to my Tabernacle church family for being supportive ever since the girls and I stepped inside of the church. To all who have come before me, those that sacrificed themselves to make this opportunity possible, thank you. Last, but certainly not least, this piece is dedicated to all women who have been affected by violence in some point in their lives, knowingly or unknowingly. Your voices are heard in the midst of the silence.

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## Abstract

Violence against women and religious participation are two phenomena that are pervasive across many African American communities. African American women experience intimate partner violence (IPV) at a rate higher than the majority of racial groups in the U.S. Although many African American women highly depend on their faith and church to navigate their experiences with IPV, scant attention has been given to the role that Black clergy have in responding to IPV against women. As a result, clergy leaders' responses to IPV were examined in this study. This study utilized a phenomenological method to understand African American clergy leaders' responses to intimate partner violence against women. The sample consisted of six Black senior clergy leaders of various denominations. Each leader took part in a face-to-face interview. In accordance with the phenomenology research method, participants were asked two general questions to help shape their narrative about their interactions with abused women. The primary research question was, "How do clergy leaders describe their experiences with responding to IPV against women". The subquestion was, "What beliefs of violence against women do clergy hold?" Findings from clergy leaders' narratives suggested that they serve primarily four roles when responding to IPV against women: spiritual advisor, pastoral care/counselor, compassionate leaders, and uninformed responders. Overall, these themes indicate that although African American clergy acknowledge the prevalence of IPV within their communities, and are trained to counsel congregants, they lack knowledge and training to respond to it. Considering these findings, I propose that clergy receive IPV training in order to be more efficient first-responders. Moreover, the results in this study can help clergy leaders identify gaps

in their practices with abused women as well as to understand the basics of intimate partner violence.

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## Chapter I. INTRODUCTION

Rampant violence in intimate relationships has created a serious problem in the American home, which is the most likely of places that women will experience assault, rape, and murder (Edleson & Tolman, 1992). The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified intimate partner violence (IPV) as the most pervasive form of violence against women and has declared the phenomenon as a major public health, human rights, and criminal justice issue (Garcia-Moreno, & Watts, 2011). Relevant research has attested to the seriousness of IPV and its devastating impact on all areas of health and well-being (e.g., Black et al, 2010; Coker et al., 2000; Edleson & Tolman; 1992). Moreover, researchers have classified the consequences of IPV on victims as first, second, and third-order effects (Riger, Raja, & Camacho, 2002).

First-order effects of IPV occur when the victim is directly impacted by the abuse. Some of the most common issues associated with these effects are physical and psychological in nature. The physical effects linked to IPV include broken bones, auditory and visual impairments, frequent headaches, chronic pain, gynecologic problems, and overall poor health status (Coker et al., 2000). Abused women are three times more likely to be in poor health than their non-abused counterparts (Edleson & Tolman 1992). Moreover, in contrast to women with no experiences with IPV, abused women are twice as likely to be bedridden due to illness and injuries. Researchers estimate that over one million women receive medical care, primarily from emergency departments, for IPV-related injuries (Wadman & Muellman, 1999). They note that 44% of women killed by an intimate partner were seen in emergency departments two years prior to their death. Another study reports that 30% of IPV femicide victims were seen in

healthcare settings for IPV prior to their death (Sharps et al., 2001). This evidence confirms that the risk of IPV related murder is significant.

A compelling finding from the extant research asserts that of the homicides that occurred in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, about 70% of female victims were killed by intimate partners (Saunders, 2002). The implications of this figure are important and cause for alarm, as researchers contend that 64% of female victims experience IPV prior to their murder (Dugan, Nagin, & Rosenfeld, 1999). For those that survive IPV attacks, the risk of incurring psychological health problems is high (Campbell, 2002). Furthermore, IPV-related psychological health effects on women might be more devastating than are physical effects (Edleson & Tolman, 1992). Findings from one study indicate that IPV induced psychological stressors are responsible for several physical illnesses (Coker, Snith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000). For example, chronic IPV-related stress has been linked to hypertension, frequent indigestion, and angina. Other IPV-related psychological effects that have been linked to physical outcomes are chronic depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Dillon, Hussain, Loxton, & Rahman, 2013; Campbell, 2002). Over one-in-five abused women report at least one symptom of PTSD following an experience with IPV (Black et al, 2010). These symptoms include recurrent feelings of distress, intense physical reactions (e.g. anxiety, emotional arousal), flashbacks, and hypervigilance. Female victims who are diagnosed with PTSD are at risk also for suicidality (Jones, Hughes, & Unterstaller, 2001).

Second-order effects of IPV refer to outcomes that manifest in a survivor's interpersonal functioning. For example, the psychological reactions to IPV that women experience also affect their interpersonal functioning; intimate partner violence not only affects the victim, it also transforms the lives to which she is connected (Riger, Raja, Camacho, 2002). For example, a

woman who experiences repeated IPV might distance herself from potential intimate partners due to her belief that IPV is inevitable.

Third-order effects impact the victim's friends, family, and community—those who are closest to the victim. To illustrate this point, a mother who sustains visible bruises from repeated physical abuse routinely visits her children's school; the children feel embarrassed and consequently, make attempts to avoid school, which in turn adversely affect their academic performance. Third order effects also occur on a societal level. Researchers posit that IPV has a staggering toll on society in general (Waters, Hyder, Rjkotia, Basu, & Butchart, 2005). In particular, the economic costs associated with IPV are enormous. Considering the expenses of the criminal justice system, health care system, and labor market (e.g., sick days, loss of productivity), IPV against women in the U.S. exceeds \$5.8 billion (Max, Rice, Finkelstein, Bardwell, & Leadbetter, 2004). These costs include \$320 million for rapes, \$342 million for stalking, \$4.2 million for physical abuse, and \$893 million for murders. Preventative efforts to address IPV are also costly. For example, under the 1994 U.S. Violence Against Women Act, agencies and governmental systems received a total of \$16.4 billion over a five-year period to provide a number of protections to victims of partner violence.

Evidence has shown that society bears the heavy economic burden of IPV (Waters et al., 2004). The enormous costs associated with IPV illustrate just how violence drains resources from many sectors such as community groups, governmental agencies, and private companies and organizations (Day, McKenna, & Bowlus, 2005). Research has also shown that the national economy is affected by female victims' reduced earning capacity. Since abused women are prone to absenteeism from work, their earning capacity results in lower savings and investment rates, leading to a reduction in their state's tax base (Day, McKenna, & Bowlus, 2005). These

societal economic burdens are expensive, but cannot compare to the value of lives taken by IPV perpetrators. Among studies that quantify the value of lives lost from IPV, authors have found values to range from \$3.1 to \$6.8 million (Water et al., 2004). These values are calculated using lost wages and productivity. Overall, the estimates presented here are conservative, as the true effects of IPV are unknown for a number of reasons, including underreporting of IPV incidents and researchers' failure to adequately define/measure the nature of violence in a standardized manner (Johnson & Leone, 2005).

One line of IPV research that scholars have well documented is the association between gender and IPV. While some research indicate that IPV victimization significantly occurs primarily among women, others find that victimization is symmetrical across genders (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). To further examine these claims, scholars have focused a considerable amount of attention on the significant impact that IPV has on both women and men. They have found that although women and men are both victims and perpetrators of IPV, women experience IPV at a more disproportionate rate. For example, findings from the 2003 Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief posit that 85% of IPV victims are women compared to only 15% of men. Additionally, more recent prevalence data indicate that in the U. S. approximately three out of 10 women are victims of IPV, compared to only one in 10 men (Black et al., 2010). In the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Assault Survey (NISVS), nearly 42.4 million women and 5.7 million men reported that they had been physically or sexually victimized and/or stalked by an intimate partner sometime in their lives (Black et al., 2010). This evidence illustrates that although IPV victimization is gender neutral, women are affected at a greater rate than men. While IPV is high among all women, certain groups of women experience IPV at disproportionate rates.

Estimates suggest that African American women are 35% more likely than their White counterparts to be victimized by an intimate partner and two times more likely than any other racial group (Field & Caetano, 2004). Although African American women constitute only 8% of the U.S. population, they represent 22% of female victims of IPV, and 29% of those murdered by an intimate partner (Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community; IDVAAC, 2006).

Considering the large adverse impact of IPV on African American women, researchers have examined ways to prevent and respond to the phenomenon among this group. Studies indicate that faith communities and clergy leaders are critical to preventing and responding to IPV against Black women, particularly since religion is documented as an important resource within the African American community (Watlington & Murphy, 2006). However, only a small amount of research has investigated the impact that clergy leaders have on responding to IPV against women (Beaman-Hall & Nason-Clark, 1997). Studies that have examined clergy leaders' response to IPV against women reveal that clergy lack training on how to respond to this phenomenon. Nason-Clark and Neitz (2001) found that clergy felt untrained to deal with IPV against female congregants. In their study with abused women, Geisbrecht and Sevik (2000) found that women perceived untrained clergy to be a hindrance to their recovery process. Whipple (1987) asserted that many clergy leaders use scripture to justify and accept husbands' use of partner abuse. Whipple (1987) and other scholars posited that religious scripture is the culprit that perpetrates patriarchal propositions that enable men to overpower women.

Feminist scholars often highlight biblical scripture's attempt to convey misogynistic or male-dominated themes and ideas that convey that women are inferior to men (Nason-Clark, 2004). Moreover, scholars assert that biblical texts are often misinterpreted to support IPV

against women. Misinterpreted biblical teachings and application not only place religious women who subscribe to these teachings at-risk for IPV victimization, it also contributes to their tendency to remain with abusive partners (Nason-Clark, 2004). For example, to condone victimization of women Conservative Christian religions suggest that women who suffer receive favor with God (see 1 Peter 2:19-21; Wood & McHugh, 1994).

Clergy may also advocate a patient and passive approach to IPV: “Trust God and He will work it out.” Consequently, when highly religious women experience IPV they frequently apply this principle by praying and waiting on the Lord (Wood & McHugh, 1994). They believe that God will miraculously intercede and stop their partners from being violent, and so they wait with hope for a divine intervention. This wait, often referred to by highly religious persons as faith, compels religious abused women to self-sacrifice for the unity of the family system. However, this recommendation may not overlook victim safety.

The extant literature on IPV and religion also illustrates a concern about clergy leaders’ attitudes and beliefs about women (Rotunda, Williamson, & Penfold, 2004). A growing body of evidence suggests that in particular Conservative Protestant clergy leaders emphasize traditional ideologies of masculinity and femininity. These leaders often excuse, justify, or even blame women for their partners’ violent behavior (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999; Potter, 2007). Such beliefs pose a unique challenge for conservative Christian women. In contrast, more liberal pastoral leaders base their teachings and guidance on values of justice and community development and take a proactive approach to address IPV (e.g., teaching, dispersing resources; Taylor, Ellison, Chatters, Levin, & Lincoln, 2000). Martin (1989) explains that when pastors actively address IPV, victims feel satisfied and more comfortable to come forward for

help. This evidence demonstrates that pastoral leaders' roles as well as the services they provide victims have a tremendous impact on victims' help-seeking behavior.

### **Rationale/Purpose for the Present Study**

The rationale for conducting the current study was to understand how Black church leaders respond to abused women in their congregation. As stated earlier in this paper, African American women tend to be highly religious, however they experience IPV victimization at a higher rate in comparison to other minority groups (Watlington & Murphy, 2006). However, only a handful of studies address pastoral leaders' roles in responding to the phenomenon among African Americans (e.g., Wang, Horne, Levitt, & Klesges, 2009). The absence of this empirical knowledge is surprising because evidence suggests that Black church pastoral leaders are uniquely positioned as gatekeepers of their communities and are recognized as the first point of contact for abused women to share their experiences (Neighbors, Musick, & Williams, 1998). To overcome this paucity of literature, it is imperative that research be done to investigate Black clergy leaders' role in responding to IPV among their congregants.

This phenomenological study aimed to extend the line of research by exploring the experiences and beliefs that African American clergy have with regard to their role as responders to intimate partner violence against women. Existing scholarship that has addressed the phenomenon has done so using a quantitative or structured qualitative approach, thus preventing the emergence of a full description of clergy experiences. Phenomenological research promotes variability where participants are not confined to choose between alternative responses; instead, they are encouraged to respond to questions in as much detail as they desire. Moreover, phenomenological research provides them the opportunity to contextualize their lived experiences of the phenomenon. This is accomplished through dialogue. A dialogue with



pastoral leaders is important for a number of reasons. First, since African American abused congregants are comfortable disclosing their problems with clergy, it is important to understand how leaders respond to this privileged communication. Research posits that while clergy leaders may be the first responders to IPV against women, their limited training in this area may place abused women in further danger (Shannon-Lewy & Dull, 2005). Therefore, it would be beneficial for Black clergy to detail their efforts to respond to violence against women. Secondly, facets of religion may be associated with the onset of IPV. Researchers such as Bowker (1982) have noted that religious teachings have, in most cases, been helpful to abused women. However, many of these teachings have hindered efforts to promote violence-free relationships. For example, some religious teachings have been said to support physical intimate abuse of women through the use of male dominant interpretations of the Bible. Such interpretations may relate to Ephesians 5:22-24 which states that:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands (The Bible—English Standard Version).

In response to the issues associated with clergy actions, it seems imperative to focus on how they respond, and in what contexts they experience these intervention efforts.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined for the clarification of the content in this document.

Intimate partner violence (IPV): Physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse (CDC, 2014)

Fundamentalism: Describes a religion or religious group that holds rigid and conservative beliefs about how one should live (Marsden, 1980).

Evangelism: Actions within the church that allow members to spread biblical teachings to others (Green, 2004).

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature that is appropriate for the present study, followed by the theoretical frameworks that I use to explain facets of IPV against Black women as well as clergy's role in responding to IPV. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that I use to examine the research questions. Chapter 4 presents a summary of the findings. Lastly, chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings along with recommendations for future research with regard to African American clergy and intimate partner violence.

## **Chapter II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Chapter Overview**

In this review of the literature, I critically analyze the extant literature on religion and IPV against African American women. The extant literature reveals that victimization of African American women is associated with complexities influenced by an interaction of race, class, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, and religion. Some of the problems that are associated with intersectionality are common to the African American experience, including discrimination, oppression, and hegemony, all of which are also related to intimate partner violence against Black women. Leaders of the Black church address many of these problems; thus, there exists a need to examine the Black churches' role in addressing IPV. Although the literature on IPV and religion is growing, there is a dearth of research that explores the relationship between members of clergy and IPV in the African American community.

In the first section of this review of the literature, I discuss the background on IPV against women, with special consideration of violence against African American women. Next, I present the theoretical frameworks that influenced the present study, followed by a discussion of the association between IPV and religious facets in the African American community. I also present background information on how religious doctrines may influence attitudes and beliefs about women, and their experiences with domestic violence. Lastly, I discuss IPV, African American religious beliefs, and how these variables may impact women and their partners within the Black church.

