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# "It Was Like Double Damage" : An Exploration of Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse, Institutional Response, and Posttraumatic Growth

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"It Was Like Double Damage": An Exploration of Clergy-Perpetrated  Sexual Abuse,

Institutional Response, and Posttraumatic Growth


A DISSERTATION

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By

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

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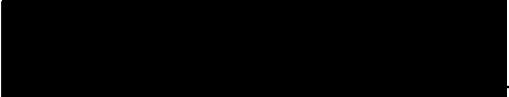
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ABSTRACT

"IT WAS LIKE DOUBLE DAMAGE": AN EXPLORATION OF CLERGY-PERPETRATED
SEXUAL ABUSE, INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE, AND POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

by Krystal L. Woolston

This study examines the relationship between institutional responses to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adult women and the survivor's level of posttraumatic growth, current spirituality, current religious commitment, well-being, and flourishing. The experience of adult women abused by clergy is not well-researched; this study seeks to highlight those experiences to the extent possible. This study utilized a mixed methods approach wherein surveys were collected from 108 participants, and follow up interviews were conducted with ten participants to further illustrate their experiences. All participants experienced some level of institutional betrayal which left lasting impacts on their ability to achieve posttraumatic growth, and their levels of spirituality, religious commitment, general well-being and flourishing. The findings suggest how a religious institution responds to reports of sexual abuse of adult women can make a difference in how that survivor experiences their life post-reporting of abuse. Interview participants shared recommendations for ways in which they felt institutions could better respond to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. These findings support the need for additional research on institutional responses to reports of sexual abuse of adults by religious institutions.

*Keywords:* institutional betrayal, clergy sexual abuse, adult survivors, posttraumatic growth, well-being, flourishing, religious commitment, spirituality

**Acknowledgements**

I'd like to take the time to first and foremost acknowledge and thank the participants of my study. Whether you participated in the survey or both the survey and an interview, it takes exceptional courage to revisit past traumas and talk about the things most are afraid to name. I am truly inspired by and proud of the strong women I was privileged to get to learn more about. I am grateful you took the opportunity to share a bit of your story with me and I hope I've honored them with this research.

I feel exceptionally blessed to have the dissertation committee that I do, led by an exceptionally inspirational chair, Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban. When I started this educational journey I was lost with no direction, and chose a research area that made logical sense for me given my current career. Several years into my journey, and a proposal defense later, I realized my heart was not in that research, and scrapped an entire half way done dissertation to start over on a topic I find a true calling and passion to. My committee did not blink an eye when I said I wanted to throw away years of research to go in a completely different direction. That level of support is difficult to find, and I am grateful for each of you. Your unending support of my research, and more importantly, of me, has made all the difference in my ability to continue to push forward in a PhD program and eventually complete a dissertation I can feel proud of. Thank you, Jen, Miriam, Kathryn, and David. Your support is absolutely transformational to me.

## Dedication

The topic researched in this dissertation is near and dear to my heart. I encountered a clergy perpetrator starting as a teenager which developed into a more significant abusive relationship in my young adulthood years. When I finally reported the abuse, my religious institution did not always respond in ways that were helpful. However, they assigned me a support person to go through the complaint process and healing afterwards; Jana Purkis-Brash. Jana has played one of the most influential roles in my life to help me grow as a person following trauma, and to find a faith and faith community again. Part of her contribution to my healing was assisting in adding an additional person to help me explore my faith and spirituality: Shawn Callender Hogan. Shawn is one of the kindest and gentlest souls I have ever met in my life. I would not be anywhere near where I am in life now if it were not for these two women supporting me through this difficult experience. I am forever grateful for the love and support I have received to both survive, and thrive in my life.

While I am the individual writing a dissertation and earning a PhD, it is only with the ongoing support and love I receive from my family and friends that allowed me to get to this point in my academic journey. My two sisters, Tiffany and Lizzette, have endured countless hours talking through difficulties and struggles, and years of a group chat many times dedicated solely to my frustrations with my academic program. You are both gems in my world and your unending love allows me to continue to grow and be successful. In addition, my life has been so full with friends and mentors that far outnumber my ability to name. I dreamed as a child of the kind of friendships and relationships I had seen on TV and in movies, never believing with my difficult upbringing I would ever have that kind of joy in my life. You all have fulfilled my life in all of those ways and I can say I truly have that tv movie dream life I had always hoped for.

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**CHAPTER I**

**Introduction to the Study**

Clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA) of adults is an abuse churches often do not

discuss but happens at an alarming rate (Chaves & Garland, 2009; Flynn, 2008). Chaves and

Garland (2009) found "when the experience is defined narrowly, approximately 1 in 50

churchgoing women have been the object of a sexual advance by a married religious leader in

their own congregation at some time during their adult life. Defined less narrowly,

approximately 1 in 30 churchgoing women have been the object of such an advance" (p. 821),

with the narrower definition being when an advance did not lead to an acknowledged

relationship by the individuals involved. CPSA happens through the misuse of power by the

perpetrator and the inability of the survivor to provide consent (Langberg, 2020; Stephens,

2011). The impact of CPSA on a survivor is often similar to the impact of sexual exploitation by

other helping professionals such as medical and mental health professionals and violates the

responsibility set forth within fiduciary duty (Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, et al., 2008). Because the

abuse is perpetrated by a member of clergy, there is also a potential impact on the survivor's

faith and spirituality. Often clergy perpetrators use the relationship with God as a way of

grooming the survivor and attempting to justify their abuse (Langberg, 2020). This dissertation

seeks to explore how faith, spirituality, well-being, and flourishing are impacted by CPSA and

the response of the institution to which the abuse was disclosed. One hypothesis is that the level

of institutional betrayal or institutional courage experienced by the survivor will have an impact

on the level of spirituality and engagement with religious institutions post disclosure of CPSA.

Furthermore, this study seeks to understand how the level of institutional betrayal or institutional

courage may help or hinder posttraumatic growth.

**Overarching Purpose Statement**

Clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse often leaves a significant and long-lasting impact on the

survivor of abuse with symptoms including posttraumatic stress disorder (Draucker, 2001;

Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, et al., 2008) depression (Draucker, 2001; Fogler, Shipherd, Rowe, et

al., 2008), poor self-esteem (Draucker, 2001; Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, et al., 2008; Garland,

2006), anxiety (Draucker, 2001; Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, et al., 2008), and social adjustment

problems (Draucker, 2001). In addition, due to the spiritual violation committed during this

abuse, often spirituality is significantly affected. Research suggests the spiritual aspect of the

abuse can be more traumatic than the physical violation (Pargament et al., 2008). The long-

lasting impact of this abuse warrants additional research to develop potential opportunities to

mitigate, as much as possible, the long-term negative impact on the survivor.

CPSA is an abuse of a sacred trust (Garland, 2006) and occurs often with adults in

congregations of varying religious institutions (Fogler, Shipherd, Rowe, et al., 2008). There is a

lack of literature around the abuse of adults within religious institutions with much of the

research that exists focusing primarily on abuse of children. Given the potentially large

population of survivors, it is imperative to identify and focus more on adults attending religious

institutions.

One of the challenges of researching this population is how often the survivor is unable to

identify the abuse. Because the survivor is an adult at the time of the abuse, they may think they

are to blame and incorrectly assume the abuse was consensual without accounting for the role of power within the relationship (Langberg, 2020). It often takes years for survivors to be able to identify what happened to them as abuse and realize it is not their fault (Garland, 2006).

Clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse has garnered more media attention in recent years specifically focusing on the Catholic Church (Fogler, Shipherd, Rowe, et al., 2008). However, this abuse is not exclusive to the Catholic Church (Garland, 2006). The United Methodist Church created the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, with a senior director for sexual ethics and advocacy position focused solely on education, advocacy, and survivor support for those abused by clergy within the denomination (General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, n.d.). After a local news report on sexual abuse within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Church developed the SBC Sexual Abuse Advisory Group to do a large self-study of abuse within SBC churches and created a report on how churches can respond to incidents of abuse and foster safer environments within SBC churches (Southern Baptist Convention, 2019). While much of the media attention has focused primarily on Christian faith institutions, this type of abuse is found in all different religious institutions including Christian, Jewish, and Islamic faiths (Adults Abused By Clergy, n.d.). Multiple faith-based organizations are creating these positions and reports because of the prevalence of abuse within religious organizations.

How an institution responds to reports of abuse can have a significant impact on the survivor. If institutional betrayal is present, it can exacerbate the trauma felt by the survivor, or alternately, when institutional courage is present, it can lessen the effects of trauma (Smith & Freyd, 2014, 2017). Smith & Freyd (2014) define institutional betrayal as "institutional action and inaction that exacerbate the impact of traumatic experiences […] individual experiences of

violations of trust and dependency perpetrated against any member of an institution in a way that does not necessarily arise from an individual's less-privileged identity" (p.577). In contrast to institutional betrayal, institutional courage is defined as "steps institutions can take to promote healing and trust of an institution" (Freyd & Smidt, 2019, p. 491). One way of lessening the effects of trauma and practicing institutional courage is by creating policies and institutional responses that help to encourage posttraumatic growth, defined as the "positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). The research surrounding the impact of CPSA suggests the abuse could be classified as a highly challenging life circumstance. CPSA and the impact of institutional betrayal have not been well researched; such research could provide insights on how to better serve survivors to promote growth after the traumatic experience of CPSA.

## Theoretical Perspectives

### Relational Developmental Systems

The proposed studies will explore clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, institutional betrayal, spirituality, well-being, flourishing and posttraumatic growth from a relational developmental systems meta-theoretical perspective. Metatheories are overarching theories that provide a worldview and grounding for other theories. Metatheories are purposefully more abstract and provide the broadest generality to help ground theories and explain the context of the theoretical perspectives encompassed within them (Overton, 2013). Relational developmental systems (RDS) meta-theory is guided by relational aspects of development, particularly the concepts of systemic development, bi-directionality and social justice (Lerner, 2006, 2012, 2015a; Overton, 2013).

RDS emphasizes the interdependence of the environment and the individual in human development therefore consistently allowing development to be adaptive to ever-changing environments and life circumstances. The interaction between an individual and their environment is an ongoing process that is itself meaningful to development (Agans et al., 2013; Lerner, 2006, 2012; Lerner et al., 2005; 2015; Overton, 2013). RDS includes the concept of plasticity, which asserts that a person can develop and change continuously throughout their lifetime dependent upon complex experiences within their life and how their environments impact those experiences and the way they respond to that environment (Lerner, 2012; Overton, 2013). Based on this concept of plasticity, a person can continuously change over time for better or worse depending on the context (Lerner & Overton, 2008).

Relational developmental systems meta-theory focuses on how adaptive developmental regulations emerge from the bi-directional relationship between an individual and their context (Lerner, 2006, 2012, 2015b). This relationship suggests the individual is constantly impacting the context and changing it similar to how the context is impacting and changing the individual; it is the influence of both on each other that spurs development.

Relational developmental systems meta-theory also emphasizes social justice and promotes social justice as a primary goal of all developmental research (Lerner, 2006, 2015a; Overton, 2013). The emphasis on individual change in the context of the environment is the focal point of RDS therefore requiring social justice to be a core target of development. Social justice is promoted naturally within RDS because it consistently explores the context and environment in which an individual is embedded. This is counter to having a "norm" against which others are compared. Therefore, an individual does not have a deficit if they do not live up to and represent the "norm" (Lerner, 2012). In addition to dismantling the idea of norms, the focus on the

individual ← → context relation makes it possible, through research, to develop responses for each individual from diverse backgrounds allowing opportunity for equitable responses based on the need for each person (Lerner & Overton, 2008).

RDS is ideal for understanding clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse in that it emphasizes the individuality of each person's experience, how their institutions may have responded and how that impacted the individual's future growth. In particular, the emphasis on the individual ← → context relationship illustrates how vital an institution's response to trauma is for the individual and institution that are impacted.

**Self Determination Theory**

This study also uses self-determination theory to frame the growth of the survivor post-CPSA. Self-determination theory (SDT) is an empirically based systemic organismic human motivation theory (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT is often considered a larger theory for understanding human motivation with six mini theories under its umbrella. For purposes of this study, components of two of the smaller theories will be integrated. Basic psychological needs theory (BPNT) and cognitive evaluation theory (CET) are used to operationalize the concepts of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and posttraumatic growth.

***Basic Psychological Needs Theory***

According to BPNT, there are three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) that must be satisfied to attain optimal growth, integrity, and wellness (Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2019; Buzinde, 2020; Curren & Ryan, 2020). Autonomy is regarded as the sense of self and ownership of one's actions (Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2019; Buzinde, 2020; Curren & Ryan, 2020; Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This relates to survivors of CPSA through their need to feel they are in control of their body and being after abuse (Langberg, 2020).

Competence is regarded as experiencing oneself as capable and able to succeed and grow

(Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2019; Buzinde, 2020; Curren & Ryan, 2020; Deci et al., 2017; Ryan &

Deci, 2017). This psychological need is especially salient within survivors of CPSA as often the

grooming process they endured leaves them feeling unstable and incapable of standing up for

them self (Garland, 2006; Langberg, 2020); therefore, focusing on this area post abuse can

provide an opportunity for significant growth. The third and final basic psychological need

necessary for wellness is relatedness. Relatedness is a sense of belonging or connection and

affirming relationships (Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2019; Buzinde, 2020; Curren & Ryan, 2020; Deci

et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Religious institutions often highlight a sense of belonging as a

selling point for becoming a part of their institution. However, after CPSA, a survivor does not

always feel comfortable returning to a religious institution (Chaves & Garland, 2009; Fogler,

Shipherd, Clarke, et al., 2008; Garland, 2006; Langberg, 2020). These psychological needs

illustrate the challenges to achieving wellness post CPSA. If these needs are not met, the

individual may face diminished growth, integrity, and wellness. Wellness is defined

as

> thriving or being fully functioning […] Thriving is characterized by vitality, awareness,
> access to, and exercise of one's human capacities and true self-regulation. […] Fully
> functioning individuals enjoy a free interplay of their faculties in contacting both their
> inner needs and states, nondefensively perceiving the circumstances in which they find
> others and themselves (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 241)

Essentially, wellness is not only happiness, but an individual being able to thrive within their life

circumstances and meet all of their inner needs while also understanding the circumstances

around them. Through the lens of posttraumatic growth after CPSA, wellness, as defined above,

may look like a survivor being able to meet their needs for understanding what happened to

them, how it happened, and how they can move past the abuse to thrive in their personal and

professional lives. An additional area of study within SDT that can further impact wellness is the

source of motivation (either intrinsic or extrinsic), which is discussed extensively in Cognitive

Evaluation Theory.

### *Cognitive Evaluation Theory*

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) is focused on intrinsic motivation and how the social

environment impacts intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Specifically, CET examines the

role of the environment in aiding or crippling intrinsic motivation. This area of development is

especially crucial for a survivor of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. Often the institutional

support the survivor once had is diminished upon disclosure of CPSA due to aspects of

institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2013). According to CET, the interaction between the

individual and the environment can result in differing levels of integrity ranging from a whole

and coherent self to a fragmented self (Arvanitis, 2017; Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2019). How the

person and the environment interact can impact whether the individual responds to a situation in

a way that is authentically them (intrinsically) or spurred by an outside belief or action from the

environment in which they are situated (extrinsically). Much of the research using CET has

focused on how creating a needs-supportive and autonomy-supportive environment assists with

intrinsic motivation to pursue well-being (Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020).

Religious institutions have the opportunity to create these environments for survivors by

practicing institutional courage instead of institutional betrayal. The more an institution's

policies and response procedures seek to protect the institution instead of those harmed, the more

challenging it is for the harmed individual to seek out and participate in that institution (Smith &

Freyd, 2014). Religious institutions can apply the concept of a needs-supportive environment to create the environment for the survivor to pursue their well-being while staying within their religious institution, which is one way to show institutional courage. A recent study on the impact of a needs-supportive environment and structure within a school setting suggests that when students experience a sense of choice, they feel more ownership over activities and greater autonomy resulting in enhanced intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Brambilla and Assor (2020) used SDT to explore how individuals perceive God. An individual's perception of God as needs-supporting is related to religious vitality. When religious institutions respond to survivors in a needs-supporting way, such as allowing a survivor to have a voice in the complaint process, this may allow a survivor to feel more autonomous which can result in enhanced motivation related to their religious beliefs and vitality within religious institutions.

**Betrayal Trauma Theory**

Betrayal trauma theory (BTT) is also used to understand and frame this dissertation. BTT helps explain the development of a person after a traumatic experience has occurred. Specifically, BTT suggests traumatic experiences occur on a continuum varying in levels of impact and violation based upon the relationship between the survivor and perpetrator. BTT submits an individual will be impacted and suffer greater consequences when the perpetrator is someone close to them (Edwards et al., 2012; Mackelprang et al., 2014; McNally, 2007; Smith & Freyd, 2013, 2014). Current studies on CPSA suggest the clergy perpetrator is considered close to the survivor (McLaughlin, 1994).

BTT differentiates between high and low betrayal. A high betrayal is characterized as trauma perpetrated by a trusted other that the survivor depends on for survival, social belonging, and/or their well-being. A low betrayal is trauma perpetrated by someone upon which the

individual is not dependent (Edwards et al., 2012; McNally, 2007; Smith & Freyd, 2013, 2014). When high betrayal is present, survivors exhibit higher levels of mental health symptoms including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Delker & Freyd, 2017; Edwards et al., 2012; Lindblom, 2010; Mackelprang et al., 2014; Zimmerman et al., 2017). In the context of CPSA, the clergy person is often considered a trusted individual who is a representation of God, and therefore would be considered a high betrayal relationship. The survivor often depends on the clergy person for both social belonging within their religious institution and well-being in terms of their spiritual life (Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, et al., 2008).

### Betrayal Blindness

One salient aspect of BTT is the concept of betrayal blindness. Betrayal blindness is categorized as the individual's desire to maintain the relationship upon which they depend leading to a blindness to the betrayal either in the form of not remembering and blocking out abusive events or in the form of not being able to recognize the abuse as betrayal (Delker & Freyd, 2017; Edwards et al., 2012; Lindblom, 2010; Mackelprang et al., 2014; Zimmerman et al., 2017). BTT posits it is necessary in many situations for the individual to develop betrayal blindness in order to continue receiving the positive life sustaining resources upon which they are dependent. For example, an individual may stay within a sexually abusive relationship with a clergy person to continue the relationship with their religious community and to continue receiving spiritual guidance from the clergy person.

Betrayal blindness is not always permanent. BTT suggests that as an individual grows more self-reliant, they are able to identify feelings of betrayal and recognize abusive relationships (Mackelprang et al., 2014). Further, survivors of high betrayal traumas are more likely to disclose their victimization experiences later in life when they are no longer dependent

upon that person or institution that is the source of the traumatic experience (Zimmerman et al., 2017). This is particularly important in exploring clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and institutional betrayal, as survivors may not identify as such initially and are less likely to report their abuse for prolonged periods of time due to their feelings of responsibility for their abuse.

**CHAPTER II**

**Review of the Literature**

**Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse**

In defining clergy-perpetrated abuse, it is important to understand what researchers have defined as sexual abuse, and what makes clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA) similar to but different from sexual abuse. The term sexual abuse is often defined specifically as it relates to a child. Fogler, Shiperd, Clarke, Jensen, and Rowe (2008) defined child sexual abuse as

> contacts or interactions when the child is being used as an object of sexual gratification for the adult. It is abuse whether this activity involved explicit force, whether or not genital or physical contact, whether or not it is initiated by the child and whether or not there is a discernable harmful outcome. (p. 333)

Vulnerable adults can also be survivors of sexual abuse. The abuse is often more difficult to understand and identify because there is the assumption that a relationship with an adult is consensual (Chaves & Garland, 2009). However, meaningful consent cannot exist within a relationship when one person holds more power and authority (Flynn, 2008; Garland, 2006). This type of abuse is sometimes difficult to name and identify for the survivor because they feel they are responsible and complicit in this "affair." They experience larger levels of shame and do not feel they are allowed to call this experience abuse especially since the topic is not generally discussed in their religious organizations or in broader society (Flynn, 2008; Garland, 2006; Stephens, 2011). The abuse of adults by clergy is not often researched, nor discussed, leaving a large gap in the literature regarding the topic, and an even wider gap in regard to preventing abuse, or positively addressing abuse when it does happen.

Defining this type of abuse is a first step in starting to close the literature gap and give voice to a problem that needs greater focus for the sake of survivors. CPSA is abuse of a sexual nature of any individual by a member or members of clergy (Fogler, Shipherd, Rowe, et al., 2008; Rudolfsson & Portin, 2018). Darryl Stephens (2011) of the United Methodist Church's Sexual Ethics commission further refines the definition of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse by explicitly including the presence of power in the relationship stating: "Any use of power to take advantage of the vulnerable party within a ministerial relationship is defined as sexual abuse" (p. 6). This power relationship is critical to note because it is predicated on a position of sacred trust (Fogler, Shipherd, Rowe, et al., 2008; Garland, 2006; McLaughlin, 1994; Pargament et al., 2008; Rudolfsson & Portin, 2018). Power is only used correctly in ministry when it is used to enhance parishioners' freedoms (Driscoll et al., 2018). As a clergy person, they are trusted to support individuals when they are most vulnerable.

CPSA can occur after grooming behavior by clergy when individuals are vulnerable, and given the power differential between clergy and congregants, all individuals within a clergy-person's religious institution can be considered vulnerable. Garland (2006) described the process of grooming within an adult clergy relationship as a:

> process whereby the religious leader breaks down a woman's defenses, making her feel special, perhaps pointing out her spiritual gifts, or in another way using his position as a religious leader to develop a close relationship and isolate her from others. (p. 7).

Through this process the clergy person can exert influence and garner favor with the survivor; often the survivor is unaware of the abuse at the start. The survivor will initially feel special to be singled out and seen as a trusted confidant of the clergy person (Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, et al., 2008; Garland, 2006). However, clergy have a fiduciary responsibility to hold members of their

congregations in the highest regard. The same fiduciary responsibility exists for many similar helping professions that require a blind trust in the professional relationship including educators, doctors, therapists, and attorneys (Fogler, Shipherd, Rowe, et al., 2008). Once this fiduciary responsibility and trust has been broken, abuse has occurred. When fiduciary responsibility and trust is broken by way of a sex act, sexual abuse has occurred.

CPSA can have devastating effects on the survivor. Following abuse, survivors have described having mood disorders, substance abuse issues, anxiety, PTSD, and personality disorders (Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, et al., 2008). Survivors have also described having immense feelings of guilt and shame (Chaves & Garland, 2009; Cozzens, 2003; Garland, 2006). Further, CPSA has been associated with many of the same symptoms experienced by those who have encountered other forms of trauma including feelings of extreme low self-esteem and worthlessness (Flynn, 2008; Marotta-Walters, 2015; Pargament et al., 2008).

One dynamic that is specific to CPSA is the loss or broken relationship the survivor often feels with God and religious institutions (Pargament et al., 2008). Survivors are often not believed (McGraw et al., 2019; Pargament et al., 2008), and if they are believed, they are portrayed as having tempted the clergy person into the relationship (Chaves & Garland, 2009; Crisp, 2012; Garland, 2006). This blaming behavior often leads to the survivor feeling guilty, responsible, ostracized and can even lead to the survivor leaving their faith community (Chaves & Garland, 2009; Garland, 2006; Stevens et al., 2019; Wind et al., 2008). Leaving their faith community can be devastating for the survivor because they lose a person they trusted, experience abuse, and lose the community they would often turn to in times of difficulty.