## History of Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence against women is a phenomenon that has origins that are documented back to the reign of Romulus in Rome during 753 B.C. (Lemon, 1996). During this period, violence against wives was accepted and considered lawful through tradition. In 300 A.D., the right to physically abuse women was also condoned by the Roman church as patriarchal authority was granted to husbands under the Roman and Jewish law. For example, Roman Emperor Constantine the Great executed his wife by burning her to death; after concluding that he had no further use for her (Lemon, 1996). During the Middle Ages, priests encouraged husbands to physically assault their wives if they did not submit to their husbands (Martin, 1976). Later in the 1400s, the Christian church (although supporters of wife abuse) encouraged husbands to reduce the severity of physical abuse that they inflicted upon their wives (Lemon, 1996). With the support of the Christian church and the old English law that permitted wife abuse, early American settlers deemed it legal and acceptable for husbands to physically abuse their wives as a method of punishment (Schechter, 1982). The permission to batter women continued in America until the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, period which has been referred to as the underpinning for the Women's movement.

**The Women's Movement.** The Women's Liberation Movement of the late twentieth century was predated by the Civil Rights Movement. During the early 1960s, civil right leaders began to challenge inequitable protection and opportunities for groups such as women and ethnic minorities. Also during this period, women worked together to support a widespread attitudinal shift in societal views of violence against women, (Tierney, 1982). They ran shelters from their personal homes, established rape crises centers, founded health clinics, and lobbied for legal changes to women's rights. Feminist leaders strove to make others aware that IPV was a

collective issue, as opposed to one relevant only at the individual level of analysis. From the late 1960s through the early 1970s, intimate partner violence against women was viewed as a private issue, or one not addressed outside of the home (Alhabib, Nur, & Jones, 2010). However, during the mid-1970s, abuse against women became punishable by law in courts across the United States. This prohibition marked the beginning of the progress toward defining IPV as a public issue, and one that was recognized and responded to by the public. In 1973, the first U.S. battered women's shelter was founded in St. Paul Minnesota by a group of women advocates. By 1979, there were over 250 women's shelters in the U.S. In the 1980s the U.S. Surgeon General declared IPV a major health problem for women. This declaration was influential in the passing of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)--landmark legislation that outlines a number of protections aimed to prevent and reduce violence against women. However, although these attempts to combat IPV were supported by many women, some groups, such as African American women, felt excluded by the Women's Liberation Movement. They accused middle class White women of simplifying oppression to facets of gender; thus ignoring equally important issues of race and class. In response to White women's scant attention to their plight, African American women began the Black Women's movement.

**Black Women's Movement.** The Black Women's Movement emerged from Black women who felt racially alienated during the Women's Movement and sexually subjugated during the Civil Rights Movement (Crenshaw, 1989). During the Black Women's movement, Black women had the onus of advocating for their rights as women and as African Americans. The double bind of being both female and Black, made their fight for equality more challenging than that of their White counterparts. As females, Black women were subjected to institutionalized sexism and marginalization. Because of their race and ethnicity, African

Americans experienced racial discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. Thus, unlike White women, Black women were subjugated along the contours of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and sexuality. Moreover, the intersection of these categories has always been deeply woven into social structures that place African American women at a greater risk for IPV than White women (Richie, 2000). For example, abused African American women may be reluctant to contact law enforcement due to the history of oppressive encounters that African Americans have had with the law enforcement and justice systems. Consequently, they remain in abusive relationships where partners continue to victimize them.

### **Theoretical Framework**

African American women's experiences with IPV can be explained by a number of theoretical perspectives. In the next section, I will introduce and expound upon theoretical frameworks that were used as lens for this study.

A theoretical perspective provides the researcher with a lens to which they may access a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon. For this study, the theoretical lenses of Role and Feminist theories, along with the Intersectionality perspective are appropriate for understanding Black clergy responses to IPV against women. Role theory explains people's behaviors and interactions based on their ascribed roles and social positions. Feminist theory, along with Intersectionality perspective explains that gender, race, and other characteristics serve as vehicles for oppression, domination, and discrimination against Black women.

**Role theory.** The roots of role theory can be traced back to the disciplines of social psychology, sociology, and anthropology (Sarbin & Allen, 1954). Sarbin and Allen are two prominent theorists that developed role theory to describe human behavior. They suggest that people enact certain behaviors based on their social positions and the expectations that others associate with

those positions. For this study, the theory is applicable to the social position of African American Christian clergy leaders. Based on Role Theory, one could expect that clergy leaders' position, which is one of high regard and value, might influence the roles clergy think they should assume. For example, one would logically expect that clergy leaders' actions, interactions, and even beliefs align with those of biblical doctrine. Furthermore, the roles associated with their social position might be expected to influence how clergy perceive and manage IPV within the Black church.

As leaders of the church, Black clergy are recognized as shepherds in charge of leading their congregation, also known as the flock. Accordingly, abused women may seek out these leaders for guidance with abusive relationships. However, congregants' expectations for their leaders do not always align with his/her behavior. For example, research (e.g., Shannon-Lewy & Dull, 2005) asserts that instead of discouraging IPV against women, clergy leaders often provide abused women with biblical scripture that seem to suggest that they remain in the abusive relationship. For many people, this response is incongruous with clergy leaders' social position.

The social position of clergy leaders, along with the expectations that accompany it may be similar to biblical leaders' roles. For example, Moses—a Hebrew prophet—was chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of slavery. He was concerned with the well-being of this group. Moses' role was similar to that of the modern Black clergy leader whose current responsibilities comprise of responding to the social welfare of congregants and the community. Clergy leaders serve in roles such as preachers, teachers, counselors, and social and political figures. The various roles that clergy enact determine the type of tasks in which they engage. Researchers have found that these roles are affected by a number of variables. Some theorists suggest that gender significantly influences clergy leaders' roles as well as their social position within the

church, which also affects their response to IPV. Below, I introduce feminist theory, a perspective that analyzes the impact of gender.

### **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory is one of the major responses to female oppression and unjust treatment. The theory attempts to change oppressive structures by linking ideas of patriarchy to political action (Flax, 1990). Feminist theory suggests that patriarchy, a social system that places men in a superior position to that of women--undergirds societal beliefs. Such beliefs have historically manifested in political, economic, cultural and social spheres and have affected women's rights in these areas.. For example, rights--such as suffrage--were not originally universally available for women. In contrast, men—particularly of the White-middle class—were not only afforded voting rights, but they controlled the decision to establish a general culture where women's rights were limited. The few rights that women possessed were related to the needs of men. For example, in order to provide sustenance for the family during World War II, a period where a great mass of men joined the military, women were permitted to work in jobs normally reserved for men. Outside of this time, women were expected to only work in roles where they were responsible for expressive and housekeeping tasks. In contrast, men were responsible for instrumental tasks—financial activities that were viewed as critical for the family's sustainment.

Feminist theory also highlights other forms of gender oppression. In addition to the gender inequalities noted above, the theory underscores structural oppression (hooks, 1984). Structural oppression of women implies that systems such as patriarchy and racism victimize women. Moreover, these systems attempt to subjugate women into a powerless group who are unable to alter their position in life. The methods used to perpetuate this victimization of women



spawn from traditional and ideological thinking that may be seen across numerous social structures. One in particular that is pertinent to this study is Christian theology.

Considering feminist thoughts about Christian theology, the following question is pertinent, “Does the Christian community acknowledge through their God that women and men are fully equal?”. Secondly, feminists may question whether gender equality is visible in the daily lives of women in the Christian community. These questions arise out of findings that religion and beliefs in women’s rights may be negatively associated (Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, & Leathers, 2008). Ali et al. investigated whether religion shaped Christian women’s understanding of feminist tenets. Christian women who participated in the study believed that women should be submissive to their husbands. They described their men as head of the household and women as homemakers and primary caregivers for their children. However, African American Christian women acknowledged flexibility in these roles. One participant explained,

... because there is so many absent men, in our, in the Black race, the roles of women have had to change...so, there are things that women now have to do that maybe a generation or two ago they didn’t have to do because there was a man in the house, but now because they are so many absent fathers or you know, males in the household, I think that culturally women’s roles have had to change.

Ali et al., (2008) also asked women how they defined feminism. A White Christian woman suggested that feminism promotes all women’s rights, but has gone overboard to the extent of hurting men. Black Christian women stated that feminism is a movement designed primarily for White women. This assertion is not uncommon as many Black women who have been active in the women’s movement note that Black and White women experience feminism

related issues differently from one another. This contrast might be an indication that Black women chose to redefine the mainstream feminist thought—which primarily fought against patriarchy—to address the multidimensionality of Black women’s experiences (Carby, 1996).

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality underscores the idea that Black women are members of multiple subordinated groups; they are female and African American. Emerging from feminist theory, intersectionality explains the association between the interlocking of social and physical categories (e.g., race, gender, class) and systems of oppression and domination (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw coined the concept in her essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” In the essay, she challenges psychology’s homogenization of gender and underscores how social identities (e.g., race, social class) intersect to shape women’s experiences with numerous oppressions. More specifically, Crenshaw focuses on these social identities across *Women of Color*. For example, Black women’s racial and gender identities influence their experiences with racism and sexism. When an additional characteristic such as class is introduced, Black women’s experiences with oppression heighten. For example, it has been documented that low SES Black women attempt to seek protection from law enforcement is compromised by racist, sexist, and classist discrimination that is embedded within the criminal justice system. Their efforts to contact police may be met with further victimization stemming from a history of racism and police brutality against members of the Black community (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

In the following sections, I describe how representations of Black women’s image and experiences have been shaped by oppressive factors. Moreover, I discuss how the

intersectionality of social characteristics such as sexuality and social class impacts their experiences with IPV. Both characteristics have equal value in the discourse on Black women's experiences with IPV. For example, Black women's sexuality has been the subject of many critical conversations; their bodies have been scrutinized and much of society's image of them is associated with sexual objectification (Harris-Perry, 2011). The impact that Black female sexuality has on Black women's experiences with IPV is modified by its intersection with class. Class presents a privilege of resources and power. The churches represented in this study are situated in predominately poor communities, thus creating a situation where abused may not likely have access to safety resources nor are they privileged with the power that affluent women may possess. The association that the intersection of sexuality and class has with IPV challenges mainstream feminist thought that all women experience IPV similarly (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

**Sexuality.** African American women have faced gender oppression that has origins in racial and sexualized sociohistorical contexts. Historically, African American women were made to feel inferior and invisible through encounters of sexual objectification and cultural invisibility. Ample evidence suggests that men across all races and classes regarded them as property and objects only recognized by their sexual abilities. Often characterized as a "Jezebel", "Sapphire", or "Mammy" like figures, African American women have been described as seductive, animalistic women that have difficulty restraining sexually urges (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). Similar to the biblical princess Jezebel, African American women were depicted as sexually aggressive, licentious, and loose. These images developed and spread throughout slavery during a time where Black women's sexuality and reproductive rights were exploited by slaveholders. During that time Black women's value was based on their

childbearing ability and sexual prowess. Today, the worth of Black women continues to be measured by their sexuality, thus contributing to the stereotype of Black women as hypersexualized beings (Harris-Perry, 2011).

Another negative, yet pervasive stereotype of Black women that originated during slavery, and that affects the image of Black women is the Mammy figure (Thomas et al., 2004). The Mammy is one of the most widely recognized stereotypes in American History. Physically depicted as an overweight, dark-skinned woman, with a signature wide grin, Mammy embodied submissiveness, tolerance, nurturance, and inferiority. Her image was contrary to common beauty expectations of women. Mammy's exaggerated backside and breasts added to the amusing nature of her image and encouraged others to ridicule what bell coins "masculinized sub-human creatures" (hooks, 1981, p. 71). Her white teeth and wide grin imply that she is a pitiful weak woman whose purpose is to serve others. Overall, the Mammy image is the antithesis of American's standards of beauty and femininity. Other characteristics of the Mammy include a docile and non-threatening attitude towards White Americans. She was very submissive towards her master and others who held authority over her (West, 1995). In her various roles—which included nanny, cook, and housekeeper—Mammy was expected to humbly sacrifice her needs for those of her domestic master. Contemporarily and in-line with the Mammy stereotype, African American women are perceived as supportive, yet self-sacrificing women who neglect their needs to attend to those of others in their care (Thomas et al., 2004). Like Mammy, a large number of Black women unselfishly give much of themselves to ensure that others' needs are met (Thomas et al., 2004; West, 1995).

The antithesis of the Mammy image is that of Sapphire (West, 1995). The Sapphire caricature is far from humble; she was seen as an argumentative, loud, evil, and angry villain.

Often portrayed in the media with her hand on her hip, rhythmically rolling her neck, and pointing her finger, the Sapphire depicts Black women as belligerent and hot-tempered (Gillum, 2002). Moreover, she is known to emasculate Black men by overpowering and challenging their masculinity with her verbal insults. Contemporarily, the Sapphire is also referred to as “The Angry Black Woman”. Although, scholars (e.g., Walley-Jean, 2009) have discredited this stereotype, it continues to pervade throughout societal structures. Gillum (2002) argues that this caricature serves as a social control mechanism used to encourage Black women to be docile and unseen, a portrayal that stands in stark contrast to the Sapphire.

The three images discussed above—Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire—are clear manifestations that intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality that explain certain aspects of Black women’s unique experience. The stereotypes of Black women that result from these three caricatures are identified as unique to African American women (Gillum, 2002). These stereotypical images potentially impact African American women’s interpersonal relationships. Gillum (2002) found that 48% of men hold at least one of the above stereotypes regarding Black women. African American men who subscribe to these misconceptions of Black women (e.g., promiscuous, emasculating) may respond to them with behaviors that support these negative ideals (Gillum, 2002). For example, a man who perceives that his partner is trying to undermine his role in the relationship may respond to her in a violent manner. On account of her stereotypical behavior/image, the man may feel justified in reacting violently towards his mate. Moreover, female victims of IPV are blamed for the abuse, due in part to society’s acceptance of stereotypical images. Such responses to the victimization of African American women are barriers that affect their ability to secure assistance that may help them to remain free from IPV.

**Social Class.** Economically impoverished abused women receive even more inadequate institutional responses to help-seeking than their more advantaged peers. In fact, when class is controlled for, differences in race and ethnicity disappear, thus showing the tremendous impact that class has on IPV victimization (Hampton et al., 2005). Evidence suggests that low-income women are recipients of the most punitive form of violence (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Moreover, IPV is more likely among poor African Americans than in other communities. Researchers postulate that chronic unemployment and high underemployment among African American families may affect the prevalence of IPV across these families. For example, anger and poor emotional regulation are associated with the economic insufficiency that African American men face (Hampton et al., 2005; West, 2004). In response to their poor economic status and historical and contemporary racial oppression, Black males adopt violence as a method for handling conflict with their partners. Social scientists maintain that violence is an outlet or a response to low SES men's feelings of powerlessness. In particular, for men who lack the financial resources to serve as "head of the family", the use of physical violence functions as proxy for his position of power in the family system (McAdoo, 1981).

The disparities in employment and income distribution among African American men and women as compared with the racial majority are associated with structural arrangements and social conditions. Historically, employment opportunities for Black women have been limited (Crenshaw, 1989). An example of Black women's denial of equitable opportunities is noted in the case of *Degraffenreid vs. General Motors (GM)*. In the *Degraffenreid vs. General Motors* case, a group of Black female employees instigated legal proceedings asserting that GM's job seniority system was biased and discriminatory. The group of women who initiated the lawsuit alleged that they experienced discrimination based on their race and sex—two legally protected

categories under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The court dismissed their claim, suggesting that neither white women nor black men were excluded from the seniority system, thus proving fair practices for women and Blacks. The courts did not acknowledge the mutually reinforcing relationship between race, gender, and class, albeit this interrelationship had and currently has implications for employment opportunities in the Black community. Black women are the only demographic in the U.S. that has not experienced a change in the unemployment rate. While some researchers speculate reasons this trend occurs, many suggest that it is influenced by the additive dynamics of racism and sexism. (Crenshaw, 1989) Unfortunately, this trend impacts Black intimate relationships and women's risk of violence.

### **Black intimate relationships**

Black intimate relationships have origins in the sociohistorical context of slavery. For Black men, the general ideology of masculinity was developed and expressed during the period of enslavement (Bowleg, 2004). However, also during this period the power of male masculinity was primarily privileged to White men. Black men were denied the power associated with masculinity and were therefore not allowed to engage in privileges thought to be given to masculinity. One particular element of masculinity that Black men have been denied was economic power. Because of their enslavement, Black men didn't have the privilege to achieve economic wealth as did White men. Consequently, Black males began to express their masculinity different than did their White counterparts (Hampton et al., 2003).

During early development Black males adopt a Black machismo identity—a cluster of behaviors that include hypermasculine characteristics such as male sexual prowess. Influenced by socialization norms, Black men are encouraged to sexually engage with multiple partners at an early age. Moreover, they engage in risk-taking, and display behaviors of rage, emotional

suppression, and violence as alternative manifestations of masculinity (Bowleg, 2004). As a result of these hypermasculine behaviors, the quality of Black men and women's relationships are affected.

Tension and distrust between the Black man and woman have grown over the last fifty years (Crenshaw, 1989; McAdoo, 1981). Black women perceive Black men as irresponsible; Black men regard Black women as 'matriarchal' with an overwhelming amount of control over the family. Black women have historically been more economically stable than Black men; they are also more independent than Black men. These achievements have not been welcomed in the Black marital relationship, as Black women's autonomy proves challenging for Black men (McAdoo, 1981). Instead, they have partly explained the increase in marital conflict, and thus the dissolution of Black marriages.

In her classic text, Rodgers-Rose (1980) reports that conflict within Black marriages originate out of issues with communication, disagreements, and dependence. In addition, Black marital conflict often occurs because of role overload experienced by Black women. Many Black women serve in roles as parent, employee, and wife. Routine tasks (e.g., child care) that are seen as daily responsibilities create a strain in the lives of Black women. However, this purported "strain" may be misperceived as Black women's independence, as Black women are socialized to be self-reliant and hard working (Hill, 2002). The socialization of Black women shapes how they enact roles within marital and other intimate relationships. Among the many socializing agents that shape their roles, religion stands as the most prominent source utilized by the African American community (Hill, 2002). In the next section, I will introduce religious life and its influences in the Black community. In the U.S., Black religion generally refers to a



number of religious practices. However, for the purposes of this study black religion refers to Christian denominations.

### **Religion in the African American Community**

Black people are considered one the most religious groups in the world (McCoy, 1998). In the United States their intense involvement in religious and spiritual practices has origins in the antebellum period—a time when a slave’s only hope rested in their God (Maffly-Kipp, 2001). Through the use of hand gestures, secret meetings, and messages that slaveholders were not aware of, Black people shared in religious practices. These meetings allowed Black Americans to congregate and share their dreams for freedom with one another. For many Blacks, the path to freedom was similar to that of the Israelites found in the biblical book of Exodus (Raboteau, 1999). The book of Exodus recounts the lives of the Israelites—a group of people held captive in Egypt. More importantly to the lives of Black American slaves, God freed the Israelites out of the hands of Egypt. God’s deliverance of the Israelites showed Black slaves that God could do the same for them.

When Black Americans finally obtained freedom, they began to play a major role in the development of churches and missions. For example, black Baptists assembled the National Baptist Convention, the largest and most influential religious organization in the U.S. (Maffly-Kipp, 2001). The growth of Black religious organizations resulted from the strong sense of religion present throughout the Black community. In many ways, religion and religious organizations helped Black Americans cope with their post-freedom experiences. Still today, the Black church and its leaders continue to play a critical role in the lives of Black Americans. The Black church is a community center, counseling center, financial training center, social welfare

agency, and shelter (Levin, 1996). Overall, this institution is considered an intermediary between congregants and the community.

One of the most important goals of the Black church is the preservation of the family (Billingsley & Morrison-Rodriguez, 2008). The Black church's history, along with its values, places it in a position to take action to respond to and protect at-risk Black families from a gamut of problems such as intimate partner violence. However, some may argue that some of these problems—most notably IPV—are highly influenced by religion (Nason-Clark, 2004).

### **Religious influences on IPV**

Religious fundamentalism shapes one's attitude and perception towards gender and interpersonal relationships. For example, empirical evidence suggests that conservative Protestant denominations tend to espouse patriarchal gender roles where men are considered leaders over the family system and women's positions are inferior to those of men (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999). These gender expectations are accompanied by an inequitable power structure within relationships, thus increasing the likelihood of intimate partner violence. Past research has shown a positive correlation between gender beliefs, religion, and IPV. In his work on the relationship between gender roles, religious ideology, and marital rape, Jeffords (1984) contends that men who report traditional gender role attitudes and religious beliefs, are more likely to support marital rape than those with inequitable gender role beliefs and a liberal religious orthodoxy. More recently, Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner (2004) corroborated this finding and attributed it to traditional ideology that suggests women are the property of men—first of their fathers and second of their husbands. Moreover, they insist that one's religious beliefs are directly associated with affirmative attitudes towards violence against women.

Many feminist theorists also concur that Christianity's origins are patriarchal in nature (Cunradi, Caetano, Schafer, 2002). In particular, they argue that female submissiveness and male domination are key tenets of the Christian worldview. Other patriarchal customs that scholars suggest are present within Christian belief systems include restricting female involvement in many tasks within the church, limiting the number of female leaders, and emphasizing women's need for compliance to their husbands and male leadership (Levitt & Ware, 2006). A recent example of forced compliance comes from a pastor in Waco, Texas who requires females within his congregation to refrain from wearing hair extensions (American Preachers, 2013). He justified his demand with the proclamation that women who wear hair extensions present a "false image" of themselves. Also, in a study by Levitt & Ware (2006) a number of faith leaders declared that women should submit and sacrifice to their husbands on a daily basis; whereas men were only required to make sacrifices in life-or-death conditions. One Baptist leader in the Levitt and Ware (2006) study described his belief that women were to refrain from leadership roles. In his discussion of the Bible, he stated that, "I think men are the stronghold of the church. I don't see any place in the Bible where God made a covenant with a woman, but I am just talking about what I read in the Bible. He made a covenant with Abraham" (p. 12).

Some religious leaders such as those discussed above reject feminist theory because, as they suggest, it undermines religious teachings. They claim that feminism has contributed to the development of a new definition of gender roles and the marital relationship (Levitt & Ware, 2006). However, many feminist leaders argue that clergy attach gender roles to dated biblical teachings of female submission and male supremacy (Padilla & Winrich, 1991). Feminists have strove to diminish adherence to biblical teachings that promote traditional gender roles. Their

work during the feminist movement has become influential in changing tradition; however, some opposition persists particularly within the church. In Levitt & Ware's (2006) grounded theory research, an Evangelical Christian leader expressed his opposition to feminism, maintaining that "[a woman] is a fellow heir of the grace of life in Christ Jesus and it says that in the same passage that it says she is a weaker vessel...everybody knows that...except maybe the feminists" (p. 17).

Such fundamentalist pastoral leaders encourage their congregants to accept the Bible as their literal guide to life, with emphasis on Old Testament values of rape and objectification of women. Congruent with this urging, many female congregants may feel the need to choose between their spirituality and physical-emotional needs (Shannon-Lewy & Dull, 2005). For example, it has also been noted that some women—particularly those with strong beliefs in biblical teachings—consider the suffering of abuse to be an act of humility, a quality that is considered virtuous by many religious leaders (Rotund et al., 2004). In Alsdurf and Alsdurf's (1989) study with abused women, they found that 70% of these women felt they had the responsibility to save their husbands. One woman in particular indicated that in doing so, her reward would be in heaven. Similar attitudes were found in highly conservative congregants who attended religious services frequently. Researchers such as Rotunda et al. (2004) reported that such attitudes might be related to the highly patriarchal sermons that religious leaders deliver from the pulpit.

Some faith leaders have proposed that—because of disobedience towards their husbands—women share fault for their experiences with IPV. This serves to justify the idea that men are superior to women. According to some faith leaders, men's authority over women is validated by the creation story found in the Book of Genesis' story on Adam and Eve. The story

provides an account on the formation of the dyad; Adam was created first and Eve was formed from his rib. As the story progresses, Adam and Eve fall from grace because of their sin of disobeying God. It is commonly pointed out that this story presents evidence for gender hierarchy; women are formed from men and thus are inferior to them (Proctor-Smith, 1995; Padilla & Winrich, 1991). Moreover, many theologians highlight the portrayal of Eve as a temptress who knowingly led Adam to his fall from grace. Undoubtedly, these teachings symbolically undergird the contemporary portrayal of women as innately inferior to men.

Conversely, some religious leaders contend that Biblical teachings are used to support egalitarian relationships. For example, a number of religious leaders view the book of Genesis' story of Adam and Eve as an illustration of equality between women and men. More conservative leaders assert that men and women have distinct roles that were innately determined by God; men serve as head of women (Levitt & Ware, 2006). Less conservative leaders argue that fundamentalist religious leaders tend to rely on a misinterpretation of scripture that may be influenced by the Bible's historical context. Because the Bible has Hebrew roots and has been translated in English, some of its context is said to be unintelligible and thus, should not be received in a pragmatic way (Levitt & Ware, 2006). Religious leaders who agree with this notion also tend to advocate for gender equality. For example, in correcting a common misperception that Paul—a disciple of Jesus Christ--commands only women to submit to their spouse (see Ephesians 5:21-22), leaders who advocate for martial equality argue that Paul's letters describe a situation where both partners shall submit to one another. These leaders contend that misinterpretation of the scripture is the heart of gender inequity within the religious community. Additionally, religious leaders who advocate for gender equity caution their counterparts of the dangers associated with a misinterpretation of biblical teachings (Levitt &

Ware, 2006). More specifically, these leaders posit that such misinterpretations can inflict harm on women, and so they have explicitly denounced IPV to show their disagreement with traditional misinterpretations that condone IPV against women (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999).

Aside from the dangers of biblical misinterpretation, abused women may fall prey to clergy leaders' limited training with identifying or managing IPV. It is not uncommon for clergy to lack knowledge on IPV or to be unaware of their incompetence. However, their ineptitude presents an unfortunate situation for abused congregants who seek support or counseling services from clergy leaders. Bowker and Maurer (1986) found that 33% of the participants in their study sought support from pastoral leaders. Approximately 34% of those women found pastoral leaders to be effective, whereas 39% reported that they were not effective, and 7% found that consulting with a pastoral leader and his/her staff "caused increased violence." In a more recent study conducted by Rotunda et al., (2004), 81% of clergy leaders provided counseling for IPV. Over half of the clergy felt that they lacked knowledge on IPV, and thus felt inadequate to address the problem. Pastoral leaders who deemed IPV to be outside of their scope of expertise referred victims to specialized IPV services. In another study almost 30% of pastoral leaders reported that IPV was not an issue within their congregation, and thus felt no need for training on the matter (Shannon-Lewy & Dull, 2005). This way of thinking may preclude members of the clergy from engaging in training to effectively handle IPV-related issues within their congregation. Moreover, these attitudes along with faulty religious teachings have obstructed attempts to promote nonviolent interpersonal relationships from the pulpit.

Extant research indicates that conservative churches encourage their congregants to seek support from only their pastoral leader or other church members (Whipple, 1987).

For example, some religious leaders are against congregants contacting law/legal enforcement (e.g., police officers, attorneys) in response to partner abuse because the church seeks to be the prominent support to its member (Rotunda et al., 2004). It is important that members of the Black community are aware of this preference as many consider the church an essential social support, second only to the biological family.

### **The Black church**

The history of Black religion is a complex one whose story can be better explained from an ethnic pluralism perspective, where many African slaves attempted to balance their native African religion in a society that encouraged Christian theology. Christianity was imposed upon Black slaves by their European slaveholders. Overtime, African-born and American-born Black slaves began to proclaim a belief in the Christian tradition. Black men and women began to apply the teachings of Christianity to their experiences of enslavement (Raboteau , 1999, p. 27). They applied parables and biblical stories to their day-to-day lives; their faith in the religion began to grow strong. As Black slaves' faith grew so did the Black Christian membership. Accordingly, the Black church was established. Since that time, Blacks have established and funded a number of Black churches across the U.S. The Black church is one of the most influential institutions presently in the Black community (Billingsley & Morrison-Rodriguez, 1998). Institutionally, Black churches have addressed conditions of poverty, illiteracy and civil rights of its members. Social programs throughout the church provide support for various unmet needs in the Black community. For many members of the Black community, Black churches not only offer tangible supports (e.g., financial support, food), they offer a sense of hope and joy in the midst of despair and hopelessness (hooks, 2003).

The Black church offers a forum where members can gain a better understanding of how religion and spirituality fits into their lives. For Black women in particular, religion is used as a coping mechanism and is considered to be more salient by Black women than it is for Black men (Watlinton & Murphy, 2006). Additionally, Black women consider religion and prayer as essential to daily living. They rely on their religious beliefs and practices, as well as their pastoral leader for assistance with a host of problems.

### **Summary**

The review of the empirical literature highlights intimate partner violence in the Black community. The theoretical foundations that are applicable in this study primarily focus on the role that gender, race, income, and social position plays in one's experience. In particular, the theoretical frameworks focus on the bidirectional nature of the relationship between position and experiences. The literature on Black clergy leaders also focuses on the role of the Black church. The role of the Black church relative to intimate partner violence against Black women is critical. For many African Americans, the church and the pastor are the sources of refuge in congregants' time of need. The pastor is seen as the Shepard feeding the flock and the church as an institution is viewed as a hospital where healing occurs. While congregants look to the church for an assortment of needs, a number of factors influence the responses they receive. For example, Biblical teachings impact how clergy view women, men, relationships, and IPV. However, as noted in this chapter, the literature falls short of providing details about how Black clergy precisely respond to IPV against women.