**Institutional Betrayal**

The definition of institutional betrayal has been developed and expanded over time. Smith and Freyd (2013) coined the term institutional betrayal (IB) in their seminal article on the concept with a broad explanation of how institutions upon which individuals depend, such as universities, churches, and the military often evoke trust and dependence in the same ways interpersonal relationships elicit trust and dependence. In a follow-up article, Smith and Freyd (2014) expanded on their original work and defined IB as "institutional action and inaction that exacerbate the impact of traumatic experiences […] individual experiences of violations of trust and dependency perpetrated against any member of an institution in a way that does not necessarily arise from an individual's less-privileged identity" (p.577). Cromer et al. (2017) expanded the definition of IB further as having occurred when a trauma is caused by an institution upon which a person is dependent that includes a failure to respond supportively to an incident perpetrated by those who act within the context of the institution. IB can be identified when an institution that a person depends on in some way harms that person from the perspective of both those receiving services and those employed by the institution (Klest et al., 2020). IB also occurs when institutions fail to prevent harm in their initial policies and when they support environments that lead to harm (Monteith et al., 2021). Acts of omission such as tolerance of harassment and lack of serious repercussions for abuse are also forms of IB (Smith & Freyd, 2014). The most inclusive definitions of IB will be used in this dissertation identifying it as both policies that failed to protect as well as a failure to adequately respond when a trauma occurs.

IB has been studied in several different types of institutions. College campuses have been examined for their institutional response to sexual assault and results indicate institutions consistently betray survivors of assault through either the events leading up to the sexual assault or in the institutional response to the assault (Smith & Freyd, 2013). Further evidence suggests

institutions have played a role in causing harm by failing to prevent negative experiences through actions such as allowing individuals with prior allegations of sexual assault into the institution with no safety checks thereby creating an environment where assault may thrive (Smith et al., 2016). Examples of IB within the medical system have been identified in patients and their families throughout the COVID-19 health crisis. Medical institutions have taken retaliatory actions against families when they publicly identified medical institutions that failed to act immediately to protect those in their care (Klest et al., 2020). The military is another institution where IB has been well documented. Individuals who experienced sexual assault while working in the military often did not feel comfortable seeking assistance from the military due to the IB present through the environment created that allows the assaults to happen and the retaliation experienced socially or professionally by the survivor when they report their assault (Monteith et al., 2021). When a traumatic experience occurs, how the institution responds can have a lasting impact on the survivor of the experience.

When IB is present, survivors of trauma can have increased levels of anxiety (Lind et al., 2020; Smidt et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2016; Smith & Freyd, 2013), depression (Lind et al., 2020; Smidt et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2016; Smith & Freyd, 2013, 2014), and posttraumatic stress disorder (Hannan et al., 2020; Lind et al., 2020; Monteith et al., 2021; Smidt et al., 2021; Smith & Freyd, 2013, 2014, 2017). In addition to the significant health-related outcomes, survivors of trauma compounded by IB are less likely to seek help in dealing with the aftermath of a trauma due to their distrust of institutions (Monteith et al., 2021). Further, IB may intensify symptoms of trauma. For example, a student who depends on a college for an education has to encounter the individual who assaulted them on the same campus due to lenient college sanctions or unanswered reports of assault (Smith & Freyd, 2017). Because these institutional responses can

hinder the personal growth of survivors, it is important to identify how to improve institutional policies and responses to prevent this additional trauma from happening. Churches are one area that can benefit from institutional policy and response changes.

IB has not been fully explored or researched within the realm of religion and religious institutions, although there is evidence to suggest religious institutions respond to abuse in a manner similar to other institutions. Churches have lacked transparency when dealing with abuse reported within the Church (O'Brien, 2020).[1] Similarly, the culture within churches may lead them to utilize institutional power to protect perpetrators of abuse, silence survivors, and cover up abuse (Death, 2015). These tactics are consistent with IB.

**Posttraumatic Growth**

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (2013) the definition of trauma requires "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (p. 271). While other challenging life events such as unemployment or the ending of a close friendship or marriage may cause distress, they are not considered a trauma if they do not meet this definition. Trauma forces an individual to rethink their understanding of the world and how they fit into that world (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Further, research suggests trauma also produces cognitive alterations that can impact a survivor of trauma negatively by worsening the experience of the traumatic event (American Psychological Association, 2013; Ramos & Leal, 2013; Updegraff & Taylor, 2000) and positively by allowing the individual to reprioritize and have a greater appreciation for life (Ramos & Leal, 2013; Saltzman et al., 2015; Tedeschi &

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[1] Throughout this dissertation, when the word Church is capitalized, it is referring to the universal body of believers in Christian faiths, whereas when the word church is not capitalized, it is referring to an individual church or experience.

Calhoun, 2004). More than half of people who have experienced a traumatic event report having some positive outcomes as a result of the experience (Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). For survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, focusing on meaning making about the trauma can occur at any stage of healing and helps survivors to focus on altruistic acts to improve the experience of other survivors (Marotta-Walters, 2015).

A substantial amount of research has been done to establish the relationship between traumatic experiences and negative outcomes such as the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and a sense of diminished control over one's own life (American Psychological Association, 2013; Ramos & Leal, 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Triplett et al., 2012). However, other studies explore perceived positive outcomes identified by survivors of the traumatic event (Ramos & Leal, 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004; Triplett et al., 2012). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) explore the concept of posttraumatic growth (PTG), defining it as "a positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances" (p. 1).

Current and expanding research in the area of posttraumatic growth has identified five domains of growth: (1) greater appreciation of life and a changed sense of priorities, (2) warmer more intimate relationships with others, (3) a greater sense of personal strength, (4) new possibilities, and (5) spiritual development (Ramos & Leal, 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In contrast, the role of rumination has also been explored. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) define rumination as "(a) conscious; (b) revolves around an instrumental theme; and (c) occurs without a direct cueing from the environment but is easily and indirectly cued because it is connected with important goals, leading to recurrent thoughts (p. 9)". Further, a key differentiation of rumination for posttraumatic growth is the contrast between intrusive rumination versus

deliberate rumination. Intrusive rumination is often unwanted and unintentional whereas

deliberate rumination is when the individual specifically attempts to focus on the trauma to

understand and make meaning from the experience (Marotta-Walters, 2015; Ramos & Leal,

2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004; Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). In this sense, deliberate

rumination can be helpful in furthering posttraumatic growth in individuals who are willing to

engage with their traumatic experience.

It is also important to note that although trauma can lead to growth, it is not guaranteed

that posttraumatic growth will arise in and from all traumatic experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun,

1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Triplett et al., 2012). In some cases, positive changes after a

traumatic event can lead to fewer PTSD symptoms, but others experience higher levels of PTSD

symptoms (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) which can sometimes lead to higher posttraumatic

growth or alternately, PTSD without growth present (Ramos & Leal, 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun,

1996). The discrepancy between survivors developing more PTSD symptoms or more

posttraumatic growth highlights the critical need for additional research in this area.

**Spirituality & Religiosity**

Increasingly, research has focused on the concept of spirituality and how it relates to

different life experiences. One challenge is how to differentiate religiosity from spirituality

(Ahrens et al., 2010; Chenot & Kim, 2017; Glenn, 2014; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020) and

whether there is a need to differentiate them (Currier et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020).

Religiosity and spirituality are often used interchangeably or noted as one concept under

the abbreviation R/S. For purposes of this research, the two concepts will be considered

separately. Spirituality can be defined as a journey or a search for sacred on an individual level

(Ahrens et al., 2010; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020) or the individual search for more

connectedness (McCann et al., 2020) and meaning in life (Ahrens et al., 2010; McCann et al., 2020). Spirituality is not just about a specific God or Higher Power, but it is the search and process of finding meaning in life, feeling a sense of connectedness, and belonging and experiencing transcendence or an awakening of the spirit. Transcendence is the common thread that ties together the concepts of spirituality and religion (McCormick et al., 2018).

Religiosity is defined as an experience in the search for the sacred through an established institution with more definitive practices such as attendance at services, prayer, meditation, and/or scripture reading (Ahrens et al., 2010; Demir, 2019; LaBouff et al., 2010; McCann et al., 2020; Sandage & Harden, 2011). Through the practice of religion, it is possible for a person to experience the same sense of transcendence as they experience within their individual search for spirituality (Schnitker et al., 2019). Essentially, religion is more of a collective practice within an institution whereas spirituality tends to be an individual search, which may or may not happen within the context of religion. A person does not have to be engaged in an organized religion to experience spirituality.

It is important to parse out the two concepts because of the nature of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. When an individual is struggling with trauma, it is not uncommon for them to reach out to a member of clergy or other religious leader for support and healing (Glenn, 2014; Kowalczyk et al., 2020). The individual may already be part of a religious organization, or they may be unaffiliated and looking to clergy representatives for guidance and support (Kowalczyk et al., 2020; Oakley et al., 2018). However, once a person has experienced the trauma of CPSA, they may be less likely to reach out to a religious figure for support (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013; Crisp, 2012; Currier et al., 2018). Often survivors of CPSA will struggle with trusting clergy, religious institutions, and God (Stevens et al., 2019). A person abused by clergy may or

may not return to religion, but they can potentially continue their search for the sacred through spirituality outside of an organized religion.

**Well-being and Flourishing**

Well-being and flourishing are similar constructs, but there are important distinctions. Well-being is "the subjective feeling of contentment, happiness, satisfaction with life's experiences and of one's role in the world of work, sense of achievement, utility, belongingness, and no distress, dissatisfaction or worry, etc." (Paikkatt et al., 2012, p.109). Essentially, well-being is how an individual feels about their life and their level of happiness. Flourishing is "excelling at the activities and achievements that constitute living well as human beings" (Wise & Barney, 2021, p. 43). This definition of flourishing is broad enough to allow individuals to assess what constitutes their own well-being, but also provides enough structure for a researcher to be able to assess it. Flourishing is a lifelong pursuit of individual goals (Wickham et al., 2020). The flexibility given in the definition and operationalization of the construct is especially important for survivors of CPSA because the way a survivor frames success in their life post-abuse may be very different than the way a person without a history of clergy-abuse may frame success. This research seeks to establish an understanding of both well-being and flourishing within survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. Well-being can be used as a measure of health and life satisfaction, whereas flourishing includes a more holistic model of well-being including thriving in relationships, engagement with others, and finding meaning in one's life (Sonthalia, 2020). This study explores and measures both concepts in survivors of CPSA. After experiencing the trauma of CPSA, a person may be deemed well, but flourishing is more than

being well – it is thriving in one's life; this study seeks to understand if survivors feel they are flourishing.

Clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults is an area of research that is largely unexplored, but has been slowly growing in interest. Current research around CPSA suggests the abuse of adults by clergy is traumatic and creates a life-long impact on the survivor (Pooler & Barros-Lane, 2022; Langberg, 2020; Garland & Argueta, 2010; Flynn, 2008; Garland, 2006). Further, how an institution responds to a trauma, with courage or betrayal, can further harm or help the survivor (Smith & Freyd, 2017; Platt et al., 2016; Gobin & Freyd, 2014; Smith & Freyd, 2013). However, currently there is not existing research that looks specifically at how the institutional response to CPSA of adults impacts the survivor. This study sought to explore how the institutional response to CPSA of adults impacts the survivors, particularly in the areas of posttraumatic growth, spirituality, religious commitment, well-being, and flourishing. Three main research questions drove this study:

1) Does the level of institutional betrayal experienced by a survivor of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse impact their:

    a. posttraumatic growth?

    b. spirituality and religious commitment?

    c. psychological well-being and flourishing?

2) What is the experience of adult survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse?

3) What impact does an institution's response have on adult survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse?

## CHAPTER III

## Methodology

This chapter describes the design, sample, procedure, and measures that will be used to research clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, institutional betrayal or courage, posttraumatic growth, well-being, flourishing, religiosity, and spirituality.

### Design

This study uses a cross-sectional mixed methods design with primary data from adult survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA). Specifically, primary data was collected through an online survey, and then a smaller sub-sample of participants were interviewed to more fully understand the experience of adult survivors. Data were collected for this study using quantitative surveys and follow-up qualitative interviews from a sub-sample of survey participants.

### Procedure

Participants were primarily recruited through email to members of religious abuse support groups including: The Hope of Survivors, PorchSwing Ministries Inc., and denomination specific organizations such as SNAP: Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests and The United Methodist Church General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. In addition, participants were recruited through social media platforms where information was posted about the study including a link to the screening questionnaire. The social media platforms where information was posted were: Clergysexualmisconduct.com., the Facebook page Safe Sheep: Church Abuse Awareness, and a blogger, Survivors Awaken the Church, and utilizing the hashtags #metoo and #churchtoo on Twitter and Instagram (see Appendix A for the social media

recruitment script). Many survivors have started to share their experiences in public online

spaces due to the #metoo movement. Utilizing social media outreach and these specific hashtags

allowed participants following the #metoo and #churchtoo hashtags to locate and opt-in to the

study. Lastly, the researcher did personal outreach to individuals and organizations that had

expressed interest in the study (see Appendix B for the email recruitment script).

Each form of outreach for recruitment included details about the study, titled the What

Comes Next Study (WCNS) and a link to the survey. Potential participants were asked to

complete an online screening questionnaire (see Appendix C). The landing page of the survey

contained the screening questionnaire which included the questions "Did you experience clergy-

perpetrated sexual abuse initiated after your 18$^{th}$ birthday?", "At what age did the abuse start?",

and "Did you disclose this abuse to your religious institution?" If the participant did not meet the

study criteria, the survey skipped to the end and the potential participant was informed they were

not eligible for the study and thanked for their time. If the participant did meet all of the study

criteria, the survey took the participant to the next page, which included the informed consent

(see Appendix D). Once a participant read the consent page, they had two options: if they clicked

on consent, they were taken to the next page to begin the WCNS survey (see Appendix E). If

they did not consent, they were taken to the end of the survey and were thanked for their time.

Individuals took on average 51.13 minutes to complete the survey ($SD = 12.08$).

At the completion of the WCNS, participants were randomly assigned a participant ID

number by the Qualtrics software used to create the survey and told to keep a copy of that

number if they were interested in participating in an interview on the same topic sometime in the

future. At the end of the WCNS, there was a link to a separate survey, the Interview Interest

Survey, where participants could express their interest in participating in an interview. The first

page of the Interview Interest Survey was the informed consent form for the interview (see Appendix F). Once a participant read the consent page, they had two options: if they clicked on consent, they were taken to the next page where they were asked to provide their participant ID they received from the WCNS, the name they prefer to be called, email address, age, gender, sexual orientation, contact information, gender, when the abuse by a clergy person started and ended, the religious affiliation of the institution to which they reported abuse, and when they reported their abuse to the institution (see Appendix G for the interview interest survey). If they did not consent, they were taken to the end of the survey and thanked for their time. A total of 37 potential participants indicated interest in being interviewed. The target interview sample size was 10 participants purposively selected for variability of experiences, age, type of institution, and gender.

Participants who were selected to participate in an interview were sent an email asking them to make an appointment for an interview at a time that was convenient for them (see Appendix H). All interviews were held on Zoom to allow participants to participate from a space that felt comfortable to them. At the beginning of the interview, participants were read the informed consent (see Appendix I) and participants were asked to consent verbally to the interview, and then verbally consent to video recording the Zoom session. Once verbal consent was given, the recording was started. Once the recording started, participants were asked again to consent verbally to participate in the interview so the consent could be recorded. Participants were interviewed according to the interview protocol (see Appendix J). All interviews were recorded using Zoom and notes were taken on paper or on a computer during the interview. All digital recording files were transcribed. Once transcription was complete, as an added layer of privacy for study participants, the recording files were deleted. Interviews ranged in time from

55 minutes to 143 minutes, with a mean time of 95 minutes. The transcriptions of interviews were then coded and used in the data analysis.

**Sample**

The study used a typical case purposive sampling method combined with a snowball sampling method. Potential participants who self-identified as adult survivors of CPSA were recruited. Because there is little research on CPSA and adult survivors, this study sought to understand the breadth and depth of the phenomenon of CPSA rather than generalize findings to the entire population of CPSA survivors. The final sample included 108 individual participants. Participants needed to meet the following criteria to be included in the study: (1) experienced clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, (2) disclosed the abuse to their religious institution, and (3) the abuse first occurred after the participant turned 18 years of age.

*Survey Sample*

Table 1

*Percentage of Participants by Screening Question*

| Screening Question | N | All Potential Participants | | Participants after each screening question | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | % total potential | % screened out | % total | % screened out |
| 1. Did you experience clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse | 229 | 100 | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| 2. Abused age 18 and above | 217 | 95 | 5 | 95 | 5 |
| 3. Disclosed to religious institution | 148 | 65 | 35 | 68 | 32 |
| 4. Consent to participate | 130 | 57 | 43 | 88 | 12 |
| 5. Completed full survey | 108 | 47 | 53 | 83 | 17 |

*Note. N=229.*

A total of 229 individuals attempted to participate in this study; a large portion of potential participants, however, were screened out based on their responses in the screening questionnaire or that they had significant missing data. Table 1 depicts the percentage of participants who were eligible to participate in the study or were screened out based on screening questions. All participants who attempted to take the WCNS answered "yes" to the question "Did you experience clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse initiated after your 18th birthday? For purposes of this study, clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse is defined as 'abuse of a sexual nature of any individual by a member or members of clergy.'" A small number (5%) of potential participants were screened out when they provided an age below 18 as the age at which their abuse began. About a third (32%) of potential participants who had experienced clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse never reported their abuse. An additional 12% of participants were screened out when they did not consent to participate. Lastly, 17% of participants who did consent to participate in the study only responded to items related to the institutional response construct without responding to any items regarding any of the remaining constructs.

Survey data were analyzed from the final sample of 108 participants. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 81 years old with the average age of participants being 31.09 ($SD$= 9.40). Participants were all female, and nearly all White (86.1%). Other participants in the study were Black or African American (12%), Hispanic (5.6%) or other (1.8%). For race, participants were able to check all that apply, with this option, several participants selected Hispanic in addition to other races. Participants on average were highly educated with a large portion of participants holding a master's degree or higher (39.8%), a bachelor's degree (36.1%), or an associate's degree (6.5%). In addition, 13.9% of participants had some college experience but did not receive a degree, and 3.7% held a high school diploma or equivalent. A large portion of

participants identified as heterosexual (83.3%) with the remaining participants identifying as bisexual (13.0%), homosexual (1.9%), or other (1.9%). Participants identified their relationship status as married (44.4%), never married (30.6%), divorced (22.2%), separated (1.9%) or widowed (0.9%).

### *Interview Sample*

Fifteen participants were sent email invitations to participate in an interview. Eleven participants responded to the email invitation and scheduled interviews. Ten interviews were completed and included in this study. An 11th interview was excluded because the participant provided information about an abusive clergy person who did abuse adult women, but the interview participant did not identify herself as a survivor of that clergy person abuser. This participant's survey data was also removed; however, the data were, in fact, removed prior to this discovery due to significant missing data in the survey. The average age of interview participants was 50.7 (*SD*=14.4). All interview participants were White. Participants were highly educated with a master's degree being the highest level of any participant (30%), followed by bachelor's degree holders (40%), associate's degree holders (10%), individuals with some college but no degree (10%), and individuals with a high school degree or equivalent (10%). Almost all participants identified as heterosexual (90%), with one participant identifying as bisexual (10%). Half of all interview participants were married (50%), with the remainder identifying as never married (20%), divorced (20%), or widowed (10%).

### Quantitative Measures

Several constructs were measured in the WCNS including (1) institutional betrayal and institutional courage, (2) posttraumatic growth, (3) spirituality, (4) religious commitment, (5)

well-being, and (6) flourishing. The next section provides information on each scale used in the WCNS.

### Institutional Betrayal and Institutional Courage

Institutional betrayal and institutional courage were measured using an adaptation of the Institutional Betrayal and Support Questionnaire (IBSQ.1 version 1; see Appendix K; Rosenthal & Freyd, 2016). The IBSQ.1was designed to be administered after a traumatic experience has occurred within an institution to understand if institutional betrayal or courage was present. The original questionnaire has the following question stem, "*In thinking about the events related to sexual misconduct described in the previous sections, did the* **[INSTITUTION]** *play a role by...*". A sample item is "Apologizing for what happened to you" with the option of answering "yes", "no," or "N/A". However, this study seeks to understand how the presence of varying levels of institutional betrayal or courage correlate with other study constructs; thus the IBSQ.1 was adapted with response options on a Likert-type scale where 1=*very true*, 2=*true*, 3=*somewhat true*, 4=*neither true or false*, 5=*somewhat false*, 6=*false*, and 7=*very false*. All institutional courage items were reverse coded, so a higher score would reflect higher institutional betrayal and lower institutional courage and a lower score would reflect lower institutional betrayal and higher institutional courage.

The first 18 items on the original IBSQ.1 were used in the adapted scale. The stem question was adapted to read*,* "In thinking about the events related to sexual misconduct you experienced by a clergy person, please rate how you felt the institution responded to your disclosure." One sample item following the stem is "Actively supporting you with either formal or informal resources (e.g., counseling, academic services, meetings or phone calls)?".

A correlation matrix was used to test inter-item correlations. Out of the 18 items on the scale, one item, "Did not do enough to prevent this type of abuse" was not significantly correlated with any other items on the scale. Therefore, this item was removed from the scale. The remaining 17 items were significantly correlated and the scale was reliable ($\alpha$=.930).

### *Posttraumatic Growth*

Posttraumatic growth was measured using the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PGI; see Appendix L), a tool developed to measure posttraumatic growth in individuals who live through traumatic experiences (Saltzman et al., 2015; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). The PGI is a 21-item scale. A sample item is "I changed my priorities about what is important in life." Individuals are asked to choose their response with 0 = *I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis*, 3 = "*I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my crisis*", and 5 = "*I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis*." The original version of the PTI scale has shown acceptable reliability ($\alpha$=.900; Maguen et al., 2006).

The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PGI) consists of five subscales, which relate to each of the five domains of posttraumatic growth: personal strength, new possibilities, improved relationships, spiritual growth, and appreciation for life. The inter-item correlations were calculated for each of the subscales. All items within each of the following were significantly correlated:  personal strength, new possibilities, improved relationships, and spiritual growth. All of the subscales were tested for reliability and all were reliable: personal strength subscale ($\alpha$ = .771; 4 items), new possibilities subscale ($\alpha$=.780; 5 items), improved relationships subscale ($\alpha$=.843; 7 items), and spiritual growth subscale ($\alpha$=.773; 2 items). One subscale, appreciation for life, when tested, did not have significant inter-item correlation for all items. The item: "I changed my priorities about what is important in life" was not significantly correlated with the

other items in the subscale. The item was removed from the scale and the remaining two items were found to be significantly correlated and the scale was reliable ($\alpha$=.703).

### *Spirituality*

Spirituality was measured using an adaptation of the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES; see Appendix M) which was designed to capture how an individual identifies with and feels about spirituality (Underwood, 2006). Response options were on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 = "*never*", 3 = "*most days*", and 5 = "*many times a day.*" A sample item is, "I feel God's presence." An additional item, "In general, how close do you feel to God?" is included with a 0-3 Likert scale where 0 = "*not at all*" and 3 = "*as close as possible*". The DSES has shown acceptable reliability ($\alpha$=.955; Reutter & Bigatti, 2014).

The DSES was designed to measure current feelings of spirituality. However, for purposes of this study, the scale was adapted to be used in the form of a retrospective pre-test and post-test to measure the perception of these variables on the individual pre-clergy abuse versus currently, post-abuse. The scale was set up with a Likert-type scale on the left and right side of the items, with all items listed in the middle of the two scales. The instructions given to participants were, "Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which you feel you relate to the statement before and after your disclosure to your religious institution. Indicate on the left side of each statement how you felt before you disclosed clergy abuse to your institution. Indicate on the right side of each statement how you feel presently." Inter-item correlations were calculated for each scale and all of the items on both of the scales were significantly correlated. Reliability was then tested for each of the 15-item scales and both were reliable (spirituality pre-abuse $\alpha$=.938; current level of spirituality $\alpha$=.954).