## **Chapter III. METHODS**

### **Introduction**

In this study I aimed to capture an understanding of the essence of Black pastors' lived experiences as responders to IPV within their congregation and communities. To this end, I utilized a phenomenological research method. This chapter presents the methods and procedures that were utilized in this study. In this chapter, I begin with an introduction of qualitative methodology. Next, I provide an overview of the phenomenological method along with a rationale for selecting this particular methodology. These sections are followed by a discussion of the research questions, participant selection, data gathering techniques, and analysis procedures that were used to evaluate and interpret data.

### **Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative research methods often lie at the center of numerous methodological discussions. Often described as antithetical to quantitative research, qualitative research has been defined by a number of contradictions, tensions, and hesitations. For over half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, quantitative research was the dominant method of inquiry. During the 1980s, qualitative research became respected as another legitimate method of inquiry. While many view the two methodologies as polar opposites, they are not mutually exclusive (Maanen, 1983).

Qualitative and quantitative research explore phenomena through the collection of data. However, their differences lie in the form of data, emphasis of study, and overall purpose of the research. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore a phenomenon through the use of rich textural information generated through an inductive approach. Quantitative research utilizes validated instruments to collect precise measurements about phenomena using a deductive approach. Additionally, in contrast to a quantitative approach to inquiry, qualitative research

views human behavior through dynamic, subjective, and situational lens (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research attempts to establish a thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied. To this end, the qualitative researcher gathers a combination of empirical materials and observer perspectives about the phenomenon under study. Using these resources, the researcher captures multiple realities of the phenomenon as they evolve through participants' narratives (Creswell, 2007).

**Rationale for qualitative design.** A qualitative design is used in this study to gain a profound understanding of pastors' roles of responders to IPV against women. In contrast to a quantitative design—which seeks to make predictions and test hypotheses—a qualitative design allows me to explore and understand the pastoral leaders' experiences of responding to reports of IPV. Conducting such research allows me to fill the gaps in the research that fail to examine clergy leaders' beliefs through an unstructured, in-depth qualitative process. Moreover, qualitative research provides clergy leaders with flexibility in sharing their experiences, as well as the opportunity for me to probe for responses that may be unclear.. To examine pastors' experiences with interacting with abused women, I employ Moustakas' approach to phenomenology as the method of research.

### **Historical context of phenomenology**

The concept “phenomenon” originates from the Greek term, *phaenesthai*, which means to come into sight, become visible, or to appear (Moustakas, 1994). In philosophy, phenomenon refers to the act of bringing to light or to “show itself in itself.” In phenomenological research, a phenomenon is represented by one's perception of a situation or object.

Phenomenology was first introduced as an idea by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant contended that as scientists and humans we only understand objects as they appear to us, a

position that can be distinguished from that of traditional science, which seeks to explain phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas posits that while Kant introduced the concept, George Hegel constructed its well-conceived meaning. Moustakas (1994) describes Hegel's definition of phenomenology as "the science of describing what one perceives, sense, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience...toward the absolute knowledge of the Absolute" (p.26).

Husserl (1920) established another approach to phenomenology out of his dissatisfaction with traditional science. According to Husserl, traditional science devalues individual experiences and the connections that an individual's consciousness has with his/her external world (Moustakas, 1994, p. 43). Husserl's approach emphasizes subjectivity and the connection between a person and his/her consciousness. This approach is referred to as transcendental phenomenology. In Husserl's explanation of transcendental phenomenology, he proposes that an individual engages in the process of discovery by way of reflection on his/her subjective experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Reflection occurs after a phenomenon appears in an individual's consciousness. It is at the reflection point that an individual attempts to interpret and explain the meaning of the phenomenon. Thus, features of one's consciousness contribute to how one grows to understand and perceive their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). It is the essence of these experiences that knowledge is predicated upon.

**Rationale for choosing Phenomenological method.** Early phenomenologists such as Husserl (1931) and Merleau-Ponty (1952) sought to explain the essence and structure of the human experience (Creswell, 2007). They were interested in using one's consciousness to make that not visible to the eye, noticeable through an examination of conscious experiences. As I too seek to

describe and understand the conscious experiences of clergy members, a phenomenological method of inquiry is appropriate for this study.

My decision to utilize a phenomenological approach was predicated on my worldview and particular philosophical assumptions. I believe that human beings are best understood as a whole rather than as small parts. An individual and his/her world are unified in such a way that they may not diverge from one another. The philosophical assumptions that shaped my decision to choose a phenomenological approach are ontological (e.g., nature of reality) and rhetorical assumptions (e.g., language used). The ontological assumption salient to the study is the belief that reality is subjective and individually constructed, and thus understood differently from person-to-person. Through listening to the description that an individual provides for his/her life, one can uncover the meaning that the individual ascribes to their lives. Each participant's perception is critical to how he/she presents the narrative. From the rhetorical assumption, it is important that participants' narratives are presented in a manner that includes descriptions of the experience and not explanations provided by the researcher. In doing so, participants' voices are not overshadowed by that of the researcher.

**Rationale for Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology.** I chose transcendental phenomenology for a number of reasons, two of which I present. First, I feel strongly that researchers' preconceived ideas potentially interfere with the stories participant choose to share. Transcendental phenomenology addresses this interference by suggesting that researchers suspend presuppositions as they attempt to view the phenomenon "for the first time." Secondly, I consider myself a novice to phenomenology. Moustakas offers less experienced researchers a systematic and detailed data analysis steps to support them throughout the research.

### **Exploratory Question**

Creswell (2007) suggests that phenomenological researchers utilize a single, central question and follow up with additional subquestions to capture participants' lived experiences. The central question is described as a broad question that allows researchers to explore the phenomenon in question. In order to examine the phenomenon, this question deserves significant attention. In this study, the central question is, "How do clergy leaders describe their experiences with responding to IPV against women?"

A subquestion follows the central question. The subquestion that supports participants' development of their overall narrative of the phenomenon is, "What beliefs of violence against women do clergy hold?"

### **Sample and Recruitment**

#### **Sampling Method**

When selecting a sample, phenomenological researchers should follow several guiding principles. First, prospective participants should have experience with the phenomenon in question (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Moreover, they should be willing to discuss their experience. Secondly, these individuals must participate in at least one interview to narrate their experience. Creswell recommends that the sample is purposeful. Considering Creswell's recommendation, I used a purposeful method. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for the purpose of the research study. Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that allows the researcher to select participants based on their appropriateness for the study.

### **Participant selection process**

Groenewald (2004) states that the phenomenon of interest determines the criteria that participants must meet. The inclusion criteria for this study include: (1) senior pastors of predominant black Protestant congregations, (2) congregations are located in predominantly Black communities, (3) belonging to the age group of 21-80 years of age, (4) reside near a particular southeast city, (5) ability to speak English and (6) must have presided over their respective congregations for at least two years.

In his 2005 discourse on phenomenology, Wertz asked “how many participants” should be sampled in a qualitative study. In qualitative research, the number of participants can vary from 1-40 (Creswell, 2007). Creswell also notes that a sample size between 10 and 30 participants is fitting for qualitative research that uses purposive sampling. Thomas and Pollio (2002) suggest that researchers aim to sample six to twelve participants. Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) suggested that six participants were an appropriate number for a phenomenology study. While there is no general rule of thumb about the precise number of participants a phenomenological researcher should sample, researchers should strive to reach of place of understanding of the phenomenon through participants’ thick, rich descriptions. Theoretical saturation refers to the phase during data analysis where new information no longer emerges. It is at this point that all concepts along with linkages between concepts have been identified. For this study, a sample size of six participants was adequate enough to capture the significant lived experiences of the participants in the study. This number is in accordance with the recommendation of Thomas & Pollio (2002) and Mertens & McLaughlin (2004).

After approval from the University of Tennessee's institutional review board (IRB), I began the participant selection process. Participants were primarily recruited from a interdenominational Christian association in a southeast city of the U.S..

### **Research Procedures**

The procedures used in this study are based on Moustakas' recommendations for conducting phenomenological research.

#### **Bracketing**

The first stage of the phenomenological reduction process is the bracketing "disciplined efforts" to bracket their experiences about the phenomenon. Bracketing involves suspending any existing judgments that one has about the phenomenon. Although Merleau-Ponty (1962) posits that complete bracketing can never be achieved, this continues to be a critical part of the data collection process. My bracketing interview revealed my experiences with interacting with abused women as well as my personal beliefs about IPV against women. The results of my bracketing interview revealed that I have supported abused women in the following ways: (a) made connections, (b) linked to resources, (c) listened to their wants with regard to the relationship, (d) respected their decisions and (e) provided advice. With regard to my beliefs about IPV, I hold that (a) violence against women is immoral and (b) IPV is both serious and dangerous.

#### **Participant contact**

The next step in the research process was to make contact with clergy. To source participants, I attended one of interdenominational Christian association's weekly meetings to share the nature and purpose of the study. During my meeting, I provided each pastor with an informational sheet that included a detailed overview of the study and explained the value of their participation

in the research process. Additionally, I answered any questions that pastors posed. I attached a calendar to the study sheet, which allowed each clergy to indicate days and times when they were available to meet for an interview as well as to provide their contact information. During this meeting five pastors expressed interest and provided their contact information. Within 48 hours, I contacted these five pastors to schedule an interview date and location. After considering scheduling conflicts, I was only able to confirm interviews for three of these pastors. In an effort to include pastors outside of the interdenominational Christian association, I contacted a number of senior clergy leaders via phone from a list of predominately Black clergy. Three of the participants in this study were recruited and confirmed using this method.

### **Description of the sample**

Ultimately the study consisted of six participants, five males and one female. An additional female expressed interest in participating in the study, but had schedule conflicts that prevented her from confirming an interview. This was the case for two additional males who initially expressed interest in the study. All final participants met criteria for inclusion in the study.

Below, I have provided a brief vignette that describes each participant's general characteristics. The length of time that clergy had been ordained varied considerably from nine-30 years. The clergy ranged in age of 31-67 years old. Three of the clergy were married, two were single (never married), and one (the female) was widowed. All of them have at least some college education. The membership size of the congregations varies significantly from 20-300 congregants.



## **Participant Vignettes**

I briefly introduce the clergy who participated in the study below. To protect their anonymity, I used pseudonyms in the vignettes.

**Kenny.** Kenny is a 51-year old Black male senior pastor. We talked on the phone extensively about the subject prior to our interview. He was willing and very eager to accept my invitation to participate in the study. He mentioned that my invitation was likely a part of God's plan for a new ministry within his congregation. He has been married to a pastor for a number of years. Kenny reported that he was invested in the subject because of his wife's previous experiences with IPV. He also discussed the pervasiveness of IPV within his congregation.

**Jessie.** Jessie is a married Black man. He has been a senior clergy leader for a great number of years. He was very open during the interview about his experiences with abused women and couples. During our conversation, it was apparent that Jessie considers himself as continuously learning about intimate relationships. He often spoke of themes taught by television evangelists and life coaches. Jessie was very accessible for his interview and post meeting. He was one of two pastors that participated in the post meeting where he confirmed themes from his interview.

**Dexter.** Dexter is a senior pastor. He is from a denomination where he often travels to serve at different churches. This arrangement makes his pastoral position unique in that congregants understand that his tenure at the church is not lengthy. Dexter reported a number of nuances that affected his placement at his present church. He talked about the culture and salary that he received as factors that were challenging, but that did not affect his commitment to service. He described himself as a shy man who never married, but dedicated himself to the

service of the Lord. Dexter appeared curious about the research and asked questions about its use for the community. His concern spoke volumes after hearing his conversation about his efforts with helping women and families in need.

**Clark.** Clark is the youngest pastor to participate in the study. His experiences with intimate partner violence vary. However, he admitted to being extremely informed about the phenomenon. He answered all questions thoroughly during the interview and talked extensively after the interview about clergy and IPV. Clark displayed great intellectuality as evidenced by the considerable thought he put into the subject as well as the church's response. Clark appeared concerned specifically about clergy who perpetrate IPV against their spouses. He felt that this behavior placed a stain on the status and influence of clergy.

**Carl.** Carl is a clergy member who I sought out via my list of predominantly Black churches. He is a married senior clergy leader of a large Black congregation. We talked in-depth about the phenomenon before and after his interview. Carl recently attended a seminar on intimate partner violence and expressed interest in learning more about the phenomenon. He reported that all clergy should work together to become informed about IPV, but contended that this need will be likely met by clergy leaders' lack of collaboration with one another.

**Mary.** Mary is the only female senior clergy leader that participated in the study. During her interview, she was very vocal about IPV against women. She shared her personal experiences with IPV as well as those of her fellow women. She advocates for women who have experience IPV by counseling and encouraging them. Encouraging and guiding these women are most fundamental to her method of responding to IPV against women. Additionally, she provides hands-on support by often visiting abused women in places (e.g., hospitals, court) where she can advocate for them.

## Data Collection

In phenomenological research, researchers use in-depth interviews to collect data from participants. The interviews serve the purpose of gathering narratives about the phenomenon of interest from those who experienced the phenomenon. Kvale (2006) describes the interview as an exchange of two people's views on a common experience; the researcher attempts to understand the phenomenon from the other person's point-of-view.

**Interviews.** Interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded. The unstructured in-depth interviews lasted for an average of 45 minutes. Before each interview began, I reviewed the consent form with the participant (see Appendix A). Each participant elected to complete the consent form after I reviewed the document with them to ensure that he/she had a working understanding of the research questions and methods used in the study prior to the interview.

At the beginning of each interview I read aloud a standard script that provided the participant with details on how the remainder of the session would proceed (see Appendix C). In the script I also reminded participants to refrain from using the names of those he/she had counseled. I also sought additional questions that they had about the research. To help participants create narratives of their interactions with abused women, I asked them to respond to the following question: "Could you tell me about a time when you interacted with a female who informed you about her experiences with intimate partner violence?" After they provided their narrative relative to this question, I asked them, "Could you tell me about your beliefs about intimate partner violence?" I followed research questions with probes to assist participants with clarifying details about their experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). In an effort to ensure that all aspects of the participants' conscious experiences were captured, I concluded the interview by

asking if they had additional details to share. Great care was taken to ensure that no harm was done and that participants' rights were respected at all times. Soon after the interview, participants completed a demographic form that asked information about their age, years as clergy, size of congregation, and education level. Also, they were invited to participate in a follow-up interview to review, confirm, and/or modify details from their original interviews. Only two of the participants took advantage of this opportunity. During the follow-up interview participants were asked to review tentative themes that I found pertinent in their interviews.

**Field notes.** I recorded notes during and immediately following each participant's interview. I used field notes to contextualize interviews and to provide additional information during the data analysis stage of the research. These notes consisted of descriptions of the setting of the interview, nature of participants' communication, and my personal reactions to each participant's interview. I also noted any unusual occurrences such as interruptions.

**Confidentiality.** All research data (i.e., field notes, audio interviews, transcripts, demographic information) were imported in NVivo, a software program that organizes qualitative and quantitative data. Prior to importing notes and interviews into NVivo10, I assigned each participant a pseudonym and number. I replaced participants' names on all documents (i.e., notes, transcripts) with pseudonyms and numbers. Participants' names were placed on a master list kept separate from the list of pseudonyms. The master list was maintained in a locked file cabinet located in JHB room 427. The list of pseudonyms along with the data was locked in a file drawer in a locked faculty member's office. The master list and data will be destroyed within 3 years after the project is completed. All digital recorded interviews were erased from the recording device once they were imported in NVivo10 and transcribed.

They will be deleted from the NVivo10 software once the University of Tennessee has accepted the dissertation.

### **Analysis**

Although there are several methods for producing these descriptions, in this particular study, I analyzed all data using Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam's methods of analysis. Moustakas omits the epoche process in his modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis. However, I incorporated this process into my final analysis procedure. The procedure is highlighted below:

- I. I presented a full description of my experience of the phenomenon. This process is known as bracketing.
- II. I listed each statement that was relevant to my experience. This process is also referred to as horizontalization.
- III. Using the reduction and elimination process, I omitted certain statements according to the two criteria below. Statements that did not meet criteria were eliminated. The remaining statements are the invariant constituents.
  - a. The statement must contain a moment of the experience that is necessary for understanding the phenomenon.
  - b. The moment can be labeled.
- IV. I clustered the invariant constituents into themes
  - a. The themes and invariant constituents were synthesized into a textural description of the experience for each participant. The textural description describes "the what" of the experience.

- b. Using the textural description, I constructed a structural description of my experience of the phenomenon. The structural description describes how participants experience the phenomenon.
  - c. I constructed a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of your experiences.
- V. At this point in the research process, I offered each with an opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview to verify, clarify, and modify their original statements. Only two of the six participants verified and clarified their transcripts. After considering the feedback that two of the participants provided, I proceeded to the last step in the process.
- VI. Lastly, I constructed a composite textural-structural description of the essences of the experiences by integrating each participant's textural-structural descriptions.

**The interpretive group.** In an effort to establish trustworthiness of the data, I presented transcripts from one participant's interview to the interpretive phenomenological research group at the University of Tennessee (see Appendix b for the confidentiality statement). The group consists of students and professors across various disciplines at the University of Tennessee. During sessions with this group, two peers read aloud the transcripts. The purpose of this action is to provide a reenactment of the interview for members of the interpretive group. Group members were encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas about the participant's narratives. This process helped me with interpretations of the final thematic structure.

**Validation of Data.** As Creswell (2007) suggested, researchers should employ multiple strategies for validating the findings. In this study, I utilized three validation strategies. First, as aforementioned, I engaged in a bracketing interview to recognize any biases about IPV or abused women that I potentially bring to the research process. Secondly, I used member checks to verify data interpretation. Member checking is an approach consistent with ensuring validity and is used to validate themes and meaning. I shared my findings with participants who chose to engage in this portion of the analysis process so that they could confirm and/or modify the accuracy of the information. Third, I presented interviews to the phenomenology research group, which evaluated the interview text to form units of meaning.

### **Summary**

The rigor associated with a phenomenological methodology lies in language as opposed to statistical power present in quantitative research. This method is completed through interviews with participants who have experienced a particular phenomenon. For this study, I used participants' language from their interview to help me understand the essence of the phenomenon through their experiences. The unstructured interview method allows clergy to articulate their experience with interacting with congregants who've experience IPV. Through its unstructured nature, participants have the freedom to control what they desire to share. This facet of the research is important and unique because it gives participants an opportunity to highlight parts of the phenomena that they find are figural.

## Chapter IV. FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter comprises a presentation of data, findings, and an analysis of the data, as well as a synthesis of the findings as it relates to African American clergy experiences of interacting with abused women. The purpose of this research is to illuminate clergy members' interactions with abused female congregants. Two research questions are considered:

1. How do clergy respond to women who seek help with intimate partner violence?
2. What are clergy leaders' convictions about violence against women?

The study, guided by these research questions, produces a synthesis of the phenomenon from the perspectives of six African American clergy. To keep with the tradition of phenomenology, much of the results are presented using participants' language.

### Biblical scripture sharing/Spiritual Advisor

Across all accounts, clergy discussed their experience with sharing biblical scripture. According to the clergy, sharing biblical scripture was very important when interacting with an abused woman. Clergy emphasized the importance of family and marriage, love, and forgiveness as they perceived them to be communicated through the Bible. For example, when Carl was asked about the specific biblical topics that he used in his interactions with abused women, he reported that his experience included talking with abused women about the importance of the family. He said that

“family is very important because it's a biblical based thing.” When Jessie interacted with abused women, he used basic Biblical principles about what love really is,



You know, as far as Corinthians 13...I go to that and talk to people about what real love is, you know real love...You know, I go over there and get the scriptures and give them to them and then I tell them about what life is really about.

They also used biblical scripture to support the sanctity of the family. Scripture was at the heart of clergy leaders' interactions, and family preservation seemed to be one of the tenets heavily expressed in scriptural teaching. For example, Carl emphasized interaction patterns that threaten the family system. In narrating his experience with speaking to an abused woman, he said that, "We talked about the family and how what's going on here and [how] you all's marriage is going to affect the children." He continued to speak about the peril associated with not only the children's functioning, but the intact state of the family.

Clergy leaders' emphasis on the state of the family was commonly sermonized on Sunday morning at which time clergy preached about love and in some cases hope for the family. Overall, clergy's work with abused women aimed to create and strengthen Christ-oriented marriages and families, a goal they asserted is supported by the bible—the source of God's word.

In their attempt to keep the family together, clergy centered on the marital relationship. They indicated that this unit was the starting point for the creation of families, and therefore needed special attention. Clergy focused on biblical concepts of the family such as ensuring that both members received salvation and were chosen by God to establish their marital covenant. To ensure that both partners met this requirement, some clergy leaders did several things.

When clergy members met with abused women and in some cases their partners, they showed concern for the baptismal status of the family. They wanted to know when both partners received salvation and what clergy leader(s) performed the baptism. Moreover, Pastor Carl wanted to know who officiated the marriage. This information provided him with background on

the couple's marriage preparation process as well as their process of spiritual growth. It also appeared that this knowledge aided clergy with understanding the relationship interactions between an abused woman and her partner. Carl provided an account of his interaction with an abused Christian woman who was married to a non-Christian man. He identified that the couple's religious discordance in areas of salvation and spiritual growth presented an issue within their relationship. The pair was not unified in the Body of Christ. However, in accordance with the bible, clergy supported both partners in spiritual transformation as opposed to recommending a marital separation.

Collectively, the clergy expressed the desire to see couples remain together in a Christ-like relationship. However, they were not supportive of unhealthy marriages particularly those characterized as abusive. They frequently used biblical principles to undermine scripture that their fellow clergy used in order to keep abused women in unhealthy marriages. For example, Kenny narrated a story about his ministerial peers who support intact marriages even in the event that a partner is abusive. According to Kenny, his peers posited that regardless of the problem, scripture speaks against divorce and therefore couples should remain together and work to resolve their conflicts.

However, Kenny contested their convictions and focused on Romans 12 and 18, which instructs people to "live peacefully." Jessie's ideas of marriage and intimate abuse corresponded to those held by Kenny. Jessie stated that,

...when we're giving those vows, you know, for better, for worse, rich or poor and sickness, health, love and cherish 'till death do you part, you know that sounds like you should never part, you know it's sickness and in health, for better or for worse, you know, it seems like it's saying you should always stay there in that mess, but when I look at the other part, the love

part and I see and I know what the scripture's saying and stuff that love hides a multitude of faults, but if love is not going to change the other side and you're still going through that mess, you need to separate. You know God don't want you to stay in there getting beat to death because you may love the person and they don't love you cause they really don't love you when they do things such as beat you and stuff.

Clark shared the same sentiment. He said that while divorce is never desirable, it's considered inevitable if a woman is in a violent relationship. "I know what the Bible says in regards to [divorce], I do try to stay away from that...I have recommended a separation for both of them to have time to work out." Clark then went on to reference biblical sayings from Apostle Paul.

He further asserted,

I would recommend that to someone, if their life is in danger. I have recommended a separation before for both of them to have time to work out, you know, what it is that they're struggling with, dealing with. The apostle Paul talks briefly about it and he says especially as it related to their you know sexual activity, he said "If you all are in agreement on this, you know to separate for a while, but you know just don't withhold it from each other just to withhold it, but as he said you know if you all are, you know, in accord with this, he said make sure that's within a decent time frame so that you all will come back together.

Clergy used such biblical teachings to also describe how couples could interact and stay together.

Kenny stated, "the Bible says that when a man finds a wife, he has found a good thing and the favor thereof. She's his favor...how a man treats his wife will be the equivalent to how God treats him. You know if you a man and you ain't been blessed, check how

you love your wife. Ah, I guarantee most men that are loving their wives and according to the Word of God, ah loving them as if there's no tomorrow, their relationship is prospering and I guarantee you that God is showing them great favor because the Bible says to love your wife as the church.”

Jessie acknowledged the difficulties that couples may experience within their relationship. He reported that such relationship challenges could be met with love. Jessie said,

I just use basic Biblical principles about what love really is, you know, as far as Corinthians 13, you know. I go to that and talk to people about what real love is, you know real love. I know people gonna have arguments sometime and that is just natural in life that people have some falling outs. They're not gonna always agree on everything and there are gonna be those times and I always tell people that this is what really makes a strong marriage you know when you go through some things in your marriage and you are able to overcome those things that you have been through that it builds a stronger bond and stuff.” He said, “it's that faucet love that turns off and turns on and stuff and we need the real love. We know real love will find a way to make things work. Real love finds a way to make things work but that faucet love it will never find a way to make it work.

Clergy described violence against women as the antithesis of love. Jessie stated that “Love does not act the way that some people treat one another and I always tell people you know you can do bad all by yourself.” Many of the abused women that they interacted with were inclined to remain with abusive partners; many times out of deep affection. Clergy had a difficult time understanding these women's choices. They could not fathom how both—love and violence—were remotely associated. Clergy like Clark, sat in confusion as to how love--a

biblically based principle--was associated with something so ungodly such as violence. They asserted that while no marriage was exempt from conflict, each marriage should be replete with Godly love. Love is what clergy preached from the pulpit, love is the hope that they had for family preservation. Clark stated,

I often ask and in this or any troubled relationship whether domestic or not um, is Do you love them? because I think that's a great starting place. If you could say Yes, I still love them. well we've got something to work with and so if love is still in play, if love is still a factor then I think we've got some stuff to build off of.

Kenny stated that,

God is a God of love and He does not intend for a woman to be beaten or treated less than a dog...When a man breaks that covenant of love then the couple must separate so that God can work on his heart. If God is in the center of their lives, then he can convict both hearts and they can come together.

This statement conveyed the impression that God's call for love is what sustains the family and what prevents a man from abusing his wife.

Clergy also underscored the power of forgiveness between couples, particularly since God easily forgives (Daniel 9:9). Carl provided an account of his experience with a woman with whom he shared the biblical literature on forgiveness. He affirmed that because he shared the biblical literature,

She did not go around with that chip, so to speak, on her shoulder. She was able to move on and I think that is what helped her to move some of the stress she went through and move on with her life. I think that right there helped greatly.

An abused woman's ability to forgive was significant as was her partner's ability to accept the process of being forgiven. Clergy asserted that perpetrators should understand that abused women need time to forgive them for what they did. They took care to say that abuse was to be forgiven but likely not to be forgotten. As God calls his people to forgive so should both partners, but with the understanding that the issue may resurface. Kenny refers to this as "reoccurrence" because,

What happens is you can forgive somebody but you won't forget what happened.

For example, that would be like a husband, you know who was abusive mentally by cheating. Now, he may have come to her and told her that he loved her and everything's cool now but she may have forgiven him or forgotten all of his sins but then there's a reoccurrence. If he says I'm gonna be home at 5:00, and he comes home at 5:01, she has to deal with the reoccurrence. She's going Oh Lord. He said 5:00, it's 5:01, who's he with today, and all those emotions, all that pain comes back so you have to deal with that reoccurrence and I like to call it word placement, because any thought we get in our minds, we have to arrest it with the Word of God and subject it to the word of God because the enemy will mess up somebody's mind with the reoccurrence and that's something that you really have to, you know really deal with... God's word is considered supreme and healing for those who need to be forgiven and those who need to forgive others.

### **Pastoral Care Counselor**

Clergy reported that Christian pastoral care was their primary response to abused women. As abused women frequently sought clergy for help with violent relationships, pastoral counseling was one of the key strategies clergy used to support these women. As one pastor stated, "I'm just passionate about counseling sessions and helping people to stay on track." In

providing counseling, clergy appeared to focus on its nature. Specifically, the counseling that clergy provided was confidential, family-driven, and safety-focused.

The clergy emphasized their attempts to ensure that counseling was confidential. For example, to ensure that abused women were protected, some clergy implemented protocols where another ordained member of the congregation was nearby during counseling sessions. Clark said,

I try to keep a secretary at the office or somebody there, you know, as just kind of a CYA thing but you know give them, you know, their privacy and so forth and all of my staff has confidentiality forms as well that they've had to sign waivers.

Another clergy stressed the idea that this additional person was female. These factors were important as they had implications to how those who sought help connected to the church. Confidentiality was associated with congregants' trust of the pastor and the church. Dexter insisted that, "once I lose that trust with pastoral care, you know, once that is diluted, you know, what defines me as a pastor is gone at that point." However, clergy did not feel solely responsible for maintaining confidentiality or for promoting congregants' trust. Members of the church also needed to respect the confidentiality of abused women's disclosures. Some clergy considered confidentiality of abused women's receipt of counseling as the church's responsibility. Dexter expressed a concern about members hurting the church by failing to maintaining privacy. He recounted a time at a previous pastoral appointment where members would speak negatively about certain things and people within the church. Therefore, in order to safeguard others' privacy of information he interacts alone with those who seek his help.

Some clergy provided conjoint pastoral care for partners who experienced intimate partner violence within their relationship. Clergy believed that conjoint counseling provides

each partner the opportunity to share their perspective of the issue(s), which also offers clergy a holistic view the couple's story. Clergy expressed concern about hearing only one perspective of the couple's issue. They suggested that hearing half of the story could cause lead them to form a wrong impression of the problem. Kenny said.

because it works a lot better and sometimes men will open up better when they're both together... The man will tend to open up more and more is accomplished when you can get them both here as opposed to talking to one of them because then the other one's getting second hand knowledge and that's not a good thing.