### *Religiosity*

Religiosity was measured using an adaptation of the Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI; see Appendix N), which was designed to capture actions, behaviors, and feelings related to religious activities (Worthington et al., 2003). The full 10-item scale was used in this study. A sample item is, "I often read books and magazines about my faith." Individuals were asked to indicate their response on a five-point Likert-type scale where 1 = "*Not true of me at all*", 3 = "*moderately true of me*", and 5 = "*Totally true of me*". The RCI scale has shown good acceptable reliability (α=.94; Reutter & Bigatti, 2014).

This scale was adapted to be presented as a retrospective pretest and posttest to measure the participants' perception pre-clergy abuse and post-abuse. The scale was set up with a Likert-type scale on the left and right side of the items, with all items listed in the middle of the two scales. The instructions given to participants were, "Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which you feel you relate to the statement before and after your disclosure to your religious institution. Indicate on the left side of each statement how you felt before you disclosed clergy abuse to your institution. Indicate on the right side of each statement how you feel presently." Inter-item correlations were calculated for each of the scales and all items on each scale were significantly correlated. Reliability was then tested for the 10-item scale and both pretest and posttest were reliable (religious commitment pre-abuse α=.920; current religious commitment α=.959).

### Well-being

Well-being was measured using the General Well-being Schedule (GWB; Dupuy, 1977). The GWB was designed to assess a person's own subjective feelings of their psychological well-being. There are a total of 18 items in this scale. A sample item is, "Have you had reason to wonder if you were losing your mind, or losing control over the way you act, talk, think, feel, or

of your memory". Fourteen of the items ask respondents to respond on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 0 = "*All of the time*", 3 = "*Some of the time*", and 5 = "*None of the time*". There are 4 additional items that use a 10-point Likert-type scale where 0 = "*Very concerned*" and 10= "*Not concerned at all*". One example item is in the past month, "How concerned or worried about your health have you been?" The GWB scale has shown acceptable reliability ($\alpha$=.91; Yanek et al., 2013). Only the 14 items that used the 5-point Likert-type scale were used. An inter-item correlation was run for the scale and all items were found to be significantly correlated and the scale was reliable ($\alpha$=.939).

### *Flourishing*

Flourishing was measured using the 8-item Flourishing Scale (see Appendix P), an assessment tool developed to measure the person's subjective success in areas of psychological well-being such as self-esteem, relationships, and purpose (Diener et al., 2010). The full scale was used in this study. A sample item is, "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life." Individuals were asked to respond on a Likert-type scale where 7=*strongly agree*, 6=*agree*, 5=*slightly agree*, 4=*neither agree nor disagree*, 3=*slightly disagree*, 2=*disagree*, and 1=*strongly disagree*. The original version of the Flourishing Scale has shown acceptable reliability ($\alpha$=.87; Diener et al., 2010). Inter-item correlations were calculated for the scale in the present study and all items were significantly correlated and the scale was reliable ($\alpha$=.891).

### *Demographics*

Participants' age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, race, and education demographics were captured as survey responses. Participants were able to select their exact age in years using an interactive slider with the prompting question "What is your age?". Age was not manipulated in the quantitative analysis. However, age was used to group participants in to

categories for selection of participants to invite for the interview portion of the study. The goal was to recruit participants within varied age ranges to achieve some level of variability in the interview sample: young adults (18-27), adult (28-43), middle age adult (44-60), and senior adult (61-89). The categorical age variable was only used to select interview participants.

Participants were able to select their gender from the following options: male, female, transgender female, transgender male, gender non-conforming, prefer not to answer, and a text box that read "not listed" with the option to write in. The prompt question was, "To which gender identity do you most identify?".

Sexual orientation was measured by providing a list for participants to choose from. The prompt question was, "Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?", and the following options were provided as answers: bisexual, heterosexual (straight), homosexual (gay), prefer not to say, and other.

Marital status was measured by providing a list for participants to choose from. The prompt question was, "Are you now married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married?", and the following options were provided as answers: married, widowed, divorced, separated, and never married. Marital status was not manipulated for the quantitative analysis.

Race was measured by providing a list for participants to choose from along with an option to list an additional choice if one was not available. The prompt question was, "Which of the following races do you consider yourself to be (check all that apply)?", and the following options were provided as answers: White or Caucasian, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and other (specify). Because "other (specify)" was an option and several participants wrote in Hispanic or Latinx, race was re-coded in the analysis to be one variable where 1=White or Caucasian, 2= Black or

African American, 3= American Indian or Alaska Native, 4=Asian, 5=Native Hawaiian or

Pacific Islander, and 6=Hispanic/Latinx.

Education was measured by providing a list for participants to choose from. The prompt

question was, "What is the highest level of school you have completed, or the highest degree you

have received?", and the following options were provided as answers: less than high school

degree, high school graduate (high school degree or equivalent, included GED), some college but

no degree, associate degree in college (2-year), bachelor's degree in college (4-year), master's

degree, doctoral degree, or professional degree (JD, MD, etc.).

**Qualitative Measures**

This study used semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix J) to allow the

researcher to adaptively ask questions based on the interviewee's responses. This method allows

participants to speak more freely about their experiences. The first question all participants were

asked prior to talking about their experience was what name they would like to use in the

interview and how they would like to be referred to in any published articles that may emerge

from this study. This was done to let participants know they have control over their story.

The interview protocol was designed with two sections; the first section focused solely on

the abuse and the institutional response to the abuse, and the second section focused on how the

experiences impacted the survivor. The first question in section one was "Please share what you

feel comfortable discussing about your experience with clergy abuse." This question yielded a

range of responses from participants that sometimes addressed several of the follow-up questions

in the interview protocol, such as "Who did you first disclose to?" and "Were you offered any

kind of support by the religious institution you disclosed to?". If participants discussed these

follow up areas in their response to the initial question, these questions were altered to

acknowledge the initial answer and the following statement was added to the beginning of anything they previously discussed, "You spoke a little bit about this already, but I want to make sure I give you the opportunity to share anything you want." This allowed participants to expand on any information they wanted to or not, while also acknowledging they did already respond to that specific prompt in their answer to the first question to make sure the participant felt heard. At the end of section one, the participants were asked, "Before we move into the next section of the interview where I will ask about how these experiences impacted you, is there anything else about what happened to you that you didn't share already that you want me to know?", which allowed participants to include any information they felt they wanted to share but did not have an opportunity earlier.

The second section of the interview focused on how the experiences impacted the survivor. Initial prompts included, "Looking back to the first time you disclosed your abuse, how would you characterize your well-being?" and a follow up, "Do you feel your well-bring has changed over time?" In case participants needed it, a definition of well-being, listed in Q9 of the interview protocol, was provided. Participants were also asked questions related to how they felt their experience with clergy abuse impacted their spiritual or religious beliefs and actions. Further, participants were asked for any recommendations they would make to the Church on how they could support survivors. Again, at the end of section two, participants were asked, "Is there anything else specific to how these experiences have impacted you that you didn't share already that you want me to know?"

**Analyses**

The present study used a variation of the sequential triangulation mixed methods design outlined by Urban and colleagues (Urban et al., 2014) to analyze the results of the quantitative

and qualitative data. In this study, quantitative data were collected in the first stage of data

collection and qualitative data were collected during the second stage of data collection. While

this data was collected at two separate time points, each form of data were analyzed separately

and then mixed during interpretation giving equal weight to both quantitative and qualitative data

(Linver et al., 2018). Each level of analysis sought to answer one of the three research questions

proposed in this study while developing an overall understanding of the phenomenon of clergy-

perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA). Figure 1 depicts this research design.

Quantitative analyses were completed first using SPSS ($N = 108$). Specifically,

correlations were used to understand the relationships between the level of institutional betrayal

or courage with posttraumatic growth, spirituality, religiosity, well-being, and flourishing. The

correlation coefficients, mean, and standard deviation of all variables can be found in table 2.

Multiple linear regression analysis was completed to test for a significant linear relationship

between institutional response and each of the dependent variables: current spirituality, current

religious commitment, general well-being, flourishing, and all 5 domains of posttraumatic

growth. For spirituality and religious commitment, a control variable was included for

spirituality and religious commitment pre-abuse, respectively. Next, a simple linear regression

plot was conducted for each of the dependent variables that showed a significant relationship.

Once the quantitative analysis was complete, thematic analysis was conducted using the

interview data. Each interview transcript was read thoroughly, and memos were created

containing emerging themes. Because the topic is one that is not well-researched, the themes

were not preconceived, but emerged from patterns in participant narratives. Transcripts and

memos were uploaded to NVivo for thematic coding. Once memos were developed for all of the

**Figure 1**

*Research Design*

Research Questions

↓

Mixed Methods Design

↓

followed by

Quant → Qual

↓                          ↓

Collection                 Collection

↓                          ↓

Analysis (Correlation and          Analysis (Thematic Coding):
Multiple Regressions):             Research Q. 2
Research Q. 1

Mixed Methods (Regression and
Transcript Analysis): Research Q. 3
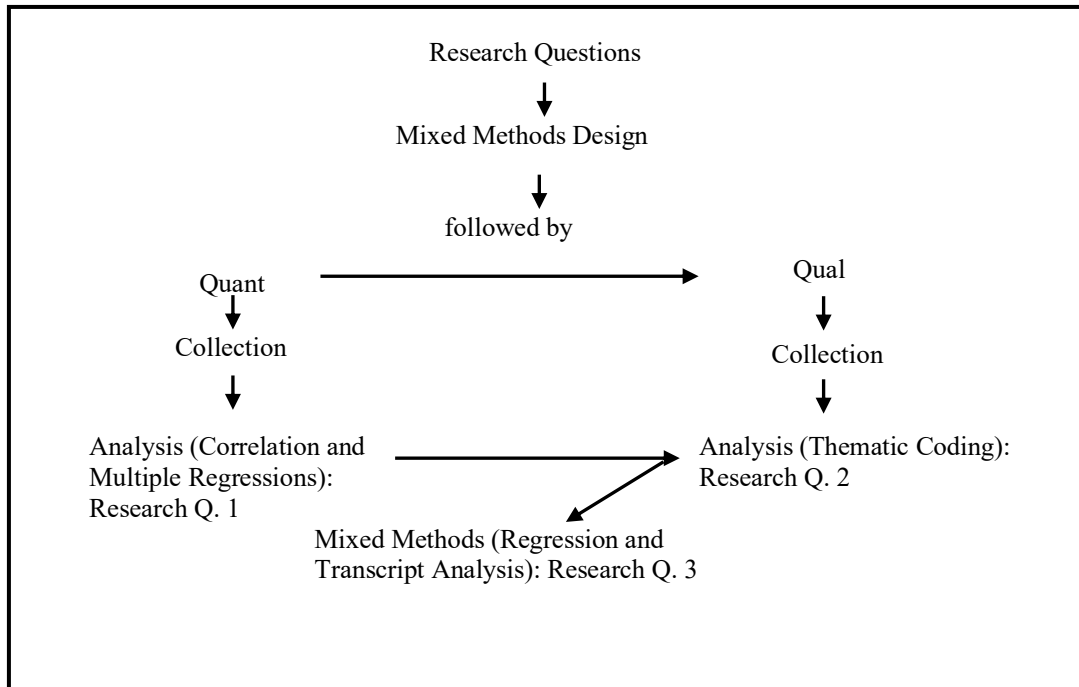
transcripts and emerging themes were identified, the transcripts were then coded to understand

the prevalence and depth of identified themes.

The mixed methods data analysis occurred after each form of data was analyzed

independently. Simple regression plots were created for variables that showed significance in the

multiple regression analysis conducted to answer RQ1. The regression plots were then used as a

framework to better understand and interpret the qualitative data. Emerging themes from the

qualitative analysis were overlayed on the regression plots to identify trends across the data. For

each significant regression plot, codes from the qualitative analysis used to answer research

question 2 were overlayed to see if the qualitative data were consistent with where the individual

fell on the regression line. For example, the themes of institutional betrayal, institutional

courage, spiritual vs. religious, and survivor narrative were overlayed on the simple regression

for institutional responses and posttraumatic growth: improved relationships. All individuals

were analyzed based on where they were located on the regression line. Themes were identified

based upon the definitions of the constructs being explored. For example, institutional betrayal

and institutional courage are both a part of institutional response, and were included in all

analysis based on institutional response. This process was repeated for all plots utilizing both

forms of data to identify consistency and inconsistency among the quantitative and qualitative

data.

## CHAPTER IV

## Results

This dissertation explored the experiences of survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse that reported the abuse to their religious institution. The main constructs explored were (1) institutional betrayal or courage, (2) posttraumatic growth, (3) spirituality, (4) religious commitment, (5) well-being, and (6) flourishing. This chapter presents the key results from this study. The quantitative data analysis was utilized to answer RQ1, the qualitative data analysis was utilized to answer RQ2, and the mixed methods data analysis was utilized to answer RQ3. Table 2 depicts the Pearson correlations between each construct and the relationships that were found to be significant and nonsignificant.

**Research Question 1: Does the Level of Institutional Betrayal or Institutional Courage Experienced by a Survivor of Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse Impact Their: (1A) Level of Posttraumatic Growth, (1B) Spirituality and Religious Commitment, and (1C) Well-being and Flourishing?**

The first research question sought to understand if the institutional response by a religious institution after a report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse had an impact on psychological functioning. Specifically, this research sought to understand if and how the institutional response related to a survivor's level of posttraumatic growth, spirituality, religious commitment, well-being, and flourishing. To answer this research question, data collected during the quantitative portion of this study were utilized.

### *1.A. Does the Level of Institutional Betrayal or Institutional Courage Experienced by a Survivor of Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse Impact Their Posttraumatic Growth*

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationships that may exist between the institutional response, and the five domains of posttraumatic growth: (1) personal strength, (2) new possibilities, (3) improved relationships, (4) spiritual growth, and (5) appreciation for life. There were no significant correlations among institutional responses, PTG new possibilities, PTG spiritual growth, and PTG appreciation for life. In contrast, there was a significant negative relationship between institutional response and PTG personal strength [$r$ (108) = -.189, p < .05]. In addition, there was also a significant negative relationship between institutional response and PTG improved relationships [$r$ (108) = -.313, p < .01].

Next, a simple regression analysis was used to test if the institutional response to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse significantly predicted the survivors' posttraumatic growth. The regressions for the domains of PTG personal strength, new possibilities, spiritual growth, and appreciation for life were not found to be significant. However, the results of the regression for PTG improved relationships were found to be significant ($R^2$=.098, F (1,105) =11.548, p < .01). Institutional response significantly predicted PTG improved relationships (β=-.275, p < .01).

### *1.B. Does The Level of Institutional Betrayal or Institutional Courage Experienced by a Survivor of Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse Impact Their Spirituality and Religious Commitment?*

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationships that may exist between institutional response, current spirituality and current religious commitment. The results indicate a significant negative relationship between institutional response and current

spirituality [r (107) = -.320, p <  .01] and institutional response and current religious

commitment [r (106) = -.358, p < .01].

Next, a multiple regression analysis was used to test if the institutional response to

reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse significantly predicted the survivors' current level of

spirituality, while controlling for the survivors' self-reported level of spirituality pre-abuse

($R^2$=.101, F (1,104) =11.629, p < .01). Institutional response significantly predicted current

spirituality (β=-.317, p < .01).

A simple regression analysis was used to test if the institutional response to reports of

clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse significantly predicted the survivors' current level of religious

commitment while controlling for the survivors' self-reported level of religious commitment pre-

abuse ($R^2$=.117, F (1,103) =14.723, p < .01). Institutional response significantly predicted

religious commitment (β=-.336, p < .01).

### 1.C. Does the Level of Institutional Betrayal or Institutional Courage Experienced by a Survivor of Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse Impact Their General Well-Being and Flourishing?

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationships that may

exist between institutional response, general well-being and flourishing. Table 2 depicts the

correlations. The results indicate a significant negative relationship between institutional

response and general well-being [r (107) = -.285, p < .01] and institutional response and

flourishing [r (107) = -.375, p < .01].

Next, a simple regression analysis was used to test if the institutional response to reports

of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse significantly predicted the survivors' current general well-

being. The results of the regression indicated the predictor of institutional response did not

significantly predict general well-being. A multiple regression analysis was used to test if the

institutional response to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse significantly predicted the

survivor's current level of flourishing. The results of the regression ($R^2$=.147, F (1,103) =17.710,

p < .01) indicated the predictor of institutional response significantly predicted flourishing (β=-

.288, p < .01).

In summary, results from RQ1 suggest relationships do exist between the institutional

response to clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, posttraumatic growth, spirituality, religious

commitment, and flourishing. Specifically, negative relationships exist between institutional

response and PTG improved relationships, current spirituality, current religious commitment,

and flourishing. When an institution responds to clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse with more

betrayal than courage, PTG improved relationships, spirituality, religious commitment, and

flourishing all decrease.

**Research Question 2: What is the Experience of Adult Survivors of Clergy-perpetrated**

**Sexual Abuse?**

One criterion for participation in this study was for the participant to have experienced

clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse as an adult, defined as an individual age 18 and above. This is an

area of research that has not been extensively explored. The first research question sought to

understand the experience of adult survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA) from the

time of their abuse, through the reporting process to their religious institution, and after their

reporting process was complete. To answer this research question, only data collected during the

qualitative portion of this study was utilized. Ten participants were interviewed and contributed

to the themes that emerged through this study. Each participant chose their own pseudonym to be

used to identify them in the reporting of this data. These interviews produced six themes across

participant responses, with additional sub-themes and patterns: (1) clergy abuse tactics, (2)

misunderstood adult victimization, (3) institutional betrayal, (4) survivor faith impact, (5)

institutional courage, and (6) hopes for the future; table 3 depicts all themes and sub-themes from

the qualitative analysis. Table 3 provides reporting information for each interview participant

including their age, age at abuse, length of abuse, type of religious institution and when they

disclosed the abuse. All 10 participants in this study were able to recall their experiences with

CPSA and the institutional responses they received.

**Table 3**

*Abuse Reporting Characteristics of Participants*

| Name | Current Age | Age abuse started | Age abuse ended | Length of Abuse | Type of Religious Institution | When abuse was disclosed |
|------|---------|-------|-------|----------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Alicia | 38 | 35 | 36 | 1 year | United Methodist Church | 0-6 months after abuse ended |
| Beth | 39 | 37 | 37 | Less than 1 year | Wesleyan | 0-6 months after abuse ended |
| Hope | 58 | 46 | 47 | 1 year | ELCA Lutheran | 3-5 years after abuse ended |
| Kate | 72 | 35 | 40 | 5 years | Episcopal Church | 1-2 years after abuse ended |
| Maggie | 63 | 55 | 56 | 1 year | Church of Christ | 0-6 months after abuse ended |
| Malta | 70 | 19 | 30 | 11 years | Catholic Church | More than 5 years after abuse ended |
| MC | 35 | 23 | 33 | 10 years | Non-denominational | 0-6 months after abuse ended |
| Michelle | 40 | 36 | 36 | Less than 1 year | The Southern Baptist Convention | Right after abuse started |
| Sarah | 66 | 34 | 57 | 23 years | United Methodist Church | 0-6 months after abuse ended |
| Vera | 63 | 46 | 50 | 4 years | Episcopal Church | 1-2 years after abuse ended |

*Note*. N=10

**Theme #1: Clergy Abuse Tactics**

The first theme to emerge for this research question was the tactics clergy perpetrators

used to abuse participants. This theme is characterized by the different tactics clergy abusers

employed to abuse those in their religious institution. Three tactics participants identified at

varying points of the abuse emerged from the data across all participants and are indicated as

subthemes: vulnerability advantage (*n*=7), violence (*n*=7), and faith manipulation (*n*=5). Several

participants identified more than one tactic used during the abuse. Table 4 provides the

breakdown of this theme and it's subthemes.

**Table 4**
*Theme 1: Clergy Abuse Tactics*

| Participant | Vulnerability Advantage | Violence | Faith Manipulation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alicia | | X | X |
| Beth | X | X | X |
| Hope | X | X | |
| Kate | X | | |
| Maggie | X | X | X |
| Malta | | X | |
| MC | X | | |
| Michelle | | X | X |
| Sarah | X | X | X |
| Vera | X | | |

*Note.* N=10.

### *Vulnerability Advantage*

Study participants identified some level of vulnerability in their life that they were

discussing with the abusive clergy person when the abusive relationship began (*n*=7). The

subtheme of vulnerability advantage is characterized by the tactic clergy abusers use to take

advantage of the knowledge of vulnerable life situations, such as difficulty in marriage, mental

health challenges, substance abuse disorder, deaths in the family, etc. that they are provided in

their role as a member of clergy to abuse their congregants. These participants were able to

identify an area of their life with which they were struggling that was only disclosed to their

abuser because of their status as a clergy person. One participant, Kate, recalled the challenges

she was experiencing when she was having conversations with her clergy person abuser:

> And I was having… it was a difficult time for me. I had three toddlers, three little kids,
>
> one of whom who had been very sickly. And my husband was not the most attentive and
>
> he was having health problems. So, I had all this exterior pressure, stress and I started

talking with him about it. The priest was also… I was taking a theology class called

Education for Ministry out of the [seminary]. This is just…and he was the instructor. And

so, we started having these talks and I've, I have trust issues anyway. And I finally

thought, well I could trust him. And I don't remember what, I guess we had met the next

weekend, the 1st of January. And this had progressed just us talking about different

things. And by about early February he had moved away from his desk, and he'd always

sat behind the desk, and I always sat on a couch, and he had come over to sit next to me

and then he started putting his arm around me and the progression of grooming began,

which actually started in January, I'm pretty sure. And I was needy. I needed that

physicality; I needed that connection. And I just didn't even think about it. Just, oh, here,

there's this wonderful understanding.

The personal difficulties Kate articulated in her statement show the vulnerable state she was in.

She had reached out to her priest to discuss the challenges of her life and because of her trust in

him as a clergy person she thought she could trust with the intimate details of her life. Her priest

then took advantage of the power he had in the relationship to slowly cross boundaries and then

start a sexual relationship.

In addition, several participants identified the way they had talked about having

previously disclosed past traumas to their abusers. MC said of her past, "I'm a person who's had a

tremendous amount of trauma in my life before all of this happened. And as I continue to go

through counseling, I can see where I totally, where I was naive, and I bought into a whole lot of

words. And it's just easy to be manipulated whenever you are desperate." MC believed part of

the reason she could be manipulated by her clergy person was because she had previously

disclosed her past trauma to her clergy person and she trusted them. Maggie also discussed the

disclosure of past trauma with her clergy person stating, "He knew all about the trauma that happened to me in sixth grade, so he knew from my sixth-grade trauma that I never, I always take responsibility." Maggie explained how she felt her abuser knew her previous trauma and that her way of coping was to blame herself for her trauma making her an easy target to be manipulated by her abuser.

### *Violence*

An additional subtheme of violence emerged as several participants identified violent acts or threats of violence during the abusive relationship as reasons they began or stayed in the abusive relationship with their clergy abuser (*n*=7). The subtheme of violence is defined as any violent act perpetrated by the clergy abuser during the time the abuser was sexually abusing an individual. Participants identified ways in which violence was used to initiate the relationship or as part of the ongoing relationship. Malta described in detail the violence used by her priest to initiate an on-going relationship:

> So, um, uh, so anyway, he drove me to a motel. I made it really clear to him that I did not want to have sex with him. He wanted to have sex. I did not want to have sex. I made it really clear to him. I said, No, no, no, no. Take me back to my parents' car. I'm going home. No. And he went to a motel. Anyway, then I told him I wasn't getting out of the car. It was really late by that time. Really late at night. And he was pretty drunk. And, and so, uh, I said I wasn't getting out of the car. And then he surprised me by opening up the door and pulling me out. He was a strong guy. He was big, and he had really strong developed arm muscles. So, he pulled me out and pushed me into the room. And, I, um, because I was raised Catholic and because of my generation and all, although with a lot of women, that it has not changed with the younger generations. I can see that right now,

that we were taught to be submissive. We're taught to not fight. We don't know how to

fight a religious leader. […] I said, just, you know, I kind of thought to myself, Well, you

know, I'm not a virgin and it won't kill me and I'll just get it over with. And, you know, I

can't get away from him, obviously. He's not gonna let me get away from him. And what

am I gonna do? […] Um, so I just knew that I was kinda lost. So, you know, so he did

what he wanted. You know, I felt, again, like I was nobody. Like I didn't matter. Like I,

he just went after me cause I was a single mother and easy to get, you know? That's all.

Malta explained this as the first encounter with her abuser, but that the relationship continued for

several months after in a similar fashion. Beth described a similar experience in her initial

physical interaction with the abusive clergy person:

Then January 20th we went on a recruiting trip and because it's in a block room, he went

and got a room key to my room, showed up and that's the night that it had turned

completely sexual. And I didn't admit this till a long time later, which we can get into, but

like I cried and screamed no the whole first time. And when he left he was like, that was

more rape-y than I expected.

While Malta and Beth identified clear times in which their clergy abuser used violence to initiate

a physical relationship, Maggie was able to discuss how her experience while not initiated

through violence, turned to violence in the relationship over time:

I had gone up to his office and we were just hugging and then he pushed me to my knees

and I know he wanted me to give him a blowjob and I did not want to. But he pushed me

down and then he got his penis out and I started and I'm thinking I don't, I don't want to

do this. This wasn't the first time, but I haven't even done it very often with him. But I

thought, I don't want to do this. So I stood up, which was the only thing that I was

capable of at that time. So then he pushes me back down to my knees and this time he

holds me down by my shoulders. And then, um, he finishes and you know, it's crazy even

after that, what, what happened there? And he had to go to an elders meeting. So he went

to the elders meeting and I got out to my car and I'm walking out of the church office and

I'm walking to my car going, wow, that's the most forced I have ever felt. But I would not

admit it was rape until the following June.

The use of violence within the relationship often left the participants feeling more confused

about the status of their relationship and their ability to leave the relationship.

### *Faith Manipulation*

The last subtheme to emerge regarding clergy abuse tactics was the utilization of faith

and/or religious language to manipulate participants into participating in their abusive

relationship (*n*=5). The subtheme of faith manipulation is characterized by any action taken or

tactic used by the clergy abuser that tried to justify the abuse by using the survivor's faith or

belief in higher power to say the abuse was ordained. Half of all interview participants reported

their abuser specifically naming God to justify the relationship. Beth described conversations she

had with her clergy abuser, "And like this can't be right- the amount of God conversations we

had. And he's like, 'Listen, I'm talking to God, I mean essentially he's good with it.' And it's

crazy now because it's like how asinine." Beth was able to reflect on her disappointment in

believing God would sanction an abusive relationship.

Michelle also articulated her frustration with how abusive clergy use God as a tool to

manipulate those within their congregations and how abusers have spiritual authority over their

congregants giving them power to be able to abuse:

And I think that just shows how much damage spiritual leaders can do because of their

authority. It's the same way that abusers abuse – that clergy can abuse, the spiritual

leaders have so much power over the congregation. And I would be like what they did to

you [the congregation] - that's how I was abused. Because these people hold something-

they have God in their hands. It's not like they're normal people who are just telling you

something. It's spiritual leaders who are using language. "God told me" and "God showed

me this" and that the position that they hold is they were chosen by God and they were

ordained by God. And that sits different in everyone no matter if you know it or not. I

think most people aren't even aware. Like they say, I don't hold anyone up on a pedestal,

but they do.

She identified how people look up to clergy because of their faith beliefs and perceived

connection to God, which gives clergy great power in the relationship with their congregants.

**Theme #2: Misunderstood Adult Victimization**

The second theme to emerge from this research was how participants feel their abuse was

misunderstood due to their age (*N*=10). Three subthemes emerged as part of this theme: (1)

religious authority trust, (2) self-blame, and (3) reporting to protect. The theme of misunderstood

adult victimization is characterized by beliefs and actions of survivors based upon their

understanding of themselves as adult survivors. Essentially, participants described how they felt

their trust in their clergy and religious institutions was often misunderstood when they spoke of

their experience because they were adults and not children. Similarly, participants blamed

themselves for the abuse because they were adults; several even named how if it had happened as

a minor, they would have easily understood they were not to blame, but could not initially make

that connection because they were adults. Participants also were clear they would not have

reported and come forward as an adult survivor if they did not believe they were helping future

victims because they know adult victimization is not understood or accepted within the Church.

Table 5 provides the breakdown of this theme and the subthemes that emerged.

**Table 5**

*Theme 2: Misunderstood Adult Victimization*

| Participant | Religious Authority Trust | Self-Blame | Reporting to protect |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alicia | | | X |
| Beth | X | X | |
| Hope | X | X | X |
| Kate | X | X | X |
| Maggie | X | X | |
| Malta | X | X | |
| MC | X | X | |
| Michelle | X | X | X |
| Sarah | | | X |
| Vera | X | | X |

*Note*. N=10.

### *Religious Authority Trust*

One subtheme to emerge regarding adult victimization was the way the abusive clergy

person was granted automatic trust in the relationship because of their status as a clergy person

($n$=8). The subtheme of religious authority trust is defined as the trust placed in a clergy person

because of their role as a clergy person; trust may not have been easily given in other

professions. This is classified within the theme of misunderstood adult victimization due to

several participants citing their abuse being misunderstood because others were not able to

understand the blind trust, they placed in their clergy person because of their role as clergy.

Participants described how they often felt because others could not understand the blind trust,

they had for their clergy person; others often blamed the survivors for their abuse saying they

were adults making adult decisions. Eight participants noted they would not have felt

comfortable with the actions of the clergy person who abused them and would have identified the boundary crossings more readily if they did not place trust in their religious institution. Hope described her trust in her religious institution, "I thought that was a church I loved. But that pastor never taught any of us about abuse. Who would've thought abuse in the church though? Had I known, I might have had my radar up. Churches are too naïve." Maggie also identified how she had placed trust in her religious institution and its clergy:

> I never heard the phrase clergy sexual abuse. I didn't even know this was a thing. I didn't know it was possible because he was the safest person in my life because he was my minister. That's, he was totally trusted. It's crazy that they can get that much trust by just having a title. And that's what he did.

Congregants quickly trust religious institutions and their leaders because of their title and perceived status with the divine. Participants indicated this trust in their institutions and religious leaders as one of the things that led them to these abusive relationships.

### Self-Blame

An additional subtheme that emerged was that survivors identified themselves as the cause of their abuse either during the reporting process, or in looking back at how they initially felt during the time they were being abused ($n$=7). The subtheme of self-blame is defined through participants identifying ways they initially or currently blame themselves for the abuse. This is characterized under the theme of misunderstood adult victimization because several participants described how they felt they blamed themselves solely because they were adults at the time of abuse and would have felt less responsible if they were minors. Maggie described her feelings of self-blame throughout her interview. She said, "If somebody gets hurt, I figure it's my

fault and then I try to change it" and later in her interview she said, "I always thought it was my fault - I will destroy the marriage and I'll destroy the church if I come forward".

Participants acknowledged the long periods of time it took for them to be able to identify their relationship as abusive and understand they were not to blame for it. Hope said, "I was in counseling for two and a half years and I felt like it was all my fault. I didn't know how or why this occurred. And I had taken on so much responsibility for it when in reality I wasn't responsible". MC explored how her previous trauma helped to compound her understanding of how she initially identified herself as to blame for her abusive relationship with her clergy person:

> Um, and I think probably because like I had been abused since I was a kid and all
>
> growing up. And so like, I understood like as a kid, like things wouldn't be my fault. It
>
> was very hard for me to understand like the difference of power dynamics and whenever
>
> there's a leader and like, there's not consent in that. There's never going to be consent in
>
> that. And my therapist told me that like in the very, very beginning and I was like, Whoa.
>
> Like, I don't know what you're talking about. It really took a long time for that to sink in
>
> and to identify like, okay, this was not my fault. Like I wasn't asking for this, I was
>
> asking for help.

Each participant identified different ways in which they felt they understood why they blamed themselves for their abuse. Michelle articulated her need to be responsible because of her faith and understanding of God:

> I really wanted to own what I did. And so I felt all the guilt and shame and I just wanted
>
> to be right with God because I grew up in white evangelical Christianity my whole life.
>
> So I was taught all of that stuff my whole life of you've got to be right with God and just

if you sin then it puts a wall between you and God and you can't have communication

with God. And I so wanted that relationship with God that I think I was afraid that I

wasn't owning…. Like I felt like it was almost like a compulsiveness to own every single

little bit of what I did. And finally, it was just one day I kind of realized on my own, like

God knows what this is, even if I don't and if I don't, he knows my heart. He knows that I

want to own it, whatever it is.

The participants who did not report an aspect of self-blame were those who reported previously

having a clear grasp of adult victimization.

### *Reporting to Protect*

The first stage of this research study collected survey data from participants who had

been abused by a clergy person at the age of 18 or above and had reported their abuse to their

religious institution. The subtheme of reporting to protect is defined as the identified motivation

survivors described to protect others from being abused. Specifically, participants noted, had

they not been worried about others potentially being abuse, they would not have reported their

abuse because they felt peers did not see them as victims because they were adults at the time of

abuse. A screening tool was used as part of the survey data collection to ensure participants fit

the criteria of the study. Nearly a third (32%) of the 229 potential participants who had

experienced clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse never reported their abuse. Because of this

information, a question was added to the interview protocol asking each interview participant

why they chose to report their abuser to their religious institution. Six of the study interview

participants reported their reasoning for reporting their abuse to their religious institution was

because of their fear the abuser would seek out additional individuals to abuse through the same

process of abuse. Kate spoke of her reasoning for reporting, "The fact that I had discovered other

victims, the fact that he was a chaplain and was going to be the chaplain at this junior high camp. That having worked with youth, I knew this was a very vulnerable age." While Kate specifically mentioned concern for youth, other participants cited the protection of other vulnerable adults in their religious institution. Vera reflected on why she reported "I mentioned to you that I was watching him groom other women. There were 12 of them. And I started calling them, in my mind, [abuser]'s girls. […] And I just saw the harm, the tremendous harm he could do." Alicia echoed the same sentiments, "Um, it was the realization that there would, there was no one who was gonna stop him. There was no one, I was the only because he, he went after women who couldn't speak up and who were afraid."

Several participants were able to articulate how abuse of a minor is more easily understood by congregants, religious institutions, and the broader public, than the abuse of an adult. Hope said of understanding adult clergy abuse, "Adult clergy abuse is so misunderstood. And I think the more it becomes a crime in more states and the more understood and more people come forward or don't remain silent they'll know. People will understand more. Kids and adults get abused". Kate specifically described her rationale for participating in research studies, such as this one, was to help others understand that adults can be abused:

> Especially talking with adults. 'Cause as adults, we're not, it's not always understood.
> And because we are adults, we're not always believed and it's seen as just an affair. And
> as adults, we're trying to be very often trying to be private. But we don't realize that our
> story, and this is the only reason I do these is because somebody else out there is going
> through this alone and they need to hear this. They need to hear that somebody else has
> survived.

When an individual comes to a religious institution, they are told they are safe, and can reach out to their clergy leaders when they are feeling vulnerable or during challenging times. However, religious institutions do not often train all congregants on how they can be vulnerable. Sarah described her hope for a training on this in the future so abuse can be prevented:

> I know that the churches I go to, they have like safe church program for people that are around children, But I think that, um, they ought to make it, I think it's very important to publicize that it's happening so that everyone realizes that this is a value that we have for children and adults. Um, and it's part of a requirement for anyone that serves in any capacity. Because what people don't realize, I think is it's not just children that are vulnerable. Right? Anyone that is hurting is vulnerable. So, because all too often, I mean so many of these are adult, adult women who fall victim, who are so hurting and then don't realize that they're sort of slowly, slowly seduced into this situation.

Vera also explained her desire for more clear education around adult victimization, "It feels like they need to do all our whole life for adults. They need to have…everybody needs to understand that no matter how strong they think they are, they could still be targeted women, old as well as young," believing this additional education could assist in the identification of and prevention of future victims. Whether it was fear for youth or adults, these participants were adamant their intention for reporting was the safety of others who would encounter the same clergy person who abused them.

**Theme #3: Institutional Betrayal**

The third theme to emerge was institutional betrayal. All 10 participants identified institutional responses during the reporting process that were harmful to them and their healing, meeting the definition of institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Specifically, participants

identified three actions their institutions took that were harmful: (1) prioritized institution, (2)

support withdrawn, and (3) narrative control. Table 6 illustrates the breakdown of participants

who identified with each of the subthemes. Further, six participants directly identified and stated

they felt betrayed by their religious institution through the actions or inactions of their institution.

Beth described the conversation she had with the lead pastor when they reached out to her three

months after her report of abuse and claimed it was more important to assist her abuser before

assisting her:

> It was the worst day of my life. It was by far worse than anything that had happened to
>
> that point. I had had questions, like okay, take my employment out of it. This is a church
>
> and I sinned. Where is anyone? You took everyone away from me and he was like, "I'm
>
> the parent of this staff and you are dangerous and you are not allowed around my children
>
> until you restore with me." And I asked what took so long to reach out to me for 12
>
> weeks. I've heard from no one. And he said, "When an ambulance shows up at a car
>
> accident, someone could be sitting on the side of the road with a broken leg like hey,
>
> come over here and help me. But someone else might have a head injury and you as the
>
> injured, don't get to decide how soon you get help. They go to the most critical first". His
>
> exact words for the image, literally he said, "of the church, [abuser] was more critical
>
> than I was. So they had to deal with him first."

The description of her religious institution protecting and serving her abuser before speaking to

her, illustrates how the concept of institutional betrayal can be understood through a survivor's

eyes. Hope also expressed frustration with her religious institution's response to her report of

abuse, "It's incongruent with a righteous response that I expected from the church. I thought it all

should have been done immediately, particularly now that I know that they knew he had at least

one victim before me; they should have removed him immediately." Allowing the clergy person

to remain in leadership while an investigation was ongoing after the report was made is one area

of institutional betrayal that was mentioned by Hope and reiterated by Vera:

> The fact that they let the priest stay in the pulpit, he knew I'd filed a complaint. So then it
>
> was in his best interest to make sure that I was seen as a nut or a slut, or both and I have
>
> direct evidence that he did that. It was a really, really toxic response. Really harmful and
>
> traumatizing.

Participants consistently identified actions taken by their religious institutions that they found to

be harmful to them and their healing.

**Table 6**
*Theme 3: Institutional Betrayal*

| Participant | Prioritized Institution | Support Withdrawn or changed | Narrative control |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alicia | X | X | X |
| Beth | X | | X |
| Hope | X | X | |
| Kate | | X | X |
| Maggie | X | X | X |
| Malta | X | | |
| MC | X | | |
| Michelle | X | X | X |
| Sarah | X | X | X |
| Vera | X | X | |

*Note*. N=10.

### *Prioritized Institution*

The first subtheme to emerge for institutional betrayal that was identified as harmful to

participants was the way the religious institution prioritized the institution and its' reputation

over the survivor (*n*=9). The subtheme of prioritized institution is defined as, actions taken by the

leaders of the religious institution participants reported abuse to, that illustrated protection of the

institution and its' reputation instead of the survivor, causing further harm to the survivor. Vera

identified the use of confidentiality to protect the institution, even when she was being told it was for her safety, "He was handling this on a so-called confidential basis. Confidentiality is supposed to protect me. He was protecting the priest".

Alicia spoke of how she felt her case was handled with the institutional reputation in mind instead of her, "the district superintendents had the tools they needed to make this situation; to reconcile this situation. And instead of doing that, they chose to protect an abuser and their own asses." Later in the interview Alicia expanded on her thoughts about how her report of abuse was handled in order to protect the institution. She said, "Which shouldn't be. But it is. […] But now that person, you know, sits almost in the role of Bishop so it's just a whole political game that is just a twist of what the intention of this whole institution was meant to be about." Participants struggled to make sense of the institution taking actions they felt were more to protect the institution than to help them heal. Maggie tried to make sense of the response she received by acknowledging the institution was the main priority over her, "They love their power, and I was just a woman, to tell you the truth, they might have loved me. A lot of 'em did. I mean they're good friends. But you know, when it comes down to it, the church is more important".

### *Support Withdrawn or Changed*

A second subtheme to emerge was how participants believed the support initially offered to them when they reported the abuse to their religious institution was either withdrawn or changed over time through the abuse reporting process (*n*=7). The subtheme of support withdrawn or changed is defined as the support offered by the religious institution following a report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse being withdrawn completely or changed over time that led to further harm of the survivor of abuse. Alicia describes how the written report of her abuse

was changed prior to it being filed by the person in charge of the reporting process in her religious institution:

> So I went to a female clergy. But, um, instead of taking my, and this is part of the reason I feel quite free to tell you about this, is because she took my statement and instead of, um, and I had it signed, I did all the things. Like I made sure I clarified with her that I was doing this formal complaint and I must have like mislabeled it in the email header and so that's when things got a little off kilter because she claimed that it was not an official statement. Um, the other woman did a, did a complaint as well, signed, et cetera., and so when I went back to her, she was like, "Oh no, this was like, this was like a statement of concern" and I was like, Oh. But they did the whole process, like they interviewed me just like they would if, you know, it was Zoom cause of Covid and all this kind of stuff - they interviewed me, like the process outlined. And then I never heard back and I never heard back and I never heard back. And so I reached out like, what the hell is going on here? And they're like, Oh, like this is what happened. And basically, the district superintendent took that woman's statement and my statement put them together, pulled it all out of context. They claimed to have done research. Like the bishop was like, Oh, we had to do research and, um, and, and made the formal complaint so that then the [district superintendent] becomes the complainant."

Through this experience, because Alicia was no longer the complainant according to her religious institution, she was not given the support the institution provides to complainants.

Maggie described her encounter reporting her abusive clergy person. Initially, she felt like the elders of her church supported her, but when she said she would not use the term affair to describe her abuse, the support she had previously received was gone. She stated, "So from then

on, the elders didn't care for me. Now maybe some of them did, but then it was, if you're not gonna say you had an affair. You're really not of much use here." Michelle recounted a similar experience with her religious institution:

> We started having meetings with the leadership and the pastor, like the head pastor was put on sabbatical while they tried to figure stuff out. […] By Wednesday the church had gotten a lawyer, a big fancy lawyer who represents churches. And I got a call from the lead, the head guy on the leadership team and he told me, we got this big fancy lawyer and we want you guys to come in and give statements or whatever. The way that they worded things to us, it was very confusing because they 100% acted like we were all on the same side and that we were all in this together and that we're out to get him. Thank you guys so much for bringing all of this into the light and you guys have shown a big spotlight on all of the stuff going on and we're going to make sure that they get what's coming to 'em, kind of talk to us. And so it was pretty far – like embarrassingly far into the process where we were like, "wait a second, maybe they don't actually care about us and maybe we aren't on the same side." When we got our own lawyer to protect us they sent a letter to the church. And literally the day they got that letter, we were in counseling, we were in a session and when we got out of it, they called us up to the desk and they were like; "we just got a call from the church and you're cut off. They're not paying for your counseling anymore."

Participants shared the way these changes in support could have real negative impacts on their well-being, particularly in the case of Michelle where counseling services were withdrawn.

*Narrative Control*

The third subtheme to emerge within the theme of institutional betrayal was participants'

beliefs their religious institution attempted to control the narrative of their abuse to protect the

institutional reputation (*n*=6). The subtheme of narrative control is defined as the religious

institution controlling the narrative about clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse after it has been

disclosed to discredit or silence the survivor.

In Alicia's experience, as cited previously, the narrative was explicit controlled by the

institution when they would not allow her to act as the complainant in her reporting process; the

church took over as the complainant. Other participants discussed ways in which they were not

allowed to share their narrative of their abuse to their church communities when they wanted to.

Beth talked about how her story of abuse was shared with the religious institution she was both

abused in, and worked in:

> So that Tuesday that the executive pastor called me, they had a virtual all staff meeting,
>
> […] they told all 250 people "[abuser] and [I] had an affair. We don't how long it's been
>
> going on, but it's not a secret. You can tell anyone you want and if you reach out to them,
>
> you will lose your job, we're not taking any questions. This is the information and good
>
> luck." So within an hour of that meeting, I was already getting Instagram messages from
>
> people who didn't work or even go to the church anymore because they could tell
>
> anybody. So at this point it was fair game to announce it.

Beth's experience of the church sharing a narrative, particularly a narrative that calls the abuse

an affair, is shared with several participants in this study. Both Maggie and Michelle also

experienced their religious institution sharing a narrative that they had an affair, and they were

not allowed to speak and share their stories of abuse. Maggie was asked to confess to the congregation of her church after her abusive clergy person made his own public confession:

> They let [abuser] go forward. They let him go forward in front of the congregation. And he gets up there before the congregation, this service. They had asked visitors, please leave. And he gets up and he says a bunch of bullshit. And then he said, I've had an emotional and physical affair with someone who wasn't my wife? And he said, I just want to tell you how sorry I am. And I know it's hard to hear, but I hope that you forgive me. And then they asked me to go forward like he did. And I said, I don't understand. Do you want me to go forward and say I'm sorry that he raped me. What am I supposed to say there? "Well, no, not that" And I said, okay. […] And so then someone I know maybe a couple weeks go by and they go, this is really, this is really like kind of destroying the church. She goes, they just feel like if you went forward and confessed it would help. And I said, Confess to what? I said, what would I confess to? And they never had an answer.

Maggie's thoughts highlight the incongruence of understanding between her and her religious institution surrounding the abuse she endured by a clergy person. Michelle also discussed how her religious institution controlled the narrative, and how that impacted her experience long-term:

> And the lead head guy, he looked at my husband and he goes, I will argue till I'm blue in the face that this was not abuse, this was an affair. And I think it was then where we realized and they started putting out more of their own narrative to the church. We wanted really badly to be able to tell the church our side of things of what really happened because we kind of felt like the church has been devastated and wouldn't they

want to know? Wouldn't it help for them to know that it was one man doing this? Not all

of us hurting them, but they wouldn't ever let us say anything to the church. And they

kept just sharing their narrative of what happened. […] I guess I mean, I'll just say this

one thing too cause it just literally just happened yesterday. But when a church leadership

does that much damage to victims with their narrative and they're just keeping things and

not sharing the truth with the church, it does not go away. So, everyone we were ever in

contact with at that church still four years later over four years later, those people still

actively hate me.

Through this excerpt, Michelle shared how the narrative shared by her religious institution

continued to harm her years after the experience and reporting period had ended compounding

this aspect of institutional betrayal.

**Theme #4: Survivor Faith Impact**

The fourth theme to emerge was the ways in which participants believe the entire

experience of CPSA inclusive of the institutional response impacted the participants beliefs on

spirituality, religion, and religious institutions ($n$=10). The theme of survivor faith impact is

defined as ways in which survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse feel their faith has been

impacted by their abuse, and their institutions' response to the report of abuse. The three

identified subthemes are: (1) spiritual vs. religious, (2) aversion to religious institutions, and (3)

disbelief

institutions can change. All 10 interview participants identified with at least one of the

subthemes, with half of all participants identifying with all subthemes identified. Table 7

illustrates the breakdown of how each participant identified with the subthemes.

***Spiritual vs. Religious***

One notable subtheme to emerge was how participants identified their spiritual practices as far more valued after their abuse than their participation in religious practices (n=10). The subtheme of spiritual vs. religious is defined as the identification by survivors of feeling more connected to their spirituality without feeling as connected to a religious institution or specific religious practice. Participants continued to have a sense of spirituality in some form but did not actively seek out a religious setting. Some participants clearly identified their faith beliefs. Beth said, "my faith pretty much has stayed intact. I've seen God's kindness to me and my husband". She went on to further clarify that while they have a sense of spirituality, it is no longer specifically grounded in a specific religious practice, "Someone has not dictated our spirituality. And it's really interesting to make your own spiritual decisions. […] So I think it's us re-learning what it's like to be a Christian and not a professional Christian." Sarah echoed a similar feeling of spirituality without a religious institution. Sarah said of her beliefs now, "I have to make a real distinction between the church and God. […] a lot of times all I could do was pray." Continuing spiritual practices was helpful for Sarah, but not within the religious institution.