Clergy's counseling with couples began well before they provided them help with IPV. Counseling typically began when clergy provided couples with pre-marital counseling. They emphasized that premarital counseling was vital for the longevity of marital relationships. Jessie stated, "just like when I'm counseling people for marriage you know I don't leave anything out, you know, I give them the whole deal." Kenny also stated,

I truly believe that counseling in the beginning is a great way to prevent some of the things that happens as far as abuse is concerned because you may be in counseling and there may be a whole lot of black flags going up and may say 'Hmm', maybe I better hold off. Maybe he or maybe she ain't the one, and so then you avoid something further down the road, so I think counseling is very vital to producing good marriages...I truly believe that prevention counseling means prevention and so I believe if you looked at many marriages that ah, have either a physical or a verbal abuse, a lot of them have not been counseled so I think it's vital.



Clergy did not routinely suggest that unmarried women receive couples' counseling. Many times clergy offered individual counseling to the abuser. These sessions were held at separate times from those of their abused partners. Clergy expressed fear that violence would escalate if the two individuals were counseled together. When abused women were unmarried, clergy's focus leaned more towards the needs of the woman. Clergy's aim for individual counseling with single abused women was to empower and help them work through the issues they experienced as a result of IPV. Clergy were content when this aim of counseling was achieved. For example, Carl mentioned that. "Eventually, the relationship needed ending. It ended on that note; however, the rewarding thing was for her to bring some closure to it and get some satisfaction where she could move on with her life."

When warranted, clergy also counseled abused women's children. Carl recounted an experience where children had been affected by their parents' relational issues. The children were angry and had difficulty coping with the emotion. Clergy sat down and talked with the children with regard to the problems they experienced spanning from hurt to anger. They expressed concern for the children's overall well-being. One pastor expressed the urgency of helping the family particularly when children were involved. As Kenny put it, the children were considered "God's children."

Clergy strove to ensure that women were safe during the process of pastoral care. They provided a number of attempts to promote abused women's safety. Kenny's concern for women prompted him to ask specific members of the congregation if abused women could reside with them until clergy figured out the next step in providing them with a safe space. He stated that,

So what actually happened was there's a couple at our church, they had a home that they wasn't living in which was actually out of town so we allowed for [the abused woman] to

go there and stay. She stayed for about a week which also gave her husband ample time to make some decisions and it gave her time for us to also counsel her.

Clergy considered it vital to get abused women to a safe place. A safe place was referred to somewhere that the women could think, receive help, and be protected from partner abuse. Clergy such as Dexter ensured they were accessible to respond to the needs of women. He provided his mobile number where congregants could access him 24 hours a day.

Clergy were also concerned about their level of involvement in matters of abused couples. Clark expressed,

the fear that I always have is that he's aware that she's seeking help and he retaliates on her for that and so that's always a fear is that he knows or he suspects that she's trying to reach out to get help and in turn, that puts more harm on her...

Although counseling was one of the first responses the clergy provided, clergy were very much aware of the danger associated with it. They remained conscious of the harm that counseling could cause and remarked about the potential for the abuser to fatally harm the abused woman upon notice of their involvement.

Often, clergy suggested that women leave their abusive mate to prevent further danger. They noted that when a woman is faced with the decision to live or die at the hands of an abusive mate, her ultimate decision should be to leave. Kenny discussed a situation where he provided an abused woman counseling with regard to her relationship. The abused woman decided to remain in the relationship and she and her mate began to attend church services together. Kenny reported that although the woman and man reconciled, she remained fearful of her partner. He speculated that fear may be the reason that she later began to miss weekly church services. In general, clergy found it common that abused women experience interruptions in attendance

services sometime during their relationship. Clergy found the interruption troubling as they were unable to verify whether or not the woman was safe.

Clergy attempted to provide Christian pastoral care to abused women and/or their abusive mates. However, when counseling was not enough they were more than happy to refer these women to other supportive resources. Although they instinctually referred abused women to faith-based organizations, clergy often referred women to non-Christian institutions if such resources were accessible and beneficial to the woman. However, prior to directing women to non-Christian services, they ensured that the service providers were highly trained in areas that fit the needs of abused women. Carl said,

I always try to know something about what I'm referring them to and not just to refer them because the name sounds flashy and good. I want to know what's behind that and so I've always tried to do my homework first before I refer them because at the end of the day that person in most cases is still a member that I'm responsible for. So, I want to make sure that I've done my homework in referring them to a place that can further help them to cope with or deal with what they are dealing with because most of the time at the end of the day they're going to come right back into the setting where I am, but they would come back as a better person.

This concern also applied to the abuser. Kenny expressed his concern for getting abusers the best healthcare they could get, as they were the central part of the issue. Clergy also provided and linked women to additional resources that provided monetary support. Dexter referenced a church account that he made available for those in crisis. Since he considered IPV a crisis, he provided abused women with financial and food resources that responded to their needs. Like other clergy, Dexter met with women to assess what they perceived to be their needs. Many of

these needs were economic and medical in nature. As such, clergy and/or other community supports assisted women with these additional resources.

### **Compassionate leaders**

In sharing their experiences with abused women clergy leaders described themselves as holding a number of compassionate leadership roles. They considered themselves as teachers and preachers of God's word, reverent leaders, and women advocates. They perceived that their interactions with abused women validated these roles. Carl shared, "probably twelve years ago concerning a female that came into my office and wanted to talk about domestic violence... I felt as a pastor she had a great deal of confidence in me to even come to share with me."

Abused women also entrusted clergy to help abusive mates. Dexter noted,

the person contacted me personally as their pastor by phone. I followed up as well with her and her husband was incarcerated in the local jail. She had an interest in me stopping by to visit, to start visiting her husband and I did.

Clergy took their role of reverent leaders very seriously as they wanted to help the women in ways that the women thought were necessary.

Clergy were not only considered strong leaders, they were advocates of abused women. During the helping process, clergy worked with abused women to aid them with piecing together their lives. For example, Mary facilitated a group with abused women. The women were previously and/or currently in violent relationships. Her aim in working with the women was to strengthen their lives in areas of autonomy, spiritual growth, and overall self-concept. Mary noted, "it's a strengthening but it's also a spiritual group and we use the Word of God and we first talk about who we are and that's the only thing we talk about you know like, Who are you? Who you really are."

Mary also narrated stories where she attended court rulings with abused women. She even stood at the bedside of a young woman with whom she worked. She stated that, “I got the call to come to the hospital and when I walked in, she was almost, it was to me, unbearable to look at her and to restrain myself as much as I could from showing it but she almost unrecognizable and she had been beaten and pistol whipped and stabbed and cut all in the same incident.” As evidenced, clergy committed themselves to supporting and advocating for the needs of abused women.

The majority of clergy considered themselves investing in the lives of these women and those coming after them; they considered themselves trainers. Mary, the clergy leader who led group sessions with IPV survivors, trained abused women so that they could go forward and help other women. In her experience, she shared knowledge, resources, and God’s word with abused women in hopes that they would disseminate this information with other abused women. The women that clergy trained became a part of the greater body of the church. These women were encouraged to be active in the church and to share their testimonies about their experiences with IPV. With regard to his experience with training abused women to “pay it forward”, Carl stated,

You know your story better than anybody else and whatever you go through, domestic violence or whatever, you have that story to share with someone else. I think that’s even another area that clergy can help people develop... how do I tell my story, how do I share my story, and so I think that a very powerful tool that has been most neglected in the church is teaching people how to not be embarrassed about what they went through, but to use it as a resource to tell your story to help somebody else.

## **Uninformed Responders**

In their descriptions, clergy described themselves as proactive in their response to help abused women. However, they regarded this task as daunting. Clergy spoke candidly about their inadequacies with responding to abused women who sought their support with regard to intimate violent relationships. Clergy admitted that they felt unprepared to effectively respond to abused women who sought their counsel. In their experiences with abused women, clergy noticed that they had training needs as well as a need to collaborate with peers that must be addressed in order for them to be better first responders.

All clergy members in this study believed that IPV was immoral. Accordingly, they were interested in providing better responses to abused women. Clergy recounted their experiences in working with abused women and expressed how uncomfortable and ill-prepared they felt in dealing with such an urgent problem. In an effort to avoid doing harm, clergy acknowledged their inadequacies and ensured that congregants were well aware of them. For example, Clark said that,

My rule of thumb for most situations is that we can sit down, converse for up to three times. I will give what the Bible says, what God expects. I am not here to tell you what to do or how to do it but 3 times and if we can't work it out or deal with it in 3 times, I will gladly refer to someone who is trained and licensed in that and so I always give that disclaimer because again, I know that I can't handle all these situations that that's just not expertise.

Carl also admitted that as a body, clergy lacked training in IPV. He recommended that clergy seek training on how to effectively address IPV. He asserted that

I don't take away that God has not called them [other clergy], but I think when God calls us, that's just the first calling, but He also calls us to prepare us, that we have to prepare ourselves in terms of knowing how to structure, how to get things to come together and how to use the resources around us, and many times I'm finding out many of our clergy have not put themselves in a position to do that.

He contended that,

Training for the clergy...there are a lot of things that go on in our community. We have a leadership class that goes on and a lot of people are not aware of it and we are trying to get it out there where people can be more informed concerning things the community is offering. I'm in a leadership class now that collaborates and last Tuesday I was in a domestic violence workshop, so there are workshops that go on probably weekly in this community, but I think in a more informative way we got to get the word out to our churches, to our clergy where they can attend these workshops and so that's where we are now. I think we got to be more informative to get our clergy in settings and then clergy also must arise to the occasion to go.

Clergy talked about their need to connect with the community and educate them on IPV against women. For example, Mary's experience involved her work with researchers and nonprofit representatives and Clark's experience concerned connecting members of the African American community. Clark said,

I think we have to get our churches especially to create a format, so to speak, a forum if you will that we invite people to...let's talk about this issue called domestic violence. What does he look like or what does she look like and so we got to talk about that rather than you know, we saw Mrs. So-and-so's window pane busted. It's a consistent thing and

so I'm not going to say anything, I'm not going to get involved. I think we are living in a time where we must get involved and we can no longer be silent.

Like other clergy, his experience consisted of spreading awareness and having a dialogue about IPV against women.

Clergy also experienced relational issues with abused women. After working diligently to assist these women, clergy eventually lost contact with them. This loss in contact was not intentional. However, clergy did not follow-up with abused women after providing them with assistance. They acknowledged the need to develop a response protocol that helped them to remain in contact with these women as a measure of safety. Clark stated,

I don't know how that other one [violent situation] worked out so that's something I should probably develop or come up with because I'm not sure. The only reason I know that the first situation worked out is because the young lady came back to me and she informed that, you know, they were no longer together and so forth and so on but I really need to get a response protocol together so that I'll know how to follow up with this stuff and see how things are progressing.

### **Summary**

I used a qualitative methodology to understand how African American clergy interacted with abused women who sought their help with incidents of IPV. A phenomenological method was used to understand these experiences. Six African American clergy took part in the study. They answered two questions: a central question and a subquestion. The central research question for this study was, "What are your experiences with interacting with abused female congregants?" The subquestion was, "Could you tell me about your beliefs about violence against women?"



The findings reveal that clergy have similar experiences of responding to African American women's report of IPV. Overall, clergy members' lived experiences with abused women can be described as supportive. They provided pastoral care through means of resources, biblical-based guidance, and a safe space. Clergy members showed genuine concern for the well-being of women and families; however, they felt the need to acquire more knowledge of IPV.

## Chapter V. DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The purpose of the current study was to capture the essence of African American religious leaders' responses to IPV against women within their congregation. Moreover, I sought to understand their perspectives of IPV against women. Clergy leaders' responses and perspectives are critical to women's help-seeking efforts, as scholars propose that clergy are typically the first persons with whom abused women share their experiences with IPV. To explore clergy leaders' experiences, I asked six leaders the following central question: "Can you tell me about your experience interacting with a female congregant who experienced IPV?" Upon my analysis of leaders' narratives, I found four themes that emerged from the data: biblical scripture sharing/spiritual advisors, pastoral care/counselors, compassionate leaders, and uninformed responders.

This chapter provides an overview of the findings as it relates to the extant literature. In this chapter, I summarize and describe the four major thematic findings that emerged from the data. The chapter will begin with conclusions of the findings. Conclusions will be linked to the extant literature. Next, I address the limitations for the study. In the limitation section, I underscore the caveats of the sample size and population characteristics. Finally, I present the implications of the results for future studies, followed by a summary of the dissertation. In order to stay true to the phenomenological research method, I describe and also seek to understand clergy leaders' lived experiences through my synthesis and interpretation of the phenomenon.

## Conclusions

All of the clergy in this study recognized the prevalence of IPV in the African American community. They shared knowledge of a number of social ills that pervade the Black experience and discussed the unique issues that exacerbate the issues. One clergy leader implied that young ladies have to learn more about relationships in effort to respond to issues such as IPV. More specifically, he stated that, “young ladies need to be taught how to respect themselves...they need to be taught that they don’t have to lower their standards to be with anyone.” While some may receive his recommendation as empowering, feminist scholars would reject his advice. The clergy leader failed to acknowledge the role that young men have in IPV, but appeared to give only young ladies the overbearing responsibility of preventing IPV. His implication is just one example of how inherent sexism is in many social spheres. Moreover, considering the low socioeconomic communities in which all participants’ congregations were situated, it may be that an intersection of social characteristics impacts their judgment and responses towards abused women.

One major finding from the lived experiences of the clergy leaders who participated in the study concentrates on the services they provided to abused women. Clergy leaders served as counselors and witnesses of the Christian gospel. When abused women sought them for help, clergy were willing to respond to them in the most efficacious way in which they were familiar. These responses largely consisted of pastoral care and biblical scripture sharing. These findings are consistent with extant research on clergy leaders’ responses. Since groundbreaking research conducted by Bowker (1982), scholars have reported that clergy’s most common form of helping abused women is pastoral counseling. This response is not uncommon as the literature is replete with work that emphasizes clergy leaders’ role as counselors for members of their congregations

(Tipton, 2014). Typically, congregants seek out clergy for support with a gamut of issues. Particularly in the Black community, clergy leaders are considered reverent healers more so than are secular counselors. Also, members of the Black community are more likely to approach the church for help than they are secular counselors. This practice is common as members of the Black community have historically rejected therapy because of their strong faith in God, and the desire to keep their lives private. For these reasons, clergy are critical responders to issues within the Black community.

Researchers who examined clergy responses to IPV reported that pastoral counseling not only emphasized focused talking, but also on educating women on resources that may be available (Wood & McHugh, 1994). These findings did not deviate much from those in the present study. Clergy were willing to equip women with knowledge of supportive resources, even those that were secular in nature. Participants were less concerned with secular versus Christian resources, than they were with the women's safety. They deemed it important that abused women were away from imminent danger. Therefore, to assess their safety, clergy used interactions with women to probe the details of their violent intimate relationship. They also sought information concerning the extent of the women's injuries, risk of further abuse, family effects and support, and safety planning. All of this information helped to set the stage for biblical counseling. The aims of biblical counseling were based on the needs of the women and were determined by the abused women. Clergy did not impose their views of what they perceived abused women needed. This action paralleled scholars and advocates treatment recommendations for providers who work with IPV survivors. As IPV is known for robbing women of liberty and autonomy, scholars (e.g., Black, 2003), recommend that they receive

support that empowers them to exercise decision making for their lives. The majority of the clergy made sure to consider this recommendation during their counseling practices.