Michelle identified with wanting a spiritual experience, but is still struggling with how to define that and what that looks like post reporting abuse to her religious institution:

> I do desire spirituality but it looks different because I just don't know what I believe anymore. So I've gone through such, this just like radical change in my beliefs about even the way, I can't really read scripture yet because it's triggering. When I hear verses, my first instinct now is to roll my eyes because I know why it's being used. So it's like I want this spirituality, I want Jesus and God, but I don't want any of the other stuff. So I don't even want people sharing a verse with me because what is their motive for doing that? I don't want anything but true spirituality, which is making me… I feel like it makes

me nervous to accept any of it. So even if I do feel like something is from God, I'm very

careful about believing that.

Michelle's explanation clarifies that she does want spirualty, but the acts of people have made

her question all motivation from those in religious institutions when they share something

spirituality related. Vera recounted a similar understanding, "I realized it doesn't matter how

friendly this place is, we are one twisted clergy member away from another crisis […] So I left

and eventually have reshaped my spirituality which is no longer that Sunday church."

Participants were able to identify their want for some level of spirituality, but that that was not

dependent upon a religious institution or traditional religious practice.

### Aversion to Religious Institutions

A second subtheme was a current aversion to religious institutions or the specific type of

institution in which their abuse occurred (*n*=7). Some participants stated they would not be able

to return to a religious institution that was the same denomination or type of religion as the one

in which their abuse occurred. For example, Sarah stated, "I knew I could never go back to a

Methodist Church", since that was the Christian denomination in which her abuse occurred.

Maggie also expressed a desire to go back to a church but could not see herself within the type of

church in which she was abused. She said of her attempt, "I needed to go to a different kind of a

church. I just cried the whole time. I don't think I'll ever go into a Church of Christ".

While some participants were specific about the type of religious institution they could

not attend again, other participants said they would not be able to attend any type of religious

institution again. Vera said, "I found ultimately that I couldn't keep going to church". Malta

described how she tried to return to a religious institution after her abuse, but ultimately could

not. She said, "It was unrealistic to go back to the church, but it's just all I knew, you know, it's

just all I knew. I mean, maybe some people could stay in the church. I know some of them do after they've been abused, but I couldn't"

Michelle discussed in depth her understanding of religious institutions and how it intersects with her desire for spirituality:

> I can say that I have zero desire for anything religious. I mean it's disheartening, especially when I do still love Christianity as it means Jesus Christ following Jesus Christ. I love who Jesus was and I love how he loved and treated women. But my hope for the church, the American church is just, I hate to say that but I just don't. […] And honestly, I mean church as an organization, I don't think it would be a terrible thing if they did disappear. I don't think that is the true church. And it's not a representation of - it's the representation of America of business and economy. It's not the representation of Jesus Christ. And me and my husband keep talking about if we are going to ever be able to do church in any way, its gonna just be a group of people getting together to talk about God's word. We can't do buildings anymore. We can't do organized religion anymore.

Michelle did not lose her beliefs through her abuse, but she did lose her trust in religious institutions and cannot return to one after the abuse she endured.

### *Disbelief Institutions Can Change*

The final subtheme to emerge was the belief participants hold that religious institutions cannot change and handle the reporting of abuse better (*n*=5). Participants believed their reporting of abuse was handled poorly by their religious institution and further believe, even if they tried, their religious institution is incapable of responding well to survivors of CPSA. The disbelief institutions can change subtheme is defined as the belief religious institutions cannot respond well to survivors who report clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. All participants were

asked what recommendations they had for religious institutions to support survivors. Some participants responded by giving recommendations, and other participants said that the concept that a religious institution could change, and handle abuse reports better was something they did not think was possible. Beth described her thought process:

> Strangely, I would love to say that I've thought a lot about this, but I really haven't in the sense that it seems so, I mean, guess this group that I'm in on Facebook, everyone's story went bad. You know what I mean? It seems so unreasonable. It's thinking about, "Hey, have you thought recently about how cars could fly?" I'm sure someone's thinking about that, but it seems unreasonable to me that that would happen and that I would be some part of that. So, it all seems like so unrealistic that the church would change.

It seemed so unrealistic to Beth to think about what ways the reporting process could be better for survivors because of her experience talking about reporting with other survivors of CPSA. MC shared a similar sentiment when she said, "It would be naive of me to be expecting something from them that I know does not line up with the way they do things." Alicia shared her thoughts on her specific institution, as well as religious institutions more broadly:

> I don't trust that. I think, I think there was a day, you know, I had a seminary professor who'd been teaching for almost 50 years, sociologist, and he used to tell his kids, if you're ever lost in a city, you ever, you know, in need of help anywhere, find the Methodist church and talk to the minister. That is not true anymore. It's just not true. And that's a shame, but I don't think it's the only institution that's suffering from this. Like, I think it's a trend in our culture.

Participants are clear they do not see a future for religious institutions to do better when it comes to resolving reports of abuse within their religious institution.

**Table 7**
*Theme 4: Survivor Faith Impact*

| Participant | Spiritual vs. Religious | Aversion to Religious Institution | Disbelief Institutions can change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alicia | X | | X |
| Beth | X | X | X |
| Hope | X | | |
| Kate | X | X | X |
| Maggie | X | X | |
| Malta | X | X | X |
| MC | X | | X |
| Michelle | X | X | |
| Sarah | X | X | |
| Vera | X | X | |

*Note.* N=10.

## Theme #5: Institutional Courage

The fifth theme to emerge was institutional courage, or "steps institutions can take to promote healing and trust of an institution" (Freyd & Smidt, 2019, p. 491). Specifically, participants were able to identify the institutional responses they received during the reporting process they deemed helpful to them and their healing (*n*=9). While many participants did not identify many actions of their religious institutions that they deemed helpful, they were able to identify two specific actions the institutions too that did provide some level of healing. The two identified subthemes are (1) therapy and (2) support person or group. Table 8 illustrates how each participant identified with each theme.

**Table 8**
*Theme 5 Institutional Courage*

| Participant | Therapy | Support Person or Group |
|---|---|---|
| Alicia | X | X |
| Beth | X | |
| Hope | | |
| Kate | X | X |
| Maggie | X | X |
| Malta | X | |
| MC | X | X |
| Michelle | X | |
| Sarah | | X |
| Vera | X | |

*Note.* N=10.

***Therapy***

Eight participants described an example of institutional courage: religious institutions'

coverage of therapy or counseling was helpful during the reporting process or in their healing

once the reporting process had ended. The subtheme of therapy is defined as the payment for

mental health treatment by the religious institution the offending clergy person was a member of,

and falls within the theme of institutional courage as a step the institution can take to promote

healing. Maggie reflected on how her therapy, for a period, was covered by her religious

institution, "The only thing they did is they paid for my counseling for 11 months. They had

promised 12, but they did it for 11. And that I could never have afforded", and it met a

need in terms of cost that she would not have been able to fulfill.

While participants acknowledged the help they experienced from their religious

institution covering the costs of their therapy, they still held reservations about the intentions

behind the action. Michelle spoke candidly about her question around intent:

> When they got their lawyer, the lawyer told them that they needed to pay for us counseling
>
> because they sent [abuser] to a sex rehab facility for six weeks. So, he told them they should pay
>
> for our counseling. I don't know, I'm sure that was maybe so we didn't sue them - I don't know.

Beth also expressed how she was unsure of the offer for counseling because of the institution's

requirements if she were to attend. She said "They would pay for four sessions of marriage

counseling under the understanding that I would sign a paper that they would get all the records

of the sessions. So, if anything was disclosed, they would be able to know." MC had also

received counseling covered by her religious institution and found it helpful for the moment, but

shared she felt she could have done it differently:

> And then the church staff offered to pay for, um, counseling for me, for a counselor of
>
> my choice, which I went with a counselor that [senior pastor] had recommended, which is

a lady who used to go to our church, which, looking back on it, I would do that

differently because that was not necessarily the best counseling help at the time, but it got

me through it and that's what I needed.

While participants were able to identify therapy as helpful to their healing, they were uncertain

of the institution's intentions.

### *Support Person or Group*

One additional subtheme of institutional courage participants identified as potentially

helpful was the assignment of a person or group of persons within the religious institution to

support the survivor after they reported their abuse ($n= 5$). The subtheme of support person or

group is defined as the assignment of a person or group of persons by a religious institution to

provide emotional support to the survivor during the reporting and healing process. A support

person or group is someone or some group that is formally assigned by the religious institution to

assist the survivor as they go through the reporting and healing process. Sarah spoke highly of

the support she received:

> The district superintendent. That was [abuser]'s supervisor. And he was wonderful. He
>
> was very supportive and very pastoral. And, um, he was very comforting to me. And
>
> some of it was that part of this that was so difficult was that I, I'm a very…I had to use
>
> the word religious cause that sounds very rule based, but my faith is an incredibly
>
> important part of my life and part of what, um, part of the abuse that [abuser] committed
>
> did whatever. Um, it wasn't just, I think the hardest abuse probably was not just the, it
>
> wasn't the sexual, it was the spiritual abuse, so this man helped with all of that.

Sarah found this assigned person was able to help her cope with what had happened to her, and assist with an area of healing with which she was struggling. MC also expressed appreciation for the person within her religious institution that assisted after she reported her abuse:

So yeah, [senior pastor] was her boss, and [abuser] was the director. Um, so I've known, I'd known [senior pastor] for years. She supported the, the [recovery house], which is that name of the house. And she had spoken several times with like, groups of women and, and I've come in contact with her several times. So her and I had a pretty good relationship. We would go for walks and stuff and talk and that sort of thing and meet and I continued, uh, we would meet about every few weeks, like go for walks and just talk about how I'm doing and what I imagined my life to be moving forward, that sort of thing.

Participants expressed the need for someone to be in this role to help in healing, and a majority of participants found these individuals to be helpful to them

**Table 9**

*Theme 6: Hopes for the Future Church*

| Participant | Survivor Narrative | Clergy Abuse Education | Mental Health Treatment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alicia | X | X | |
| Beth | X | | |
| Hope | | X | X |
| Kate | X | X | |
| Maggie | X | X | X |
| Malta | X | X | X |
| MC | X | X | X |
| Michelle | X | X | |
| Sarah | X | X | X |
| Vera | X | X | |

*Note*. N=10

**Theme #6: Hopes for the Future Church**

The final theme to emerge was recommendations from participants on how religious institutions can handle disclosures of CPSA in ways that will be helpful to survivors. All participants were asked what recommendations they had for religious institutions to support survivors after disclosing clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. There were three salient recommendations that emerged from this question with broad approval from study participants: (1) survivor narrative, (2) clergy abuse education, and (3) mental health treatment. Table 10 illustrates what recommendations each individual participant identified with.

### *Survivor Narrative*

The first recommendation participants identified as a positive way to address disclosures of CPSA within religious institutions is to allow the survivor to share their narrative of their experience (n=9). Survivor narrative is defined as the ability of the survivor of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse to share their narrative of what happened and prioritized over the narrative of the abuser and religious institution.

Some participants described the frustrations they had with how their narrative was changed by the institution. Alicia said of her experience, "taking my personal life and rewriting it as their own I think was the most, it was like double damage. Like it took everything I had to just make that statement and then to realize that I don't even get to see what [he] put in there." To Alicia, losing her narrative and voice created further harm by her religious institution.

Several participants named listening to their narratives as a healing act that religious institutions, and others can do to help survivors. Michelle shared her feelings on survivor narratives, "Listening to victims, understanding, not allowing narratives to be spoken before- I mean really it should only be the victim's narrative being spoken". Vera went into more detail about why it matters to listen to survivors and share their narratives:

Once you've been through an experience like this, you've got a truth that most of the church doesn't know that they need to know. And so it is a prophetic voice that survivors bring. In terms of care, tell the truth - don't keep it a secret. Even if there's a complaint that the bishop that the adjudicator thinks is insignificant like mine -tell it to the congregation. The congregation deserves to know, take that preacher out of the pulpit for a while – until the case is adjudicated. Open a conversation within the congregation. Being heard, having our stories heard, being listened to by someone who believes us and cares is a huge part of healing. The church didn't do that for me. You're doing that for me. I've had over the years, other friends doing that for me. And I think as survivors, we need to tell our stories and we need to tell them into an environment that is safe. We need to be believed and respected and heard and validated. We need to be told, yes, what happened to you was awful. And no, it was not your fault, so what the church can do, now that I'm thinking about this, is just listen. And not just listen to the first report that comes in, but really creating a listening ministry for survivors to tell their stories however they want to tell them, as often as they need to tell them.

Kate shared similar feelings to Vera regarding the value of survivor voices in religious institutions to assist with healing; "It will live with you the rest of your life, but every time you tell your story, you can, even if it's just half of a 1% of a bit of power back and you have to have that." The idea of survivors being able to grow in healing as their story is told explains the importance of the recommendation to share the narrative of the survivor.

### Clergy Abuse Education

The second recommendation was participant hopes for more education for both clergy and laity within religious organizations on the topic of CPSA to assist in prevention and

identification of this abuse if it were to occur again (*n*=9). Michelle explained, "I think the first thing is just awareness and learning about different types of abuse and being invested in trying to understand abuse and why this happens. And so that when these situations come along, they can be like, wait a second, that's not an affair. Or be like, that doesn't sound exactly right". Much like Michelle, Vera was also direct in saying religious institutions ought to be teaching about this type of abuse, "I think the number one thing that churches need to do is talk about this on a regular basis. Every congregation needs to talk about the reality of abuse, needs to talk about the power dynamics and talk about staying safe."

Resoundingly, participants reiterated the need to educate parishioners on clergy-perpetrated abuse of adults, because while there is some education related to children, there is often none or very little related to the abuse of adults. Maggie explained her frustration with religious institutions that do not address the abuse of adults:

> They could actually treat this as a real thing that happens in churches and not just, you know, they love to talk about like in the Church of Christ that Catholic churches, boy those Catholics should have done something about all those little kids. Well why don't you talk about all the adult women that this is happening to in all the Protestant churches. There's no difference. You just like to pretend because they're children, that's worse than this.

Education would provide a clearer understanding to individuals who attend religious institutions and to individuals who work within religious institutions which may help congregants and employees of religious institutions better understand this type of abuse. Hope reiterated similar feelings around education and adults, "More education. And like I said, I don't really know it, there needs to be age-appropriate education in the church to teach about abuse in general. Kids

and adults get abused." She further emphasized the importance of this education by stating, "Predators go to churches, they know that is fertile ground and congregants have no idea that they are fodder if they don't know. So, I think churches need to do a better job of educating." Participants felt education around adult abuse can act as a preventative tool within the religious institution.

### *Mental Health Treatment*

The final recommendation to emerge was the need for mental health treatment covered by the religious institution to help advance the healing of the survivor of CPSA ($n$=5). Half of all participants discussed how mental health treatment that was paid for by the religious institution was one way the institution could respond in a way that supported survivors. Malta said she felt "they should support the survivors definitely with psychological health therapy and paying for it", offering a potential for religious institutions, whereas MC was more direct in saying "they definitely need to provide counseling."

Further, one of the survivors, Hope, clarified the need for professional care versus in-house spiritual care that religious institutions sometimes offer, "And honestly, this is such a trauma situation. I do think you need professional trauma counselors, not just spiritual care. I think that is too confusing for survivors in the beginning. I think you need to go to professionals, leave the spirituality out of it." She believed there could be a time for spiritual exploration, but that it should happen independently of receiving mental health treatment following the trauma of CPSA.

In summary, results from research question two suggest clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults is a traumatic experience, and the way a religious institution responds to a report of CPSA makes a difference in the way a survivor moves through life post-abuse. Participants

described how they understand their abuse, and the ways they felt their abuse is often

misunderstood because of their age at the time of the abuse. Participants described several ways

the institutional response to the report of their abuse helped or harmed them during the reporting

process or after the reporting process, during their healing.

**Research Question 3: What impact does an institution's response have on adult survivors**

**of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse?**

One criterion for participation in this study was the participant had to have reported the

sexual abuse they suffered at the hands of a clergy person to the religious institution to which

that clergy person belonged. Clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse is an area of research that has not

been extensively explored. The third research question in this study sought to understand how

the participants felt the response of their religious institution impacted affected their level of post

traumatic growth, spirituality, religious commitment, well-being, and flourishing. To answer this

research question, both quantitative and qualitative data were used and a mixed methods analysis

of the data was utilized. Four plots were analyzed in this analysis and a total of seven themes

were overlayed on various plots. The four plots were chosen to be analyzed based upon the

regressions that showed statistical significance during the quantitative analysis completed to

answer research question one. Themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis used to answer

research question two were then chosen to be overlayed on the regression plots. Because this

study sought to understand how the institutional response may impact survivors of clergy-

perpetrated sexual abuse, the three subthemes of institutional betrayal: (1) prioritized institution,

(2) support withdrawn or changed, and (3) narrative control, and the two subthemes of

institutional courage: (1) therapy and (2) support person or group were overlayed on the plots

first. Then two additional subthemes: (1) spiritual vs. religious and (2) survivor narrative, were

chosen because of their relevance to the constructs being evaluated: post-traumatic growth, spirituality, religious commitment, and flourishing.

**Institutional Response and PTG Improved Relationships**

A linear regression analysis was conducted on the full quantitative study sample ($N$=105) to test for a significant linear relationship between institutional responses to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and PTG-improved relationships. A significant negative relationship was found ($R^2$ =.098, $\beta$ = -.275, $F$ (1,105) = 11.548, $p$ < .01). In general, as the institution responds with lower levels of betrayal and higher levels of courage, posttraumatic growth in improved relationships increases. It is important to note that while the linear regression resulted in statistical significance, institutional response accounts for just 9.9% of the variation in the posttraumatic growth domain of improved relationships. The following codes developed in the qualitative analysis used to answer RQ2 were then analyzed and compared to the data points on the regression figure: the three subthemes of institutional betrayal: (1) prioritized institution, (2) support withdrawn or changed, and (3) narrative control, the two subthemes of institutional courage: (1) therapy and (2) support person or group and then two additional subthemes: (2) survivor impact, and (3) survivor narrative. Figure 2 presents a visual depiction of the linear relationship with each data point representing a participant who participated in the interview component of this research.

One example of this is Vera, who spoke of receiving extensive trauma therapy after years of negotiating with her religious institution, thus exhibiting a high level of institutional courage, and the challenges she was experiencing within her marriage at the time of her abuse. However, when speaking of her current well-being, she very clearly identified an improved relationship with her husband and their marriage. She said:

My current wellbeing is great. I found ultimately that I couldn't keep going to church.

That took a long time. That was a long process. But I addressed the problems in my

marriage. It's not a great marriage, but it's good enough now. And the power and balance

that was in the marriage is no longer there. I eat well. I take care of my body in a healthy

way. I call myself now a recovering perfectionist. I'm at peace. It's not like every day is

full of nothing but peace. But overall, I'm in a good place.

This description of being at peace, and finding a real balance within her marriage, exhibits the

improved relationship, which maps closely to the regression line, showing the institution

exhibiting a lower level of betrayal and her increase of improved relationships.

Kate is an outlier within the data as she experienced quantitively higher levels of

institutional betrayal than all other interview participants. However, it is important to note, while

she quantitatively is much higher, her responses in her interview were very similar to many of

the interview participants. However, Kate also spoke of her improved relationships with others

as time passed in the response to her report of abuse, "The supplementals is what I refer to them

as […] It seemed like somebody showed up, somebody was there every time I needed them. And

I started getting a voice back."

Beth, Sarah, Maggie, and Alicia all experienced lower levels of institutional betrayal and

higher levels of institutional courage, which places them lower on the institutional response

regression plot. Each of these participants were also mid-range in their scores for the PTG

domain of improved relationships. This is consistent with the qualitative data collected. Each

participant discussed in their interviews either the assignment of a support person or group by

**Figure 2**

*Regression Plot of Institutional Responses and Posttraumatic Growth Improved Relationships*
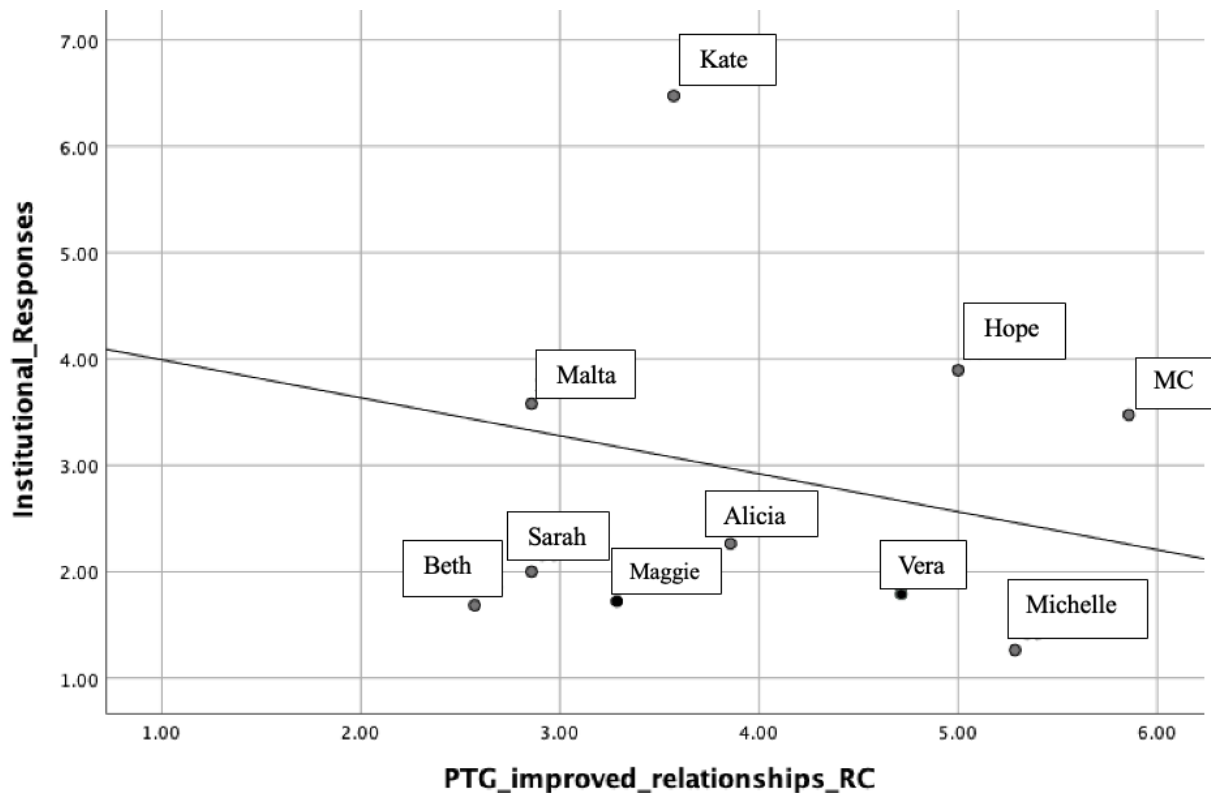


their religious institution, or in one case, Beth, a significant sibling relationship that acted as a support for her during the process. Alicia spoke of the way she looks at relationships different now, "I no longer offer my time to just anyone. I'm much more discerning about who I spend time with and why I spend time with them."

Hope and MC displayed higher levels of institutional betrayal and high levels of PTG improved relationships. This is consistent with their interview data. Hope discussed her improved relationship with her husband and family in contrast with what they lost when her religious institution did not respond with much courage to her report of abuse:

I mean, ultimately, my husband and I have a very strong marriage now. We've gotten

through it. We're better off. We've grown closer and we've worked through it, but we've

lost so much too. So we just deal with the loss and disappointment and injustice and be

grateful that we're alive and our family's intact and that's a victory.