In addition to providing pastoral counseling to abused women, some clergy thought it necessary to conduct counseling with both partners. They reported that conjoint counseling was more efficient because both perspectives could be heard. Others felt that the inclusion of both partners raised safety concerns. However, it is not surprising that clergy were willing to provide counseling with abused women and their mates. It seems intuitive that they would provide conjoint counseling considering that they are trained to work with marital partners. However, because violent relationships have several dynamics that distinguishes them from those without violence, clergy who wish to conduct conjoint counseling with abusive mates should be extremely careful. In fact, much of the empirical literature admonishes counselors to refrain from conducting conjoint counseling out of concern for the woman's safety (Maiuro & Eberle, 2008). However, a new body of literature suggests that conjoint therapy with batterers can be safe and effective with the proper treatment modalities (Stith, Rosen, McCollum, & Thomsen, 2007; Fals-Stewart, Klostermann, & Clinton-Sherrod, 2009). Considering clergy leaders' lack of solid protocols to respond to IPV, there is reasonable doubt that they operate from a modality that is specifically designed for couples experiencing IPV. Hence, I would not recommend that these clergy conduct conjoint therapy with couples experiencing IPV.

Another finding similar to those in the literature is clergy's lack of knowledge of IPV and training in IPV counseling (Potter, 2007). Clergy expressed concerns about working with abused women. They acknowledged their boundaries of competence in working with this population. They found IPV important yet had little knowledge of how to respond with the exception of pastoral counseling. Most of the clergy recognized their need to acquire skills that could

prepare them to be efficient responders of IPV against women. For example, some proclaimed a difficulty understanding a woman's decision to remain in an abusive relationship. They often asked themselves why these women stayed with their abusive partners. However, scholars note that focusing on the question, "why does she stay" implies that the abused woman is at fault. It is more appropriate to ask about the perpetrator's actions than those of the woman. Such a lack of knowledge about IPV and its best practices could designate clergy as a part of the problem rather than the solution.

This consequence supports the need for clergy to receive training in the area of IPV. None of the clergy in this study acknowledged previous extensive training in IPV; however, a few of them desired instruction on the phenomenon. In general, clergy leaders' knowledge of IPV tended to be influenced by biblical theology and family experiences of the phenomenon. Mary—the only female clergy in the study—illustrated this point. Among all of the participants her interactions with abused women appeared very purposeful and personal. She often shared her personal experience with IPV with other abused women. Her story helped build rapport with these women. Per her report, this relational skill appeared to be an effective instrument in working with abused women. Moreover, she appeared conscious of how the unique factors of race, gender, and class associated with Black women's experience of IPV, which reflected in her interactions with abused women. Another clergy leader shared his wife's story of abuse in an attempt to demonstrate his understanding of IPV against women as damaging and important.

Participants' responses to abused women support the propositions of Role Theory, as clergy engaged in tasks that they perceived relevant to their roles of preacher, counselor, and teacher. Even in their reported feelings of incompetence with managing IPV, clergy desired to remedy the situation. Therefore, they sought information about IPV or designed a protocol to

ensure that they did not step outside of the purview of their competence or comfort level. Role theory postulates that those who occupy a particular social position must perform well order for them to be recognized as fulfilling that position. If IPV victims do not recognize clergy as knowledgeable, respectful, or supportive it is likely that they will not view them as a source of refuge.

Although some of the findings from this study were similar to those in the extant research that considered clergy perspectives an IPV, some appear to be quite unique. More specifically, the empirical literature suggests that clergy often misuse scripture to promote the subjugation of women in abusive relationships (Levitt & Ware, 2006). The clergy in this study reported using scripture to only illustrate love and good treatment of women. Moreover, contrary to some religious traditions that hold physical abuse and control of women as legitimate methods of compelling women to submit to men, the clergy in this study agreed more with African American feminists and liberation theologians who report this thinking as biblically inappropriate (Bell & Mattis, 2000). Although the Bible clearly illustrates several examples of violence against women, the clergy in this study disagreed with such behavior in present-day and contended that New Testament biblical thinking consists of love and respect for women. They insisted that despite historical accounts of abuse within the bible, tenets such as respect and love supersede the mistreatment of women. Also, they acknowledged disappointment with clergy peers who tend to select certain biblical excerpts that seem to support their use of violence in efforts to justify their behavior. This action is referred to in the literature as “prooftexting”, where part of the Bible is taken out of context and used for one’s personal gain (Fortune & Enger, 2005).

Another finding in the literature that clergy's narratives failed to confirm is clergy's support for marital sustainability even in relationships that are characterized by violence. Potter (2007) suggests that biblical scripture reinforces the pervasive idea that wives shall remain in abusive relationships as divorce is prohibited except under certain circumstances, and IPV was not one of them. Many times abused women seek clergy for support with finding a way out, but they are told only to stay in the relationship (Potter, 2007; Shannon-Lewy & Dull, 2004). Clergy in this study did not disseminate this advice to abused women. While they rejected divorce as a solution to any relationship conflict, they were willing to suggest it at times where women's lives are at stake. Clergy were hopeful that partners could salvage their marriage, however when danger within the intimate relationship intensified, clergy's hope for marital reconciliation diminished.

The unique findings in this study may be explained by a number of factors. One important factor that may be relevant is the extent of clergy leaders' adherence to theological doctrine (i.e., liberalism, fundamentalism). Much of the literature that finds clergy support for IPV suggests that this support occurs primarily in conservative or fundamentalist congregations. These congregations are known for their seemingly rigid doctrine. Fundamentalist Christians view the Bible as God's truth and therefore consider it as literal. More liberal churches focus on the critical analysis of the bible with a consideration of Jesus' emphasis on compassion and love. These distinctions may be relevant to how clergy respond to and view abused women who seek their help.

Although I did not gather information about clergy leaders' orthodoxies, it is possible that their focus on biblical traits such as love and compassion suggests that many of the participants may operate from a liberal orthodoxy. Moreover, perhaps those who volunteered to participate



in this study held different beliefs and experience than those who chose to participate. For example, those who volunteered to partake in the study may have held favorable views about the treatment of women than those who did not participate in the study.

### **Personal Reflections**

Drawing on my experiences during the research process, I often think about a couple of unexpected challenges that I have come across. During the participant selection process, I was initially ecstatic to meet with prospective participants who were a part of a large group of clergy leaders. The day of my meeting with the group of leaders I presented information on the nature of the study and sought volunteers who wished to participate. I naively assumed that clergy would anxiously sit in anticipation to take part in the study. My naiveté arose out my awareness of the profound work that clergy leaders have done in responding to social issues within the Black community. I assumed that clergy would be excited to speak about their role in responding to IPV as a social issues that plagues the Black community substantially. To my amazement, only a handful of leaders showed interest in the study. While I sincerely appreciated the interest of these clergy, I was taken aback by those who did not shown interest in participating in the study.

After speaking with this group, I remained enthused about the opportunity to be a recipient of the living stories of clergy leaders. As the interview sessions began to take place, and I started to understand their experiences of responding to IPV against women, I became enlivened by the importance that they placed on the subject. Participating clergy spoke passionately about working with these women and families. All of them reported interest with receiving a copy of the final document to assess just what their peers are doing and what is left to do when working with female victims of IPV.

Another notable aspect of the study is clergy leaders' lack of collaboration with their peers. A few of the leaders expressed their disappointment with the poor culture of collaboration among their clergy peers. They spoke about their efforts to collaborate and appeared displeased with the lack of fruit from these attempts. I was dismayed by the absence of partnership among clergy. Many of these clergy led churches within a 3-mile radius of one another, but yet they remained distant. Clergy revealed that personality clashes among leaders were a common explanation for their lack of collaboration. This was difficult for me to comprehend as I assumed that they were working for the same purpose—winning souls for Christ.

Another observation that I found interesting was the emphasis that married male clergy placed on their love for their wives. Married clergy spoke considerably about their treatment towards women, more specifically their wives. I was not a bit surprised that they spoke favorably about their wives. Instead, I was intrigued by their attempts to explicitly convey the message that they were not abusive and could never do such harm to women. I wondered if they felt the need to emphasize their rejection of women abuse because I am a) a woman and b) clergy may likely suspect that I am against IPV due to my interest in the subject. Also, because the majority of participants are male, I ponder the extent to which participant-researcher gender differences may have affected participants' ability to speak openly and honestly about the subject.

Overall, I learned much from the leaders who participated in this study. First, I learned that although communities depend on clergy leaders to assist them in resolving a numbers of problems, clergy don't always feel comfortable with this dependence. Some participants expressed uneasiness with responding to the overwhelming problems that congregants brought to them. Part of their discomfort grew from their feelings of incompetence with a number of

subjects. Second, I learned that the church has shortcomings that affect their ability to maximally fulfill their overarching mission.

My naiveté about the church was challenged as I learned a great deal about its inner-workings. For example, the leaders talked openly about how personal traits influenced their ability to effectively work with one another. Although I am aware of how different personality attributes interact and affect work settings, I assumed that clergy leaders would be apt to set aside differences to accomplish the important mission of the church and the needs of its congregants. Finally, I learned while clergy are essentially the gatekeepers for many African American congregations, church secretaries are the gatekeepers for the clergy. During my attempts to invite clergy to participate in the study, I was often directed to contact the church secretary. Upon making contact with the church secretary I was often asked a number of screening questions such as, “What is the purpose of contact” and “What is the nature of the study.” After responding to their questions, the secretary stated that he/she would pass my information to the clergy. I am unsure if this step occurred, however, the screening process made it appear that some clergy were not as accessible as I initially thought. Moreover, I was slightly disappointed with the seemingly mandatory request for information. Particularly because some information—such as that provided by abused women—should be privy only to the clergy leader.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to the study, most of them common to qualitative inquiry. First, the characteristics of participants restricted the knowledge that could have been gleaned with the inclusion of additional qualities. The participants for this study were limited to African American senior clergy who had interacted with an abused woman.

These characteristics are not representative of clergy as a body. Also, a sample size of six may be considered small which may have reduced the knowledge that could have been obtained if a larger sample of participants had been included in the study. However, the sample size used in this study is considered adequate for a phenomenological method, which focuses more on the depth of subjective experiences as opposed to the breadth of generalizable ones.

Second, the study took place in a Southern city within the bible belt of the U.S.. Therefore one may wish to exercise caution when comparing participant's responses to the responses of clergy leaders in other less religious regions of the country. Moreover, the majority of IPV-related murders occur in the southern U.S., which may affect how clergy respond to women in abusive relationships (Levitt & Ware, 2006). Third, participants volunteered to take part in the study. Perhaps those who volunteered to participate in this study were in some way different than those who did not participate. Participants may have been more comfortable with the subject than those who chose not to participate. Lastly, the findings in this study were based upon retrospective narratives of participants. It is possible that some details of their narratives could have been forgotten overtime. Moreover, apropos this point, there is the possible existence of social desirability bias in participants' responses. The social desirability bias describes the potential that clergy inaccurately provided information in order to present themselves in favorable light. The likelihood that social desirability was evident in this study is considerable in light of two points. First, some of the clergy who participated in this study were a part of the interdenominational Christian association. I had established a working relationship with one of the members of the organization, who also introduced me to the group. Since these clergy within the association were connected to this particular leader, and considering the working relationship between the clergy leader and myself, perhaps clergy did not wish to share any incriminating or

unfavorable information with me. Secondly, the small Black population in the area that many of the clergy resided has compelled African Americans to build an enclave that maintains some cultural distinction from the larger area of the city. Those who are a part of the enclave—myself included—are familiar with one another or are connected in a form or another. These connections may discourage African American clergy from being honest about their experiences. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, this study continues to add value to the IPV literature.

These limitations could be addressed in future research by including a larger sample size, as well as including additional demographic variables. In particular, future research should consider the impact of gender, age, and to what extent clergy identify their church as conservative or liberal. This study included only one female. In the future, more female clergy should be included. Perhaps, female clergy leaders may reveal additional responses that have not been presented in this research. Additionally, future studies with African American clergy should include various religious affiliations and denominations. For example, future researchers may expound the literature by including the experiences of Muslim imams. In general, researchers should note the recruitment strategy used in this study and determine how the characteristics of the sample in this study might be different from the larger population of interest. Future research should also consider speaking directly to the survivors of IPV to receive information about their experiences with clergy leaders. Also, considering that men typically hold clergy headship positions, researchers should interview clergy leaders' wives regarding their interactions with abused women. In sum, considering these recommendations, future research should continue to examine how the clergy and the institution of the church can confront issues of IPV against women.

## **Implications of the Findings for Clergy Practice**

This study introduces a number of implications for clergy's future interactions with abused women. Clergy in this study provided their experiences in working with abused women. The most prominent interaction held between both parties took place in the counseling relationship. The counseling relationship began from abused women's pursuit of support from clergy. This is not uncommon as research illustrates that Black women frequently revere their clergy and, as such, seek their help with various matters including IPV. This study sought to examine how clergy address the needs of abused women who seek their help. Traditionally, clergy have urged abused women to pray about their problems with IPV. This study demonstrated that clergy leaders' are more proactive in their responses to congregants' concerns. They provided different modes of counseling, referred abused women to additional resources, and included survivors in the greater function of the church.

Although clergy leaders are proactive in their efforts to respond to IPV, their lack of knowledge and training in IPV makes their attempts somewhat ineffective. They admitted to being unaware about whether they were engaging in the best practices of responding to IPV. Their lack of knowledge on effective IPV responses can be addressed with additional training. Based on the findings in this study, clergy should take part in trainings geared towards understanding as well as effectively responding to IPV. These trainings should emphasize how structural factors of race, gender, and religious oppression impacts women's experiences with abuse. Such an emphasis confronts clergy with an honest discourse on how the church may contribute to the origins and maintenance of IPV. Additionally, clergy should educate their congregation on IPV so that all members of the church's system will have an understanding of what IPV looks like and how it impacts the greater community.

Perhaps, education can occur through a series of sermons on relationships, inviting an IPV expert to address the congregation, and/or creating a litany remembering IPV survivors. When vital members of the church's organization are aware of the prevalence and impact of IPV against women, those who seek support may feel less anxious and frustrated because the system in which they are seeking counsel is knowledgeable and potentially has experience with addressing the problem. The results of this study also imply that clergy must be attentive to the culture of the church. The Christian church is often recognized by its patriarchal structure where men serve as unilateral authority over the church and their homes. However, biblical scripture attests to God's love for- and value of women. Clergy should disseminate this message—along with other positive biblical texts about women—throughout their congregation in a move to promote a culture of love and equality for women.