MC also discussed the development of a relationship with another person from her religious

institution that she'd share daily walks with post-abuse disclosure that grew into a mentoring

relationship, while also acknowledging she did not feel she received much support from the

religious institution itself.

This analysis suggests when religious institutions respond to reports of clergy-perpetrated

sexual abuse with more betrayal than courage, survivors may not see as much posttraumatic

growth in the domain of improved relationships.  However, because the variance accounted for is

so small, this relationship should be examined further in future studies.

**Institutional Response and Spirituality**

A linear regression analysis was conducted on the full quantitative study sample ($N$=105)

to test for a significant linear relationship between institutional responses to reports of clergy-

perpetrated sexual abuse and current spirituality. A significant negative relationship was found

($R^2$ =.101, β= -.277, F (1,104) =11.629, $p$ < .01). In general, as the institution responds with

lower levels of betrayal and higher levels of courage, current spirituality increases. It is important

to note that while the linear regression resulted in statistical significance, institutional response

accounts for just 10.1% of the variation in current spirituality. The following codes developed in

the qualitative analysis used to answer RQ2 were then analyzed and compared to the data points

on the regression figure: the three subthemes of institutional betrayal: (1) prioritized institution,

(2) support withdrawn or changed, and (3) narrative control, the two subthemes of institutional

courage: (1) therapy and (2) support person or group and then an additional subtheme of survivor

impact. Figure 3 presents a visual depiction of the linear relationship with each data point representing a participant that participated in the interview component of this research.

Malta and Kate both experienced higher levels of institutional betrayal. While Kate experienced much higher levels of betrayal, both participants experienced lower levels of current spirituality. Malta spoke of how the institutional response to her report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse impacted her spirituality when she said, "It just definitely affected my spirituality. And it made me hard. I always felt, because I hadn't totally dealt with the shame and guilt, yet, I hadn't totally resolved my spirituality", which is consistent with where she is on the regression plot.

Maggie, Alicia, and Sarah all experienced lower levels of institutional betrayal but also experienced lower levels of spirituality. This is inconsistent with the interview data for each of these participants. While all three participants did discuss institutional betrayal and institutional courage, with each participant receiving a support person from their religious institution to go through the abuse reporting process with them, all participants did mention having a stronger sense of spirituality in contrast to their religious commitment. For example, Maggie spoke of her relationship with God:

> I thought God was over here like my dad. And he was more disciplinarian. And he loved me, but he was like I'm good being here and you're good being there. Um, and now my relationship with God is deeper than I thought was possible. So like I told my son, part of me would never change what I went through because I wouldn't be where I am with [God]. I wish there had been a different way to get here, but I love where I am.

This may suggest more research should be done to differentiate spirituality from religious commitment.

MC and Hope both had higher levels of institutional betrayal, but also experienced some institutional courage and higher levels of spirituality on the regression plot. This is consistent with the responses each participant shared in their interviews. MC spoke of the institutional courage she received in terms of a person to walk through the healing process with her, and while she does not connect with religious commitment, she spoke of feeling a connection to the divine as very valuable to her, saying "I would say [walking with her and talking] really opened me up to God". While MC identified her institution's response as a way she experienced spirituality, Hope discussed her faith without any acknowledgement of the institution or its' response as it relates to her faith, "I mean, I'm never gonna lose my belief in God. I will always be God-centered. I know God is the owner of my universe."

Beth, Vera, and Michelle all expressed lower levels of institutional betrayal while also expressing higher levels of spirituality currently. This is somewhat consistent with the interview data. Beth directly attributed some of her spirituality to how she and her husband had grown after reporting clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse to her religious institution. She said, "my faith has stayed intact. I've seen God's kindness to me and my husband." Vera also spoke of her spirituality, but not attributing it to the experience of clergy abuse or the institutional response to her abuse, "I still am spiritual. I have a meditation practice. I meet on a regular basis with a group […] and we talk spiritual matters." In contract, Michelle spoke of her desire for a close spirituality, but not feeling like she has that yet, "I do desire spirituality but it looks different because I just don't know what I believe anymore. […] It's like I want this spirituality, I want Jesus and God, but I don't want any of the other stuff." Michelle may have scored high on the spirituality scale because of that consistent desire for spirituality, but the connection would need further exploration.

**Figure 3**

*Regression Plot of Institutional Responses and Current Spirituality*
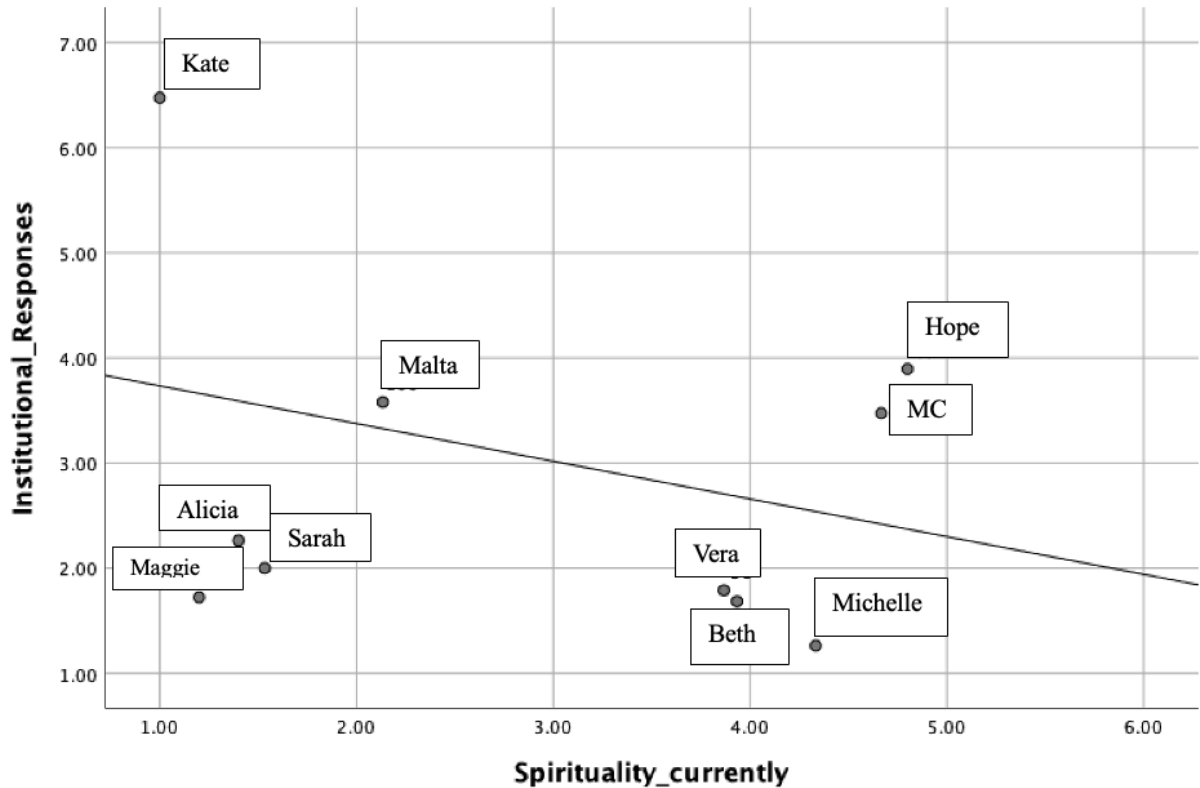


**Institutional Response and Religious Commitment**

    A linear regression analysis was conducted on the full quantitative study sample ($N$=105) to test for a significant linear relationship between institutional responses to clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and current religious commitment. A significant negative relationship was found ($R^2$ =.117, β= -.336, F (1,103) =14.723, $p$ < .01). In general, as the institution responds with lower levels of betrayal and higher levels of courage, religious commitment increases. It is important to note that while the linear regression resulted in statistical significance, institutional response accounts for just 11.7% of the variation in religious commitment. The following codes developed in the qualitative analysis used to answer RQ2 were then analyzed and compared to the data points on the regression figure: the three subthemes of institutional betrayal: (1)

prioritized institution, (2) support withdrawn or changed, and (3) narrative control, the two

subthemes of institutional courage: (1) therapy and (2) support person or group and then an

additional subtheme of survivor impact. Figure 4 presents a visual depiction of the linear

relationship with each data point representing an interview participant.

As mentioned previously, Kate is an outlier within the regression due to her extremely

high level of institutional betrayal. Kate has a high level of institutional betrayal, and a low level

of religious commitment on the regression plot which fits with the data. Kate clearly identified

that while she had no desire to attend church given her abuse, she added she also only initially

attended church due specifically to childhood guilt, and suffers from a co-occurring symptom of

anxiety. Kate said of her challenges:

> I don't attend church. It started out as a sense of guilt.  But I can talk to God sitting here
>
> in my chair just as well as I can in a church with a bunch of people. I had one spiritual
>
> director who said, oh you need to be in community. I said, No, I don't. I said I don't. I'm
>
> an extreme introvert, being in a community is uncomfortable. I said, if I need a
>
> community, I have that. It's the good things, especially if you're an introvert about
>
> Facebook, is I know who I can talk to, who I can trust with information.

Given this personal challenge, Kate would fit into the low religious commitment category.

However, Kate also experienced a high level of institutional betrayal, which she discussed in her

interview explaining how after years of asking for justice, she confronted the bishop in charge of

handling her complaint:

> I had called the bishop about a year before he retired. Cause they have a certain age they
>
> can get to and then they have to retire. And he was close to retirement. And I said, we
>
> need to finish up and and I went in with both, with both guns blazing and said, this is

> where you screwed up. I shouldn't have had to wait six months for you to do shit. The minute I told you, you should have done something. I don't care if it was investigative, I don't care if it was whatever. I said the second I told you, you should have gotten me an advocate. I said, and [abuser] deserved an advocate and I had a whole list. These are the things you should have done.

Together, these descriptions of her religious commitment and institutional response from her interview show the interview data is consistent with the regression plot data.

Sarah and Maggie display relatively low levels of institutional betrayal and low religious commitment. In terms of religious commitment, the quantitative data from each participant aligned well with the interview data as both participants were coded as having an aversion to religious institutions. However, Sarah and Maggie discussed in their interviews, actions by their religious institutions that are characterized as high institutional betrayal, including all three identified subthemes of: (1) prioritized the institution, (2) support withdrawn or changed, and (3) narrative control, but they displayed lower levels of betrayal in the regression plot. For example, Maggie described how she felt when the elders of her institution would not let her return to church unless she confessed to an affair:

> I said I am like a sheep. I'm like the one, so here's the 99, here's the one. And what they're doing with that one is they're just putting a blanket around them. I felt I was the sheep. They put a blanket around me, which was the care team. And they gave me a little fire, which was the counseling. But don't come back to the pen. Stay where you are. So we're going to take care of you while we have you completely separated from us. But I still didn't want to accept it because I was crushed. They crushed me.

IT WAS LIKE DOUBLE DAMAGE

Maggie's answers in the survey produced a lower score for institutional betrayal but she described feelings of hurt and frustration with how her institution responded to her in her interview.

**Figure 4**

*Regression Plot of Institutional Responses and Current Religious Commitment*
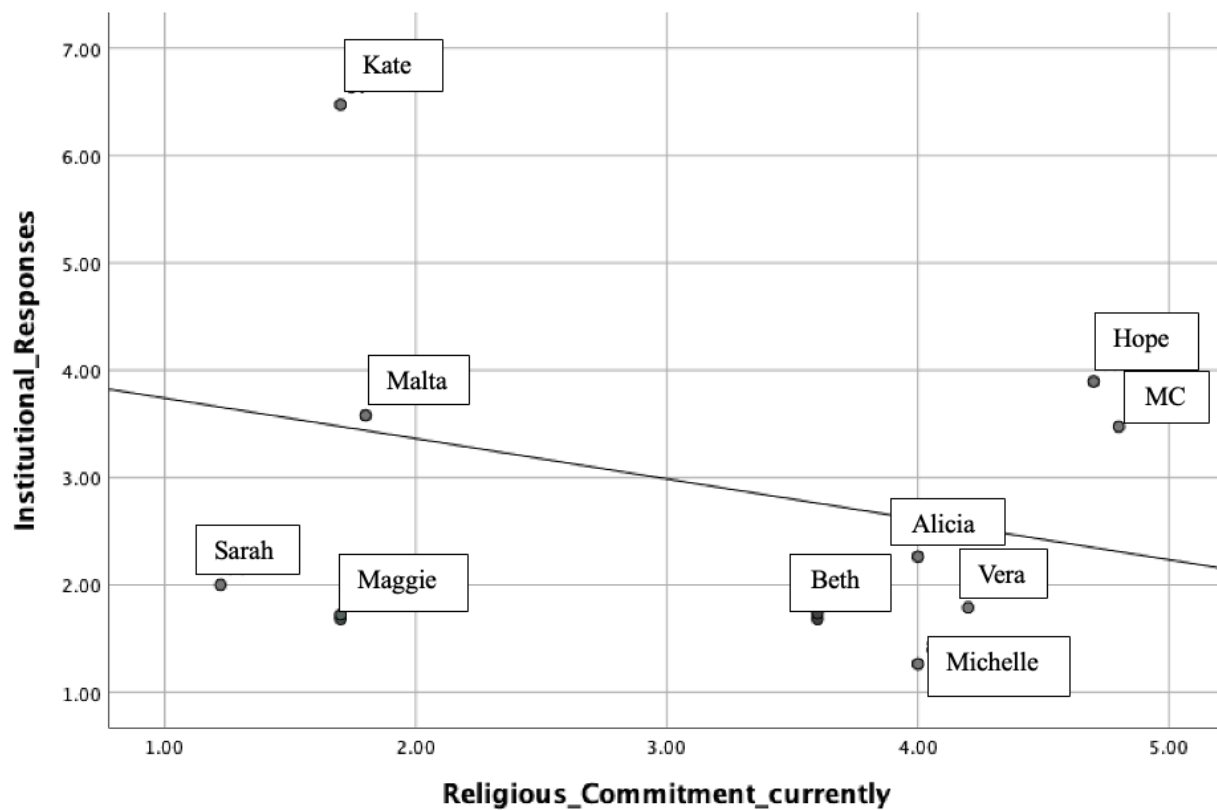


In contrast, Hope and MC had a high religious commitment and a high level of institutional betrayal. For Hope, this result is similar to her interview data as she described continuing to attend services for holidays and with her adult children when they visit, while also describing the challenges she experienced with her religious institution. However, while MC is plotted on the regression line with a higher level of institutional betrayal and high religious commitment, she spoke in her interview of high betrayal believing the church responded in ways

to protect itself, but also spoke of not attending any religious institution any more, making the regression plot results inconsistent with her interview data.

Beth, Alicia, Vera, and Michelle show high levels of religious commitment and lower levels of institutional betrayal. These results are somewhat in alignment with the interview data. All participants spoke of institutional betrayal on some level, with all 4 participants discussing how the institution prioritized itself over them, and Beth, Alicia, and Michelle all identified with the institution trying to control the narrative of their abuse, however, they also all discussed receiving long term therapy as an area of institutional courage they received. This may explain the higher level of institutional courage shown in the regression plot. In addition, Beth, Michelle, and Vera all spoke of no longer believing in the institutional Church. However, Vera spoke of continuing to provide financial contributions to her church, which is one of the indicators of religious commitment, which may explain the reason for her higher religious commitment.

**Institutional Response and Flourishing**

A linear regression analysis was conducted on the full quantitative study sample ($N$=105) to test for a significant linear relationship between institutional response and flourishing utilizing the full quantitative data set ($N$=105). A significant relationship was found ($R^2$ =.147, β= -.288, F $(1,103)$ =17.710, $p < .01$). In general, as the institution responds with lower levels of betrayal and higher levels of courage, flourishing increases. It is important to note that while the linear regression resulted in statistical significance, the institutional response to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse accounts for about 14.7% of the variation in flourishing. The following codes developed in the qualitative analysis used to answer research question 2 were then analyzed and compared to the data points on the regression figure: the three subthemes of institutional betrayal: (1) prioritized institution, (2) support withdrawn or changed, and (3)

narrative control, the two subthemes of institutional courage: (1) therapy and (2) support person or group and then an additional subtheme of survivor impact. Figure 5 presents a visual depiction of the linear relationship with each data point representing a participant that participated in the interview component of this dissertation.

MC shows a higher level of institutional betrayal and lower level of institutional courage, while still exhibiting a high level of flourishing. Throughout her interview, MC discussed a severe drug addiction she had for many years. At the time of the interview, she spoke of her success in being able to find recovery, "I'm good. […] I am two months clean from hard drugs finally, like, I finally got off the hard drugs." MC may describe a higher level of flourishing because she is able to contrast her current experience with that of a years-long heavy drug addiction, and see the growth in being able to get off hard drugs.

Michelle, who experienced some level of institutional courage in the form of trauma therapy, spoke of her current level of flourishing after describing her initial feelings on well-being after reporting her abuse as "it was the worst", but summed up her current well-being in a simple state of joy, "I'm different in every way".

Alicia, Maggie, Sarah, and Vera all display lower levels of institutional betrayal and higher instances of institutional courage, while having relatively low flourishing levels. This is somewhat consistent with the interview data, as the participants did not openly discuss flourishing within their interviews. However, Maggie did describe her self-improvement in her interview, "I would say then I was like a negative ten literally, and now I would say I'm like a positive eight", making her flourishing score inconsistent with her interview data. One possibility for this may be in how each participant described the response of their institution as taking a year

IT WAS LIKE DOUBLE DAMAGE

or longer to see any resolution causing them to ruminate on it frequently leading to a lower level

of flourishing when reflecting back on the reporting process.

**Figure 5**

*Regression Plot of Institutional Responses and Flourishing*
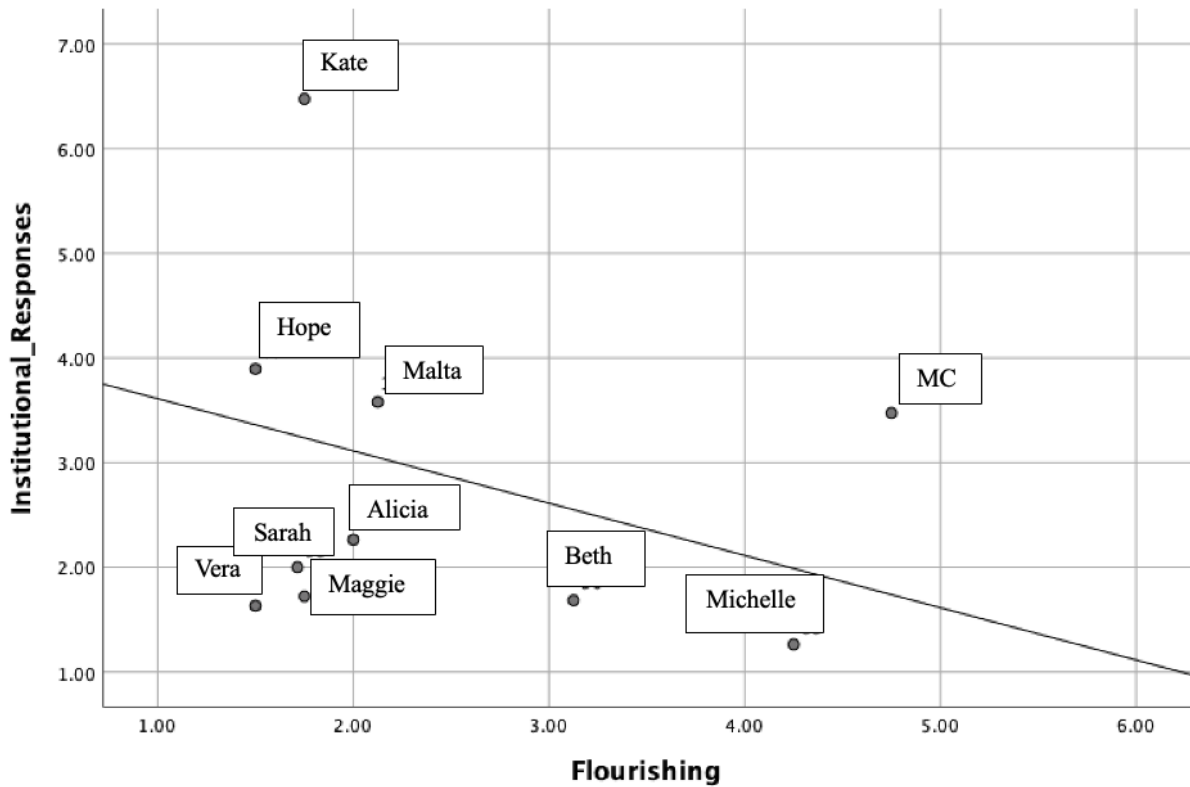


Hope, shows a higher level of institutional betrayal and a lack of flourishing, which

mirrors what she said in her interview regarding her institution and feeling like years later she

never received any type of closure and could not heal. In her interview she described this feeling

as, "Difficult. I mean, this whole time there's been a lack of closure. I thought I was gonna get

closure, but then when his ex-wife contacted me and then the YouTube sermons were going on,

and so no closure making it still difficult." She further discussed her lack of flourishing, when

she said, "It's all been soul crushing." Kate also experienced high levels of institutional betrayal

and as discussed earlier, also identified as having high anxiety and being uncomfortable in community which keeps her home bound, which may explain her lower levels of flourishing.

In summary, results from research question three suggest how an institution responds to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults may have an effect on survivors. Specifically, results suggest a survivor's level of posttraumatic growth in the domain of improved relationships may be impacted by how an institution responds to reports of abuse. Participants described some of their relationships that have improved post-abuse reporting, especially when participants experienced institutional courage, and some participants described a lack of relationships, which was especially salient for participants that experienced higher levels of institutional betrayal. In addition, results suggest levels of spirituality and religious commitment of survivors may be impacted by the way an institution responds to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. Participants discussed how their spirituality and/or religious commitment have changed over time after reporting clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, and how they feel the institutional response has impacted their spirituality and religious commitment. Results also suggest a survivor's level of flourishing may be impacted by the institutional response to their report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. Participants articulated how they were doing well in some areas of life post abuse, in particular those who encountered some level of institutional courage when reporting their abuse.

**CHAPTER V**

**Discussion**

The current study explored how institutional responses to clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adult women impact survivors' level of posttraumatic growth, spirituality, religious engagement, general well-being, and flourishing. This chapter analyzes the findings from each research question to better understand the experiences of adult survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse who reported their abuse to their religious institution. This chapter also discusses limitations and implications of the study and concludes with recommendations for further study, and ways religious institutions can better respond to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adult women.

**Research Question 1: Does the level of institutional betrayal experienced by a survivor of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse impact their level of posttraumatic growth, spirituality and religious commitment, and well-being and flourishing?**

The first research question in this study explored the relationships between institutional betrayal, institutional courage and posttraumatic growth, spirituality, religious commitment, well-being, and flourishing. This study provides insight into how the constructs relate and can be useful in solving some of the challenges for healing presented in this study. A future step of this research will include rerunning all analysis in this area while controlling for demographic characteristics.

*1.A. Posttraumatic growth*

This study aimed to understand if and how institutional responses to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and posttraumatic growth were related. While this study looked at all five domains of posttraumatic growth, not all domains were found to have a significant

relationship with institutional response. The five domains of posttraumatic growth are: (1) personal strength, (2) new possibilities, (3) improved relationships, (4) spiritual growth, and (5) appreciation for life. Only the domain of improved relationships had a significant negative correlation with institutional response. As institutional betrayal increased, the posttraumatic growth domain of improved relationships decreased. This finding mirrors previous research on institutional betrayal that has shown trauma survivors who experience large levels of institutional betrayal have more difficulty in relationships with others post-trauma (Death, 2015; Easton et al., 2019; Hannan et al., 2020). This finding highlights the importance of appropriate institutional responses to survivors' long term positive outcomes. Further, previous research on institutional courage as shown positive outcomes related to posttraumatic growth for trauma survivors when institutions respond well (Freyd & Smidt, 2019; Lind et al., 2020). The current study further illustrates the positive outcomes that can be present when an institution responds with courage.

While the current study found a significant relationship between institutional response and the posttraumatic growth domain of improved relationships, the current study did not find a significant relationship between institutional response and the other four domains of posttraumatic growth: personal strength, new possibilities, spiritual growth, and appreciation for life. One explanation for the lack of significance could be the small sample size of this study. However, the relationship between institutional response and all five domains of posttraumatic growth in the context of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults should be explored further to provide a richer understanding of the relationships between the constructs.

*1B. Spirituality and religious commitment*

This study aimed to understand if and how spirituality and religious commitment related to the institutional response to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults. Because this

study focused on abuse perpetrated by clergy in religious institutions, how the abuse impacts spirituality and religious commitment is especially important to understand. The institutional response was significantly negatively correlated with spirituality and religious commitment. If an institution responds with higher levels of betrayal and lower levels of courage, a CPSA survivor will generally exhibit a decrease in their spirituality and religious commitment. In contrast, when a CPSA survivor is met with higher levels of institutional courage as a response to their report of abuse, their level of spirituality and religious commitment is likely to be higher. This research illustrates the religious commitment and spirituality of survivors of CPSA increases when institutions show courage, making it easier for institutions to understand how their actions post abuse disclosure will impact survivors' likelihood of remaining within a religious institution, or finding a level of spirituality at all post-abuse. While there is currently limited research related to clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and spirituality, some current research suggests when used correctly, religious coping can be a protective factor for survivors of sexual assault (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013; Ahrens et al., 2010), suggesting religious institutions could potentially foster more well-being among survivors

### *1.C. Well-being and flourishing*

Survivors of any type of significant trauma often struggle with their well-being and ability to flourish (Ramos & Leal, 2013; Triplett et al., 2012). While the long-term negative impacts of trauma have been widely established in many fields of study including sexual assault (Ahrens et al., 2010), there has not been substantive research on the specific topic of long-term well-being of survivors of CPSA. This study sought to add to the research available in this area. This study examined both general well-being and flourishing.

There is a significant negative relationship between institutional betrayal and flourishing. This illustrates the potential value of responding well as a religious institution to individuals that report clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. How the institution responds plays a role in the survivor's long-term ability to flourish in life post-abuse.

**Research Question 2: What is the experience of adult survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse?**

Research question 2 focused on understanding all elements of the participants' experiences from the time of abuse, through the reporting process disclosing abuse to their religious institution, the experience of their religious institutions' response, and ultimately their current experiences within and outside of religious institutions. This area of research has not yet been fully explored so a comprehensive examination of the experience can contribute to understanding the phenomenon of CPSA.

*Clergy Abuse Tactics*

The first key in prevention of abuse is understanding how the abuse occurs. While the results of this research will by no means produce a fully comprehensive list of tactics used to initiate abuse, it does provide some insight into how it occurs. This is especially important due to the nature of sexual abuse of adults being highly misunderstood. Each of the themes that emerged around the process of abuse, including vulnerability advantage, violence, and faith manipulation will be discussed in detail below.

A majority of interview participants noted they were having discussions with their clergy (turned clergy abuser) about areas of their life where they were currently experiencing challenges or had previously experienced trauma. Many participants explained they would not have disclosed their current life challenge or past trauma to their abuser prior to the abuse, were it not

for their religious leader's status as a clergy person. For the faithful, religious institutions are often thought of as safe spaces to be vulnerable (Langberg, 2020). Individuals are taught that religious institutions can be a safe haven when you are dealing with a difficult life situation, and to reach out to clergy for assistance. Those who attend religious institutions are often taught to think of the religious institution as a place of comfort where the weary can seek refuge (Pargament et al., 2008). The trust that is placed in clergy because of their role puts them in a position to meet individuals in very vulnerable states which could place the religious leader in a position to assist in whatever challenge the individual is facing and help reduce their vulnerability, or abuse their position and take advantage of that individual's vulnerability (Pooler & Barros-Lane, 2022).

While some participants identified vulnerability as the main tactic used to initiate the abuse, other participants identified the use of violence as the tactic with a few participants identifying with both tactics. Participants that identified the use of violence within their relationship cited violence as either directly used to initiate the relationship or within the context of the relationship as time went on. The role of a clergy person is to be a comfort in a time of need, which makes the experience of violence difficult for survivors to understand. Participants felt confused about their relationship because they could not grasp how a person who was supposed to be guiding them could also hurt them. While violence as a tactic of abuse initiation has not been studied broadly within the context of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, it mimics some of the characteristics seen in survivors of domestic violence relationships, such as self-blame and shame (Reich et al., 2015). Further, current research related to sexual abuse suggests the use of violence is a specific predictor of abuse reporting, and without experiencing violence,

survivors were less likely to report their abuse to law enforcement (Pinciotti & Seligowski, 2021).

While some participants described the initiation of the abuse with violence, several participants identified more closely with the ways in which their faith was used and manipulated by the clergy abuser. Individuals are taught clergy persons are the experts on God and faith-based learning. In many religious traditions, clergy are elevated to a God-like status where it is thought they are called directly by God to lead their religious institution. The role of clergy is thought of specifically as a calling versus a career path. This elevated status of clergy as second to God puts them in a position to be the religious authority for their congregants. Several participants discussed how their abusive clergy person used this role as an authority on God to sexualize their relationship, including participants who said their abuser directly said they spoke with God, and "God's good with it" (Beth). Understanding this usage of God to manipulate individuals into sexually abusive relationships distorts the conception of God, and the role of clergy (McLaughlin, 1994).

### *Misunderstood Adult Manipulation*

There has been expansive research done on child sexual abuse, and clergy-perpetrated child sexual abuse specifically (Death, 2015). However, there is only a small yet growing cadre of research on the sexual abuse of adults within religious institutions. Participants identified this lack of understanding for adult survivors of sexual abuse as a hindrance to receiving justice from their religious institutions. Often survivors noted their religious institutions, as well as their peers within their institutions, referred to their abuse as an affair, without understanding the role of the clergy person, the power dynamics within the relationship, and the inability for there to be meaningful consent in a relationship where there is an imbalance of power.

In addition to the power held by the clergy person individually, participants also described having a strong trust in their religious institution. Individuals are taught to trust the religious institution and those within it, especially those in clergy roles (Gobin & Freyd, 2014; Guido, 2008). Individuals trust that their religious institution is going to treat them well, and they trust the institution with solve any issue that may arise, including abuse, in a thoughtful way that promotes healing. This is often because congregants believe their issue will be solved with God in mind. This level of trust is required to be a faithful follower in many religious traditions, but is also the very thing that allows for sexual abuse of adults to occur easily without the target of abuse realizing and understanding they are being targeted for abuse (Garland & Argueta, 2010).

The trust placed in the clergy person and religious institution can lead the survivor of sexual abuse to believe they are to blame for their abuse. Several participants identified how they initially believed they were the cause of the abuse, and in some cases went forward and "confessed" to the leaders of their churches that they had caused their abuser to fall into sexual sin with them. It was only after time away from the situation and their religious institutions that survivors were able to process what had happened as abuse. One participant, Kate, stated it took her several years to realize she was not to blame for the abuse she endured at the hands of a clergy person. Another participant, MC, clearly stated she endured abuse as a child and other participants also alluded to their past childhood trauma throughout their interviews. While they were able to identify how their abuse as children was not their fault, they struggled to make that connection as adults believing they are responsible for what happened to them. However, research has shown revictimization as an adult occurs at an alarming rate for individuals who have experienced abuse as a child (Relyea & Ullman, 2017;Walker et al., 2017).

Because participants felt a strong pull towards understanding the abuse as their own fault, they were often reticent to report the abuse to their religious institution. Multiple participants identified their reasoning for reporting their abuse as the desire to protect future targets of abuse, or having connected with another survivor of abuse by the same clergy person. This study found 32% of all individuals who attempted to participate in the study were screened out at the final screening question asking if they had reported their abuse to their religious institution. This is consistent with sexual abuse disclosure research that suggests survivors are less likely to report sexual violence through formal reporting structures (Johnson & Lewis, 2023; Mennicke et al., 2022). The desire to protect others may indicate survivors are able to see the ways in which they were abused and manipulated into the abusive relationship, but lack the full understanding of how they were abused to be able to clearly voice that early in their disclosure process, therefore they cite reporting their abuser to protect others before they are able to identify with and articulate reporting their abuser to seek justice for themselves. Understanding why survivors report their abuse is an area where additional research is necessary.

### *Institutional Betrayal*

Institutional betrayal (IB) is a term used to describe institutional policies and responses from institutions to reports of harm that can sometimes be more harmful to the individual than the abuse they are reporting (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Many participants in this study reported experiencing higher levels of institutional betrayal and lower levels of institutional courage. Interview participants identified policies and actions they felt their religious institutions took that were harmful to them as they reported their sexual abuse, or in the months and years after their initial report of abuse. The policies and actions identified by participants could be characterized as IB.

The most salient action reported among almost all interview participants (*n*=9) was the prioritization of the religious institution over the survivor, ranging from blaming the survivor for their abuse to the complete cover up of abuse and allowing the clergy perpetrator to remain in clergy leadership. Institutions often protect their own image or reputation out of fear that identifying a harm perpetrated by their leadership will result in the decrease of support for their institution (Delker & Freyd, 2017; Hannan et al., 2020; Monteith et al., 2021) However, the more direct institutions are in addressing abuse, the more likely individuals are to continue to support that institution; it is the cover up of abuse that leads to more attrition in institutions (Stephens, 2011).

Further, institutions need to respond without IB, or low levels of IB to see continued support of their institution. One aspect of IB that came up quite often for participants was the level of support that was either initially offered and withdrawn or significantly changed over time. The immediate supportive response from an institution and then withdrawal of support is common in responses to reports of abuse; institutions may move from an initial crisis intervention-type response to a long-term response, where less support is provided to the survivor (Smith & Freyd, 2013), leaving the survivor wanting the same level of support they received when their initial report of abuse was made. For survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, the withdrawal of immediate support is compounded because of the immediate trust the survivor places in the institution to respond appropriately to their abuse given their role as a religious institution (Gobin & Freyd, 2014; Guido, 2008).

In addition to institutions withdrawing their initial support to survivors, participants also identified another action they felt was exceptionally harmful to them. Multiple times throughout the interview participants discussed the narrative control the religious institution held onto

throughout their reporting process. Participants were often not given the ability to share their story with institutional leadership or members of their congregation. However, while participants were often silenced, the religious institutions often shared their own narratives surrounding the abuse, many times failing to identify what happened as abuse. This was especially frustrating for participants who discussed this narrative control as a mechanism for keeping them quiet or turning others against them. One participant discussed how years after her abuse she was still being shunned by the people she used to call her church family because of the report she made. This response from the institution and its members is a normative response from an institution that seeks to protect its reputation by damaging those making the complaint. Some participants reported the lack of community that came from the dismissal of their abuse narrative felt worse than the initial abuse they suffered.

### Survivor Faith Impact

Trauma in one's life can often lead to a questioning of beliefs and religious practices. This questioning is amplified when the trauma experienced is perpetrated by a clergy person within a religious institution. Participants in this study described how they have questioned their faith since being abused by a clergy person and reporting that experience to their religious institution. This questioning of faith was often amplified by the negative response of the religious institution.

Questioning of one's faith, particularly as it relates to individuals who feel they have a sense of spirituality, but do not live that out in the context of a religious institution, has led to the concept of spiritual versus religious (McEnvoy et al., 2014). This concept of spiritual vs. religious is amplified for those who have experienced clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. Several participants in this study said they still longed for a spiritual life and even identified some of the

spiritual practices in which they engage in their everyday life. However, many of the participants

reported being unable to be an active member of a religious institution. Some participants said

while they desire spirituality, they could not return to a religious institution. However, other

participants said they could enter a religious institution, but their level of engagement with the

religious institution or its leadership needed to remain minimal for them to feel safe.

Moreover, when participants were asked what types of changes their religious institution

could implement to make it a safe place for survivors and to handle their reports of abuse well,

participants said they did not feel their religious institution could or would be willing to change.

This is consistent with institutional betrayal research within the context of other types of

institutions including high schools (Lind et al., 2020), the military (Monteith et al., 2021)

hospitals (Klest et al., 2016, 2020) and colleges (Smith et al., 2016). Institutions could assist

survivors in healing well by being more responsive to abuse survivors in their handling of abuse

complaints.

### *Institutional Courage*

This research initially sought to identify religious institutions that responded well to

reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults and showed significant institutional courage

(IC). Many participants did not report feeling like their institution responded well to their report

of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse; this may be because the sample was recruited mainly through

survivor support groups, and individuals who felt their institution responded well may not have

felt the need to engage with a support group. While interview participants did not discuss many

ways in which they felt their institution responded well, some interview participants were able to

identify specific actions their institution took, or initially promised, even if removed, that were

helpful to healing throughout the reporting process, and would meet the standard for institutional courage.

Participants noted two examples of IC. One example of IC is the religious institution paying for therapy. Research has overwhelmingly pointed to the necessity of comprehensive therapy after a significant trauma (Ahrens et al., 2010; Cardenas et al., 2019; Hoffman, 2013; Triplett et al., 2012). While this has not been widely researched within the context of religious institutions and adult abuse survivors, there is research that exists showing how beneficial the coverage of and affordability of trauma therapy is to survivors through victim compensation funds established by organizations (Blunden et al., 2021) and governments (Abbott, 2010; de Boer et al., 2022; Haynes, 2011).

A second example of IC identified by participants is the assignment of a support person or support group by the religious institution to assist the survivor in healing post-abuse. Some religious organizations provide a support person as a required response to a report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse written into their current practices for responding to reports of sexual abuse within the institution (General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, n.d.). Other institutions provide a full response team, often referred to as a care team in participant interviews, to assist with the response to sexual abuse in their organization. The use of this person or team is essential in helping a survivor to feel cared for by the religious institution after the report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. However, how the support person or team is assigned, and what their assigned role is, may need to be identified more clearly, as two interview participants discussed their support person or support team as being the opposite of supportive, which furthered the institutional harm in the survivor's perspective. This shows the necessity of careful screening and clear expectations for support persons or teams.

### *Hopes for the future*

Hope was not lost for many of the participants in this study. Participants identified recommendations for improvements to the reporting process that would help, rather than harm, survivors when disclosing clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. The recommendations suggested by the participants in this study are not comprehensive, but can provide a starting point for creating policies and procedures for how religious institutions respond to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults. Such recommendations are truly survivor informed, which is considered the gold standard in policy creation (Deer & Baumgartner, 2019; Gilfus et al., 1999).

One of the participant recommendations is the economic coverage of trauma therapy for survivors after abuse has been disclosed. The recommendation for the religious institution to provide financial support for therapy for the survivor was mentioned by half of all interview participants. In addition to coverage of therapy, participants recommended sharing the survivor narrative with the leadership of the religious institution, and the congregations and/or religious communities in which the abuse occurred. Allowing an individual to share their own story is a powerful way to support survivors of trauma; trauma survivors feel more empowered when they are able to tell their story accurately and openly (Flynn, 2008; Noll & Harvey, 2008). This may be particularly true for survivors of CPSA because of the feelings survivors have reported of being silenced by their religious institution (Flynn, 2008; Pargament et al., 2008; Rauch, 2004; Wind et al., 2008). Participants in this study reiterated the power of and desire to tell their story to their religious institution, and to correct any false narratives that were initially shared by their religious institution. Creating a safe place within a religious institution where survivors can share their narrative could be both helpful to the survivor for their own sense of healing, while also creating a courageous institutional response.

Another courageous institutional response most participants recommended was comprehensive education around CPSA within religious institutions. When communities are educated about abuse, they are more likely to be able to identify when abuse is happening and respond appropriately to address it (Freyd & Smidt, 2019). Because many religious organizations do not have comprehensive education around CPSA, it has often been misunderstood (Pooler & Barros-Lane, 2022). A comprehensive education policy and practice around CPSA would further the knowledge base of both the abused and those charged with responding to abuse allegations.

**Research Question 3: What effects does an institution's response have on adult survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse?**

Research question three explored the effects a religious institution's response to a report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults may have on the survivor. This section of the study looked at institutional response and how it impacted survivors' level of posttraumatic growth, spirituality, religious commitment, and flourishing. Results from the mixed methods analysis suggest when institutions show more betrayal than courage, survivors tend to have lower levels of posttraumatic growth in the domain of improved relationships, spirituality, religious commitment, and flourishing.

*Posttraumatic Growth in Improved Relationships*

Aa stated previously, this research indicates a relationship may exist between institutional responses to clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and posttraumatic growth. The findings of this study indicate a significant negative relationship between institutional response and the posttraumatic growth domain of improved relationships; specifically, when more institutional betrayal is present, a survivor's level of posttraumatic growth in improved relationships is decreased, and when more institutional courage is present, a survivor's level of posttraumatic

growth in improved relationships is increased. Through the mixed methods analysis, a fuller

picture of the nuance of the relationship is identified. The participant interview data was

consistent in the domain of improved relationships with the information gathered through their

surveys. However, personal relationships were discussed in interviews more often as it relates to

the survivors' understanding of their current personal relationships. Several participants

identified how their marriage had struggled through the reporting process, some leading to

divorce, while other participants discussed how their marriage was strengthened through the

reporting process, while others still discussed how they did not feel they could have an intimate

relationship in the future. This is somewhat consistent with existing research related to romantic

relationships after sexual violence; specifically, a systematic review of existing literature on

romantic relationships after sexual assault reveals half of the studies explored found significant

relationships with negative relationship outcomes including increased conflict and lower

communication, and other studies finding some or little connection between current relationships

and sexual violence (Vitek & Yeater, 2021). However, more recently, the focus on relationships

post sexual abuse found survivors were less likely to report satisfaction in intimate relationships

(Rothman et al., 2021). More research is necessary to understand how romantic relationships are

impacted by the reporting of, and institutional response to, clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of

adults to fully understand why some relationships are improved and some relationships end.

### *Spirituality and Religious Commitment*

Findings indicate institutional response has an effect on a survivor's spirituality and

religious commitment after a report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. While interview

participants were able to articulate the differences between spirituality and religious commitment

as they understood it, the results of the mixed methods analysis suggest further research is

needed to fully differentiate these two concepts. Through the analysis of interview data, it was clear the participants could articulate how they felt their understanding of spirituality and religious commitment were different. However, once interview data was overlayed on survey results, participants' explanations of their spirituality and religious commitment differed greatly from their survey results. Through interviews, participants discussed ways in which they felt a strong spirituality but may not have a strong religious commitment. While researchers have attempted to separate spirituality and religious commitment through different measures (Kim et al., 2020; LaBouff et al., 2010; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020; Underwood, 2006; Worthington et al., 2003), the current study findings suggest the measures currently available may not capture the nuance of spiritual practices versus religious commitment. Further research may help religious institutions understand how their response to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of adults may impact survivors to improve survivor outcomes related to current spirituality and religious commitment.

### *Well-being and Flourishing*

Current research has found that well-being declines significantly as the rate of institutional betrayal increases (Gobin & Freyd, 2014; Klest et al., 2016; Platt et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016; Smith & Freyd, 2014, 2017; Wright et al., 2016). The current study replicated those findings. However, when race was considered, it became the only significant predictor. This indicates that race may play a significant role in receptiveness to institutional response. Because only 14% of participants were people of color, this finding should be interpreted with caution until it can be verified in a larger more racially diverse study. In general, diverse populations have scored lower on well-being (Berge et al., 2020; Nielsen, 2017;Xie et al., 2021), which may be due to stigma of help seeking in communities of color. People of color are less likely to seek

treatment for physical health, and mental health (DeLuca et al., 2016; Lipson et al., 2022) which may lead to overall lower general well-being.

Well-being was defined in this study as how an individual feels about their life and their level of happiness, whereas flourishing was defined more narrowly as excelling at their own defined life goals. While findings were not significant within the construct of well-being, results did indicate institutional response had a significant effect on survivors' level of flourishing post abuse. Specifically, survivors experienced less flourishing when more institutional betrayal was present. This finding suggests acts of institutional betrayal may contribute to less flourishing in survivors after they report their abuse. Further, this finding suggests more research is needed to understand what flourishing after clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse looks like for survivors.

### *Institutional Betrayal and Institutional Courage*

Lastly, whether a participant experienced institutional betrayal or institutional courage as a response to their report of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse was an area that was inconsistent with many participants across all constructs explored through the mixed methods analysis. In their interviews, most of the participants identified very closely with different aspects of institutional betrayal including the time it took for their institution to respond, the lack of communication they received from their institution, the ways in which their institution tried to control the narrative of their abuse, and how the support they received was often withdrawn or changed. Further, participants discussed how they felt they received no support or experienced low levels of institutional courage. However, when interview data was overlaid on their survey data many participants did not report high levels of institutional betrayal or low levels of institutional courage. This may suggest the measures for institutional betrayal and institutional courage may not be fully capturing the nuance in the constructs. Specifically, when participants

were asked about the institutional response to their report of abuse they focused much of their interview responses on being able to tell their story, and how their institutional response often involved the offer of support, but then a withdrawal or change in the level of support received. The survey tool used does not address the survivor narrative of their abuse, and only asks whether formal or informal resources were offered. This may have led survivors to respond yes to the question of resources because at some point in time they were offered resources, even if the support was not continuous. Further, some of the survey responses indicating institutional courage, such as, "Created an environment where this type of experience was recognized as a problem," may have led participants to agree if a formal reporting process was in place, even if that institutional courage was not displayed by the institution when participants reported their abuse, leading to higher scores on institutional courage.

Institutional courage may act as a protective factor for survivors of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse as research has shown institutional courage can lead to better health outcomes for survivors of trauma in general (Freyd & Smidt, 2019). Findings from this study suggest institutional betrayal and institutional courage does have an impact on a survivors' posttraumatic growth improved relationships, spirituality, religious commitment, and level of flourishing. However, further research is needed to fully understand the effects of institutional betrayal and institutional courage on a survivor of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse.

**Limitations**

It is necessary to make note of the limitations of this study. The first limitation of this study is the lack of previous research on the topic of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and institutional response. The limited research available allows this study to be a starting point for research on the relationship between institutional response and clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse,

but it does not allow for cross-referencing of previous research for comparison of results.  A second limitation of this study is that results cannot be generalized to the broader public because this study sample was recruited through survivor organizations, and sought only to include those in the study who reported abuse to their religious institution, therefore limiting participants. This study sought to understand how the institutional response to reports of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse impacted survivors, which would necessitate the requirement of reporting the abuse to their religious institution. However, future research should explore individuals who report the abuse versus individuals who do not report the abuse. Further, this study was based on the retrospective report of the participants, many of whom recalled the memories of both their abuse and the reporting of abuse after significant time had passed. Over time, memories can fade and participants may not have been able to recall accurately all previous interactions (Nahleen et al., 2019, 2021).

An additional limitation of this study was the recruitment process. Participants were recruited primarily through survivor networks. Several of the networks used to recruit participants were faith-based institutions, which may indicate participants were actively seeking a sense of spirituality or looking for ways to be engaged with a religious institution. The second major way participants were recruited was through social media and the hashtags #metoo and #churchtoo. This recruitment method means those who self-selected into the study were more likely to be interested in the topic of addressing clergy abuse, a topic that is not well discussed or researched, especially as it relates to the #churchtoo movement, and were more likely to be vocal on social media about the topic. In addition, because much of the recruitment was done through social media, only those who actively engaged with social media were likely to know about and self-select to participate in the study, therefore potentially reducing the likelihood of older age

groups from participating in the study. Others who may not follow the social media movement may provide a different understanding of their experience that is not informed by national public conversations on the topic through social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter.