Lastly, this study also brought to light the lack of collaboration that occurs within groups of African American clergy, as well as that between clergy and community organizations. Some participants mentioned a lack of cohesion amongst their counterparts. They suggested that their peers were not active in collaborating on critical social issues within the Black community. This is quite disappointing as there are numerous social ills that clergy could respond to in a potentially effective manner. It may be helpful for clergy to formulate relationships with one another to create a cooperative task force that could respond to IPV and other social problems within the Black community. Moreover, clergy should collaborate with IPV victim advocacy agencies, counseling, and social service organizations around their city in order to obtain the instruments and knowledge to address the religious and cultural issues associated with IPV in the Black community.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand African American clergy leaders' interactions with abused women. The findings of this study provided a deeper understanding of how clergy interact with and respond to abused women who seek out their support. The findings in this study are similar to those in the extant literature in some respects. However, they are also different in many respects that are important for the Black community, considering the dearth of literature on clergy leaders' response to IPV in this community. The implications of this study point to a need for clergy to increase their understanding of IPV violence against women as well as how to respond to those who fall victim to it. Overall, findings imply that African American clergy along with their respective church bodies have much work to do to combat violence against women.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Informed Consent Form  
Clergy Perspectives of Intimate Partner Violence against Women: A Phenomenological Study

**INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a research study about clergy leaders' experiences with female victims of intimate partner violence. The purpose of the current study is to examine African American clergy leaders' beliefs about and responses to IPV against women within their congregations. This study is being conducted by Milicia A. Tedder, a fourth year doctoral student in the Child and Family Studies program at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, as a partial fulfillment of her Doctoral degree. Her faculty advisor Delores Smith will guide her throughout the present research project. Delores Smith is an Associate Professor in the Child and Family Studies department at the University of Tennessee.

**INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY**

To be eligible for inclusion in this study, you must have previously advised a female victim of intimate partner violence with regard to her victimization experiences, have served as senior clergy for at least two years, and be at least 21 years of age. Additionally, the church in which you serve must be located within a 30-mile radius of Knoxville. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be involved in an interview with the researcher in which the researcher will ask you a number of questions related to the goal of the study. The interview will include questions about your experiences with female congregants who have experienced intimate partner violence. The interview will be audio-recorded with a digital recorder. The interview will take approximately 1.5 hours. After your interview, the researcher will provide you with a form that asks you to provide demographic information. After you complete the demographic form, the researcher will schedule a post-interview meeting where you will be asked to verify the statements from your interview and participation is voluntary. The post-interview meeting is optional. If you choose to take part in the post-interview, we will schedule it during the day of your interview. The post-interview will take place about two weeks after your interview, and will take approximately 1 hour to complete. There will be no recording in your post-interview meeting with the researcher. You have a right to review your audiotape or transcripts of the interviews, and ask that portions of your tape be removed if you are uncomfortable with the information.

**RISKS**

There are minimal anticipated risks associated with this study. The risk of harm is no greater, considering probability and magnitude, than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine psychological examinations or tests. There are no perceived potential dangers to individuals who participate in this study. However, it is possible that by participating in this study, you may develop discomfort in having to discuss your interactions with abused women.

\_\_\_\_\_ Participant's initials

If this occurs, you may terminate your participation in interviews at any time during the research. Should you have questions or concerns, the researcher will meet with you, at your convenience in an accessible location. Additionally, you may contact the Research Compliance officer, Brenda Lawson (865) 974-3466 should you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

### **BENEFITS**

Participation in this research project has reasonable benefits. The results of the study will be used to encourage a discourse on intimate partner violence against women among religious leaders. It is anticipated that the findings from this study of clergy leaders will extend our knowledge of the role of clergy leaders and their practices with women who are victims of intimate partner violence.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information in the study records will be kept confidential and will only be shared with a third-party transcriptionist and the University of Tennessee's phenomenology group. Before the PI shares your information with either party, she will replace your original name with a pseudonym to protect your personal information on all documents. The transcriptionist will complete a confidentiality agreement before receiving a copy of your audio-recorded interview. Within one month after the researcher receives the transcripts, the researcher will erase your audio-recorded interview from the recording device. The researcher will also erase any identifying information that your transcript may contain. The transcripts will be shared with members of the University of Tennessee's phenomenology group. Members of the group must agree to maintain confidentiality of your interview before the researcher is allowed to share the material with them.

Your transcripts and demographic information will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet—accessible only to the researcher--in the researcher's office. Transcripts, demographic information, and your audio-recorded interview will also be uploaded to the researcher's secure, password protected computer. Your audio-recorded interview will be erased from the computer once it is transcribed, within one month from the interview. Only the researcher has access to the computer. Your transcripts, field notes, and demographic information collected in this research project will be stored for approximately five years, and destroyed.

### **COMPENSATION**

No compensation will be provided in this study.

### **EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT**

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse subjects for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the researcher in charge, Milicia Tedder at (919) xxx-xxxx.

Participant's initials\_\_\_\_\_

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Milicia Tedder at 1518 W. Cumberland Ave, Room 427 and (919) xxx-xxxx. Additionally, you may contact Delores Smith at (865) 974-5316. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research [Compliance Officer](#) at (865) 974-3466.

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary.. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

**CONSENT**

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B. Study Information Sheet

### Clergy Perspectives of Intimate Partner Violence against Women: A Phenomenological Study

#### **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a research study about clergy leaders' experiences with female victims of intimate partner violence. The purpose of the current study is to examine African American clergy leaders' beliefs about and responses to IPV against women within their congregations. This study is being conducted by Milicia A. Tedder, a fourth year doctoral student in the Child and Family Studies program at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, as a partial fulfillment of her Doctoral degree. Her faculty advisor Delores Smith will guide her throughout the present research project. Delores Smith is an Associate Professor in the Child and Family Studies department at the University of Tennessee.

#### **INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY**

To be eligible for inclusion in this study, you must have previously advised a female victim of intimate partner violence with regard to her victimization experiences, have served as senior clergy for at least two years, and be at least 21 years of age. Additionally, the church in which you serve must be located within a 30-mile radius of Knoxville. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be involved in an interview with the researcher in which the researcher will ask you a number of questions related to the goal of the study. The interview will include questions about your experiences with female congregants who have experienced intimate partner violence. The interview will be audio-recorded with a digital recorder. The interview will take approximately 1.5 hours. After your interview, the researcher will provide you with a form that asks you to provide demographic information. After you complete the demographic form, the researcher will schedule a post-interview meeting where you will be asked to verify the statements from your interview and participation is voluntary. The post-interview meeting is optional. If you choose to take part in the post-interview, we will schedule it during the day of your interview. The post-interview will take place about two weeks after your interview, and will take approximately 1 hour to complete. There will be no recording in your post-interview meeting with the researcher. You have a right to review your audiotape or transcripts of the interviews, and ask that portions of your tape be removed if you are uncomfortable with the information.

#### **RISKS**

There are minimal anticipated risks associated with this study. The risk of harm is no greater, considering probability and magnitude, than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine psychological examinations or tests. There are no perceived potential dangers to individuals who participate in this study. However, it is possible that by participating in this study, you may develop discomfort in having to discuss your interactions with abused women. If this occurs, you may terminate your participation in interviews at any time during the research. Should you have questions or concerns, the researcher will meet with you, at your convenience in an accessible location. Additionally, you may contact the Research Compliance



officer, Brenda Lawson (865) 974-3466 should you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

## **BENEFITS**

Participation in this research project has reasonable benefits. The results of the study will be used to encourage a discourse on intimate partner violence against women among religious leaders. It is anticipated that the findings from this study of clergy leaders will extend our knowledge of the role of clergy leaders and their practices with women who are victims of intimate partner violence.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information in the study records will be kept confidential and will only be shared with a third-party transcriptionist and the University of Tennessee's phenomenology group. Before the PI shares your information with either party, she will replace your original name with a pseudonym to protect your personal information on all documents. The transcriptionist will complete a confidentiality agreement before receiving a copy of your audio-recorded interview. Within one month after the researcher receives the transcripts, the researcher will erase your audio-recorded interview from the recording device. The researcher will also erase any identifying information that your transcript may contain. The transcripts will be shared with members of the University of Tennessee's phenomenology group. Members of the group must agree to maintain confidentiality of your interview before the researcher is allowed to share the material with them. Your transcripts and demographic information will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet—accessible only to the researcher—in the researcher's office. Transcripts, demographic information, and your audio-recorded interview will also be uploaded to the researcher's secure, password protected computer. Your audio-recorded interview will be erased from the computer once it is transcribed, within one month from the interview. Only the researcher has access to the computer. Your transcripts, field notes, and demographic information collected in this research project will be stored for approximately five years, and destroyed.

## **COMPENSATION**

No compensation will be provided in this study.

## **EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT**

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse subjects for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the researcher in charge, Milicia Tedder at (919) xxx-xxxx.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Milicia Tedder at 1518 W. Cumberland Ave, Room 427. Additionally, you may contact Delores Smith at (865) 974-5316. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research [Compliance Officer](#) at (865) 974-3466.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

## Appendix C. Interview Guide

Introduction: Today, I will ask you a number of questions about intimate partner violence against women. I just ask that you base your responses solely on your experiences. If anything is unclear, please inform me of such. Do you have any questions about the research? I just would like to remind you to refrain from using names of any of the women that you've advised. Okay, I will now start the recording and we will begin.

1. Could you tell me about a time when you interacted with a female congregant who experienced intimate partner violence?
2. Can you tell me about your beliefs with regard to intimate partner violence against?

Conclusion: We have concluded the interview portion of our session today. Is there anything else that you would like to add to your interview? Thank you for participating in the interview. I will now stop the recording.

## Appendix D. Demographic questionnaire

**Instructions:** Please provide a response for each of the following questions:

**1. What is your age?** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What is your sex?**

Female  Male

**3. What is your marital status?**

Single  Married  Separated  Divorced  Widowed

**4. With which racial or ethnic category do you identify?**

American Indian / Native American

Asian

Black / African American

Hispanic / Latino

White / Caucasian

Pacific Islander

Other : \_\_\_\_\_

**5. What is the highest level of education you completed?**

Elementary school only

Some high school, but did not finish

Completed high school

Some college, but did not finish

- Two-year college degree / A.A / A.S.
- Four-year college degree / B.A. / B.S.
- Some graduate work
- Completed Masters or professional degree
- Advanced Graduate work or Ph.D.

**6. How long have you been a member of the clergy? \_\_\_\_\_**

**7. How long have you served as the senior clergy leader of the current church?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**8. Please provide an estimate of the number of members there are in your congregation.**

\_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix E. Debriefing form

Thank you for participating in my research study. This study explored the experiences of clergy leaders who have interacted with at least one woman who has been victimized by an intimate partner. As participants in my study, you answered interview questions that allowed me to gather valuable information about your experiences.

This research will help all of us--including the greater community--understand what it is like for clergy leaders to interact with female victims of intimate partner violence. I hope that this research will serve to improve future attempts to help victims of intimate partner violence in their help-seeking efforts.

If you have any questions about this research study, or if you would like a copy of the results, please call Milicia Tedder at (919) xxx-xxxx. You may request to have your information or any part of your responses withdrawn from the study. You may do so at this time or at a later date by contacting Milicia Tedder. If you do so, there is no penalty. If you have concerns about this study or your rights as a participant of this experiment, you are encouraged to contact the University of Tennessee Research Compliance Officer, Brenda Lawson at (865) 974-7697.

If you have experienced distress as a result of your participation in this study, please contact the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee at (865) 584-9125. The Mental Health Association of East Tennessee can link you to a number of treatment options. Please remember that any cost in seeking medical assistance is at your sole expense.

Thank you again for your participation,

**Signature of researcher** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix F. Confidentiality Agreement  
Transcription Services

I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist, individually and on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ [name of business or entity if applicable], do hereby agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes, videotapes, and oral or written documentation received from texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Milicia Tedder related to his/her research study titled *African American Clergy perspectives of Violence against Women: A Phenomenological Study*.

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio taped or live oral interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not disclose any information received for profit, gain, or otherwise;
3. To not make copies of any audio-recordings, or electronic versions of the transcribed interview texts;
4. To store all study related audiotapes, videotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
5. To return all audio-recordings and study related documents to Milicia Tedder in a complete and timely manner.
6. To refrain from saving audio-files or any study related documents on my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or paper files to which I will have access.

I am further aware that if any breach of confidentiality occurs, I will be fully subject to the laws of the State of Tennessee.

Transcriber name \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber signature \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber Name of Business and Title  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_





## Appendix H. Researcher's Script

*Prompt to representative:* Hello Mr./Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_. I would first like to introduce myself. My name is Milicia Tedder, I am a doctoral student at The University of Tennessee. I am conducting a research study that examines African American clergy leaders' perspectives about violence against women. The research focuses on each clergy leader's perspective and experiences with advising women who have sought them out for support with intimate partner violence victimization. In order to participate in the study, clergy leaders must have previously advised a female victim of intimate partner violence with regard to her victimization experiences, have served as senior clergy for at least two years, and be at least 21 years of age. If any clergy leaders within your organization meet these criteria, I am interested in speaking with them about the study and their potential interest in participating in the study. I would be happy to attend one of your regular meetings so that I can provide clergy leaders with information about the study as well as invite them to partake in the study.

## Appendix I. Researcher's Script

*Prompt to clergy contacted directly:* Greetings, My name is Milicia Tedder, I am a doctoral student at The University of Tennessee. I am conducting a research study that examines African American clergy leaders' perspectives about violence against women. The research focuses on each clergy leader's perspective and experiences with advising women who have sought them out for support with intimate partner violence victimization. In order to participate in the study, you must have previously advised a female victim of intimate partner violence with regard to her victimization experiences, have served as senior clergy for at least two years, and be at least 21 years of age. If you meet these criteria, I would like to invite you to participate in the study. As a participant in the study, you will participate in a 1-1.5 hour interview about your experiences with advising these women, as well as your perspective of violence against women. Your feedback will add to the current body of research on how to best support women who experience intimate partner violence. I would like to meet with you to provide further details about the study as well as to answer any questions that you may have in regard to the study.

## VITA

Milicia Tedder completed her Bachelor's degree in 2004 from the Psychology department at a long-term goal of developing a community women's center to benefit adolescent and adult women who present with a gamut of needs. North Carolina Central University (NCCU). She then continued her studies in NCCU's Master's of Psychology program until completion in 2008. Milicia worked a couple of years in the field of psychology where she conducted psychological evaluations, as well as provided outpatient mental health care to individuals and families with limited financial resources. While working across various settings, and in the best interest of those with whom she worked, Milicia realized her need to learn more about developmental trajectories and family systems. Therefore, she pursued a PhD in Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK). During her graduate studies at NCCU and UTK, she conducted research and engaged in applied practices with individuals from low-income communities, many of them also were survivors of intimate partner violence. She anticipates continuing her work with individual and families in a community health context. Milicia has a long-term goal of developing a community women's center that addresses the needs of female adolescents and women across a gamut of life domains.