Further limitations include the relative homogeneity of the participants and their religious institutions. Participants were predominantly White (86.1%), heterosexual (83.3%), and held a minimum of a bachelor's degree (76%). The study sample may be skewed towards a predominantly heterosexual white population due to the organizations that assisted in recruitment of participants which largely developed as a response to abuse in main line Protestant denominations in the United States, which tend to have largely White congregations. A more diverse population of participants may assist in the ability to generalize findings more broadly. In addition, by capturing experiences of more cultures and identities, the findings could assist in serving broader populations that this research seeks to help. In addition, there was very little diversity in the types of institutions to which participants had reported their abuse. While participants named several different types of institutions, most were different denominations of the Christian faith, which does not give a broad understanding or ability to generalize to different faiths.

**Future Directions**

Findings from this study suggest there are varying tactics employed by clergy abusers to initiate clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and understanding this key component of the phenomenon is worth additional study. Prevention is more difficult to implement when the tactics used to initiate abuse are not well-known or explored. Understanding the dynamic between clergy perpetrators and targets of abuse as it relates to power and vulnerability needs to be further explored (Pooler & Barros-Lane, 2022). In addition, while there is significant research

on the use of violence in domestic violence relationships, how violence is utilized within the context of CPSA is still an area that should be examined further.

While further research is necessary to understand how CPSA occurs, future research should also focus on how the response of an institution impacts a survivor, particularly around how the survivors understand spirituality and religious commitment, post reporting of CPSA. Findings suggest survivors of CPSA return to religious institutions at varying levels. While in some cases the decision to return to a religious institution can be attributed to how the institution responds, there were several participants that continued to seek out religious spaces even when their religious institution responded in a way that would be classified as institutional betrayal. Current research into CPSA suggests a return to a religious institution may be due to the religious commitment a survivor had prior to their abuse (Chaves & Garland, 2009; Garland & Argueta, 2010), however this research found religious commitment prior to the reporting of abuse did not have statistical significance. This finding suggests further research is needed to explore the ways in which survivors experience spirituality and religious institutions.

Disclosure of sexual abuse is a growing area of research. However, while disclosure research has been accumulating, there is still limited research on disclosure of adult sexual abuse within religious institutions as a whole, and more directly, with clergy perpetrators. Because it often takes years for survivors of sexual abuse to disclose their abuse (Rashid & Barron, 2019), more research is needed to understand what prompts disclosure. The current study found participants chose to report their abuse to try and protect those who might become future targets of abuse by the same clergy perpetrator.

**Implications**

Despite the limitations of this study, there are several implications that can be drawn

from the findings of this study. First and foremost, understanding how clergy-perpetrated sexual

abuse is initiated is paramount to both prevention and improved institutional responses. The

manipulation of the concept of God by a clergy person to satisfy the clergy person's own sexual

needs and desires illustrates the need to understand and address abuse within religious

institutions to prevent this abuse and improve outcomes for those who report it to their religious

institutions.

Further, some research suggests prevention education around sexual abuse has been

associated with higher rates of abuse reporting and a heightened awareness of abuse and the

victimization indicators to look for by individuals who are given prevention education training

and resources (Freyd & Smidt, 2019). Prevention education is already implemented in many

religious institutions across the United States as it relates to sexual abuse of minors (Stephens,

2011). The current study's findings suggest prevention education related to adult victims may

produce similar positive outcomes if implemented.

An additional implication of this research is the need for clearer policies and legislation

related to clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse. Currently, only 14 US states have statutes that make

clergy sexual abuse of adults a criminal act (Misconduct, n.d.). Almost all states in the United

States have laws that make sexual relationships with adults in helping professions including

medical professionals, mental health professionals and educational professionals, illegal, but

clergy and religious leaders are often not included in those laws. Further study is necessary to

understand why these professionals were not originally included, and more effort should be made

to amend laws and/or create new laws that specifically address clergy and increase legal ramifications for clergy perpetrators who engage in this harmful behavior.

Lastly, this research highlights that some domains of posttraumatic growth were impacted, however the domain that seemed the most likely to be impacted, spiritual development, saw no impact. This may indicate when spirituality is used as a tactic of abuse, it may be more difficult for the survivor to develop spiritual growth post trauma. Posttraumatic growth research has focused on different types of traumatic events (Maguen et al., 2006; Ramos & Leal, 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Triplett et al., 2012), but has not been used to research trauma caused by a religious institution or its leadership. This suggests the relationship with spiritual development may be more complicated when the cause of the traumatic event is due to a misuse of trust within a religious institution. Further study in this area may point to more nuanced developments within posttraumatic growth research and spirituality research.

**Table 2**

*Correlation Matrix of All Variables*

| Variable | n | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Institutional Responses | 108 | 2.86 | 1.37 | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. PTG Personal Strength | 108 | 2.93 | 1.31 | -0.189* | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. PTG New Possibilities | 108 | 3.47 | 1.27 | 0.007 | 0.767** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 4. PTG Improved Relationships | 108 | 4.18 | 1.21 | -0.313** | 0.602** | 0.673** | - | | | | | | | |
| 5. PTG Spiritual Growth | 108 | 4.09 | 1.68 | -0.173 | 0.506** | 0.508** | 0.548** | - | | | | | | |
| 6. PTG Appreciation for Life | 108 | 3.35 | 1.69 | -0.175 | 0.793** | 0.690** | 0.554** | 0.433** | - | | | | | |
| 7. Spirituality Currently | 107 | 3.42 | 1.23 | -0.320** | 0.286** | 0.312** | 0.426** | 0.649** | 0.351** | - | | | | |
| 8. Religious Commitment Currently | 106 | 3.30 | 1.31 | -0.358** | 0.097 | 0.094 | 0.295** | 0.523** | 0.076 | 0.758** | - | | | |
| 9. Well-being | 107 | 3.08 | 1.18 | -0.285** | 0.494** | 0.351** | 0.406** | 0.259** | 0.589** | 0.345** | 0.200* | - | | |
| 10. Flourishing | 107 | 2.49 | 1.03 | -0.375** | 0.352** | 0.317** | 0.443** | 0.323** | 0.442** | 0.464** | 0.391** | 0.715** | - | |
| 11. Spirituality pretest | 107 | 2.49 | 0.84 | 0.072 | -0.175 | 0.239** | -0.158 | -0.023 | -0.206* | 0.061 | -0.163 | 0.130 | 0.034 | - |
| 12. Religious Commitment pretest | 106 | 1.87 | 0.74 | 0.107 | 0.110 | -0.018 | 0.033 | 0.054 | 0.134 | -0.065 | 0.045 | -0.100 | -0.027 | 0.449** |

*Note.* * *p* <.05, ** *p*<.01

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**Appendix A: Social Media Recruitment**

Hello!
I am currently collecting data through an anonymous survey about clergy-perpetrated sexual
abuse and institutional response. If you are a survivor of clergy-perpetrated abuse that was
initiated after you turned 18, and you disclosed this abuse to your religious institution you may
be eligible to participate. This survey will take about 35 minutes of your time. Some sample
questions include Please briefly describe what occurred, what type of religious institution did
you disclose to, and how have you been feeling in general?
Click here to see if you're eligible for the study and to take the survey:
https://montclair.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5C4kP12h9Qsxbg2
Thank you for considering participation in this study. This study has been approved by the
Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, Study #IRB-FY21-22-2390.
If you have any questions, please contact Krystal Woolston at 973-655-4268 or
woolstonk@montclair.edu, OR my faculty advisor, Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban at 973-655-6884
or urbanj@montclair.edu

Thanks!

Krystal

Department of Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University

#metoo #churchtoo #churchabuse #spiritualabuse #clergyabuse

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**Appendix B: Recruitment Email**

Hello _____,

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse and institutional response. This study will involve a survey about individual experiences disclosing clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse of an adult, the institutional response, well-being, and spirituality and religiosity.

This survey will take about 35 minutes of your time.

If you are a survivor of clergy-perpetrated abuse that was initiated after you turned 18, and you disclosed this abuse to your religious institution you may be eligible to participate. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

If you have any questions, please contact Krystal Woolston at 973-655-4268 or woolstonk@montclair.edu, OR my faculty advisor, Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban at 973-655-6884 or urbanj@montclair.edu

Thank you for considering participation in this study. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, Study #IRB-FY21-22-2390.

Click here to see if you're eligible for the study and to take the survey:

https://montclair.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5C4kP12h9Qsxbg2

Sincerely,

Krystal Woolston, PhD Candidate

Family Science and Human Development, Montclair State University

**Appendix C: What Comes Next Survey Screening Questionnaire**

MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY

**Screening Questions**

Please answer the following questions to see if you are eligible for this study:

Did you experience clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse initiated after your 18th birthday? For purposes of this study, clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse is defined as "abuse of a sexual nature of any individual by a member or members of clergy".

○ Yes
○ No

At what age did the abuse start?

| 0 | 13 | 25 | 38 | 50 | 63 | 75 | 88 | 100 |

Please move the bar to the age in which your abuse started, which will appear as a number on the right side.

Did you disclose this abuse to your religious institution?

○ Yes
○ No

**Appendix D: Informed Consent for What Comes Next Survey**

**Welcome to the What Comes Next: An Exploration of Institutional Response to Clergy Abuse Disclosure Research Study**
**Consent Form**

You are invited to be in a study about sexual abuse by religious leaders. I want to understand how different religious institutions treat and respond to sexual abuse of adults. I want to learn from those who reported their abuse to their religious institution. I am interested in how the response from your institution impacts the survivor. I want to learn how the response impacts your well-being. I want to learn how the response impacts your views on spirituality and religion.

If you agree to be in the study, please complete the following survey. The survey is designed to understand your views on your experience. It will take about 35 minutes to complete this survey. There will be questions about your experience with abuse by a religious leader. You will be asked questions about reporting the abuse to your religious institution. You will be asked questions about your well-being. You will also be asked to share your thoughts on spirituality and religion.

 You may not directly benefit from this research. This research may help religious institutions understand how they impact survivors. This research aims to help religious institutions respond to reports of abuse in ways that are helpful to survivors.

Data will be collected using an online survey. There are no guarantees data can be completely secured in an online survey. Confidentiality will be kept to the level possible based on the technology used. You should not use an employer issued electronic device, laptop, or phone. You should also avoid using Wi-Fi owned by your employer to respond to this survey. Many employers monitor use of all devices.

If you agree to be in the study, you can stop at any time. You can skip questions you do not want to answer. You have the right to leave the study at any point. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you would like to take part in a future interview. You are not required to take part in an interview. You are not required to share your personal contact information.

You may feel stress or discomfort from memories of your abuse. If you need someone to talk to please reach out for help. You may reach out to the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673, and/or visit RAINN for more resources: https://www.rainn.org/

Please ask any questions you have about this study. You may contact me if you have questions. My contact information is 973-655-4268 or woolstonk@montclair.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban at 973-655-6884 or urbanj@montclair.edu.

Any questions about your rights can be directed to Dr. Dana Levitt. Dr. Levitt is the chair of the Institutional Review Board at Montclair State University. You can reach her at reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu or 973-655-2097.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,
Krystal Woolston
PhD Candidate, Department of Family Science and Human Development
College of Education and Human Services

By clicking the link below, I confirm I have read this form and will take part in the study described. The purpose of the study has been explained. I understand my part in the study. The possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can leave the study at any time. My consent also affirms that I am 18 years of age.

[Please feel free to print a copy of this consent.]

☐ I consent, begin the survey          ☐ not consent (closes the survey)

This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board #IRB-FY21-22-2390

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## Appendix E: What Comes Next Survey (WCNS)

**Start of Block: Demographics**

Q2 1. What is your age

|  | 18 | 28 | 39 | 49 | 59 | 69 | 80 | 90 | 100 |

Please slide the bar to your age, which will appear as a number on the right side. (28)

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Q3 2. To which gender identity do you most identify?

○ Male  (1)

○ Female  (2)

○ Transgender Female  (3)

○ Transgender Male  (4)

○ Gender Non-Conforming  (5)

○ Not Listed  (6) _____

○ Prefer Not to Answer  (7)

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Q4 3. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

○ Heterosexual (straight)  (1)

○ Homosexual (gay)  (2)

○ Bisexual  (3)

○ Other  (4)

○ Prefer not to say  (5)

------------------------------------------------------------

⤫

Q5 4. Are you now married, widowed, divorced, separated or never married?

○ Married  (1)

○ Widowed  (2)

○ Divorced  (3)

○ Separated  (4)

○ Never Married  (5)

------------------------------------------------------------

Q6 5. Which of the following races do you consider yourself to be?  (select all that apply)

☐ White or Caucasian  (1)

☐ Black or African American  (2)

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native  (3)

☐ Asian  (4)

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander  (5)

☐ Other (specify)  (6) _____

Q7 6. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

○ Less than high school degree  (1)

○ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)  (2)

○ Some college but no degree  (3)

○ Associate degree in college (2-year)  (4)

○ Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)  (5)

○ Master's degree  (6)

○ Doctoral degree  (7)

○ Professional degree (JD, MD, etc.)  (8)

**End of Block: Demographics**

**Start of Block: Religious Abuse and Institution**

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Q12 7. What type of religious institution did you disclose to?
(Examples include, Catholic Church, Southern Baptist Convention Church, United Methodist Church, Jewish Synagogue, Mennonite Church, etc.)

_____

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Q13 8. When did you disclose the abuse to your institution

○ Right after the abuse started (1)

○ Right after the abuse ended (2)

○ 0-6 months after the abuse ended (3)

○ 7 months - 12 months after the abuse ended (4)

○ 1-2 years after the abuse ended (5)

○ 3-5 years after the abuse ended (6)

○ More than 5 years after the abuse ended (7)

○ Other time point (8) _____

**End of Block: Religious Abuse and Institution**

**Start of Block: Institutional Response**

Q14 This section of the survey will focus specifically on how the religious institution responded to your disclosure.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Q15 In thinking about the events related to sexual abuse you experienced by a clergy person; please rate how you felt the institution responded to your disclosure.

| | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Somewhat Disagree (3) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) | Somewhat Agree (5) | Agree (6) | Strongly Agree (7) | N/A (9) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. Actively supported me with either formal or informal resources (e.g., counseling, academic services, meetings or phone calls) (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 10. Apologized for what happened to me (2) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 11. Believed my report (3) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 12. Allowed me to have a say in how my report was handled (4) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 13. Ensured I was treated as an important member of the institution (5) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 14. Met my needs for support and accommodations (6) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 15. Created an environment where this type of experience was safe to discuss (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. Created an environment where this type of experience was recognized as a problem (8) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 17. Did not do enough to prevent this type of experience/s (9) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 18. Created an environment in which this type of experience/s seemed common or normal (10) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 19. Created an environment in which this experience seemed more likely to occur (11) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 20. Made it difficult to report the experience/s (12) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 21. Responded inadequately to the experience/s (13) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 22. Mishandled my case, if disciplinary action was requested (14) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 23. Covered up the experience/s (15) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 24. Denied my experience/s in some way? (16) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25. Punished me in some way for reporting the experience/s (e.g., loss of privileges or status) (17) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 26. Suggested my experience/s might affect the reputation of the institution (18) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 27. Created an environment where I no longer felt like a valued member of the institution (19) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 28. Created an environment where staying at my religious institution was difficult for me (20) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 29. Responded differently to my experience/s based on my sexual orientation (21) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 30. Created an environment in which I felt discriminated against based on my sexual orientation (22) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31. Expressed a biased or negative attitude toward me and/or my experience/s based on my sexual orientation? (23) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 32. Responded differently to my experience/s based on my race (24) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 33. Created an environment in which I felt discriminated against based on my race (25) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 34. Expressed a biased or negative attitude toward me and/or my experience/s based on my race (26) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Page Break

Q16 35. Who did you tell about your experience first?

_____

Q17 36. How did they react?

_____

Q18 37. Please briefly described what occurred:

_____

Q19 38. Prior to this experience, was this an institution or organization you identified with or felt a part of?

○ Very Much (1)

○ A Good Deal (2)

○ Very Little (3)

○ Not at All (4)

Q20 39. Are you still a part of this institution?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

**End of Block: Institutional Response**

**Start of Block: Post-traumatic Growth**

Q21 The next section of this survey will focus on your life since experiencing clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse.

Q22 For each of the statements below, indicate the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result of the abuse.

| | I **did not** experience this change as a result of my abuse. (1) | I experienced this change to a **very small degree** as a result of my abuse. (2) | I experienced this change to a **small degree** as a result of my abuse. (3) | I experienced this change to a **moderate degree** as a result of my abuse. (4) | I experienced this change to a **great degree** as a result of my abuse. (5) | I experienced this change to a **very great degree** as a result of my abuse. (6) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 40. I changed my priorities about what is important in life. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 41. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life. (2) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 42. I developed new interests. (3) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 43. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance. (4) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 44. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters. (5) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 45. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble. (6) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 46. I established a new path for my life. (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 47. I have a greater sense of closeness with others. (8) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 48. I am more willing to express my emotions. (9) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 49. I know better that I can handle difficulties. (10) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 50. I am able to do better things with my life. (11) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 51. I am better able to accept the way things work out. (12) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 52. I can better appreciate each day. (13) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 53. New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise. (14) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 54. I have more compassion for others. (15) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 55. I put more effort into my relationships. (16) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 56. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing. (17) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 57. I have a stronger religious faith. (18) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 58. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was. (19) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 59. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are. (20) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 60. I better accept needing others. (21) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**End of Block: Post-traumatic Growth**

**Start of Block: Religiosity and Spirituality**

Q23 This section of the survey will focus on your feelings and actions related to religion and spirituality.

Q24 For each statement below, indicate the degree to which you feel you relate to the statement before you experienced the abuse and how you feel presently. Indicate on the left side of each

statement how you felt before you experienced clergy abuse. Indicate on the right side of each statement how you feel presently.

| | Before Experiencing Clergy Abuse | | | | | | Feel Presently | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Many times a day (1) | Every day (2) | Most days (3) | Some Days (4) | Once in awhile (5) | Never (6) | Many times a day (1) | Every day (2) | Most days (3) | Some Days (4) | Once in awhile (5) | Never (6) |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 61. I feel God's presence. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 62. I experience a connection to all of life. (2) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 63. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns. (3) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 64. I find strength in my religion or spirituality. (4) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 65. I find comfort in my religion or spirituality. (5) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 66. I feel deep inner peace or harmony. (6) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 67. I ask for God's help in the midst of daily activities. (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 68. I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities. (8) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 69. I feel God's love for me, directly. (9) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 70. I feel God's love for me, through others. (10) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 71. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation. (11) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 72. I feel thankful for my blessings. (12) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 73. I feel a selfless caring for others. (13) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 74. I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong. (14) | C | C | C | C | O | C | C | C | C | C | O | C |
| 75. I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine. (15) | C | C | C | C | O | C | C | C | C | C | O | C |

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Q25 For the statement below, indicate the degree to which you feel you relate to the statement before you experienced the abuse and how you feel presently. Indicate on the left side of the statement how you felt before you experienced clergy abuse. Indicate on the right side how you feel presently.

| | Before Experiencing Clergy Abuse | | | | Feel Presently | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | As close as possible (1) | Very close (2) | Somewhat close (3) | Not at all (4) | As close as possible (1) | Very Close (2) | Somewhat Close (3) | Not at all (4) |
| 76. In general, how close do you feel to God? (1) | O | O | O | O | O | O | O | O |

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Q26 For each statement below, indicate the degree to which you feel you relate to the statement before you experienced the abuse and how you feel presently. Indicate on the left side of each

IT WAS LIKE DOUBLE DAMAGE

statement how you felt before you experienced clergy abuse. Indicate on the right side of each statement how you feel presently.

| | Before Experiencing Clergy Abuse | | | | | Feel Presently | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Totally true of me (1) | Mostly true of me (2) | Moderately true of me (3) | Somewhat true of me (4) | Not true of me at all (5) | Totally true of me (1) | Mostly true of me (2) | Moderately true of me (3) | Somewhat true of me (4) | Not true of me at all (5) |

| | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ( | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ( |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

77. I often read books and magazines about my faith. (1)

78. I make financial contributions to my religious organization. (2)

79. I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith. (3)

80. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life. (4)

81. My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life. (11)

82. I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation. (6)

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 83. Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life. (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| 84. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection. (8) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| 85. I enjoy working in the activities of my religious affiliation. (9) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| 86. I keep well informed about my local religious group and have some influence in its decisions. (10) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |

**End of Block: Religiosity and Spirituality**

**Start of Block: Well-being**

Q27 This section of the survey will focus primarily upon how you currently feel in relation to your well-being. For each question, choose the answer that best describes how you have felt and how things have been going for you during the past month.

---

Q28 87. How have you been feeling in general?

○ In excellent spirits (1)

○ In very good spirits (2)

○ In good spirits mostly (3)

○ I've been up and down in spirits a lot (4)

○ In low spirits mostly (5)

○ In very low spirits (6)

---

Q29 88. Have you been bothered by nervousness or your "nerves"?

○ Extremely so—to the point where I could not work or take care of things (1)

○ Very much so (2)

○ Quite a bit (3)

○ Some—enough to bother me (4)

○ A little (5)

○ Not at all (6)

---

Q30 89. Have you been in firm control of your behavior, thoughts, emotions, or feelings?

○ Yes, definitely so (1)

○ Yes, for the most part (2)

○ Generally so (3)

○ Not too well (4)

○ No, and I am somewhat disturbed (5)

○ No, and I am very disturbed (6)

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Q31 90. Have you felt so sad, discouraged, hopeless, or had so many problems that you wondered if anything was worthwhile?

○ Extremely so—to the point I have just about given up (1)

○ Very much so (2)

○ Quite a bit (3)

○ Some—enough to bother me (4)

○ A little bit (5)

○ Not at all (6)

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Q32 91. Have you been under or felt you were under any strain, stress, or pressure?

○ Yes—almost more than I could bear (1)

○ Yes—quite a bit of pressure (2)

○ Yes—some, more than usual (3)

○ Yes—some, but about usual (4)

○ Yes—a little (5)

○ Not at all (6)

---

Q33 92. How happy, satisfied, or pleased have you been with your personal life?

○ Extremely happy—couldn't have been more satisfied or pleased (1)

○ Very happy (2)

○ Fairly happy (3)

○ Satisfied—pleased (4)

○ Somewhat dissatisfied (5)

○ Very dissatisfied (6)

Q34 93. Have you had reason to wonder if you were losing your mind, or losing control over the way you act, talk, think, feel, or of your memory?

○ Not at all (1)

○ Only a little (2)

○ Some, but not enough to be concerned (3)

○ Some, and I've been a little concerned (4)

○ Some, and I am quite concerned (5)

○ Much, and I'm very concerned (6)

---

Q35 94. Have you been anxious, worried, or upset?

○ Extremely so—to the point of being sick, or almost sick (1)

○ Very much so (2)

○ Quite a bit (3)

○ Some—enough to bother me (4)

○ A little bit (5)

○ Not at all (6)

---

Q36 95. Have you been waking up fresh and rested?

○ Every day (1)

○ Most every day (2)

○ Fairly often (3)

○ Less than half the time (4)

○ Rarely (5)

○ None of the time (6)

---

Q37 96. Have you been bothered by any illness, bodily disorder, pain, or fears about your health?

○ All the time (1)

○ Most of the time (2)

○ A good bit of the time (3)

○ Some of the time (4)

○ A little of the time (5)

○ None of the time (6)

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Q38 97. Has your daily life been full of things that are interesting to you?

○ All the time (1)

○ Most of the time (2)

○ A good bit of the time (3)

○ Some of the time (4)

○ A little of the time (5)

○ None of the time (6)

---

Q39 98. Have you felt down hearted and blue?

○ All the time (1)

○ Most of the time (2)

○ A good bit of the time (3)

○ Some of the time (4)

○ A little of the time (5)

○ None of the time (6)

---

Q40 99. Have you been feeling emotionally stable and sure of yourself?

○ All the time (1)

○ Most of the time (2)

○ A good bit of the time (3)

○ Some of the time (4)

○ A little of the time (5)

○ None of the time (6)

---

Q41 100. Have you felt tired, worn out, used up, or exhausted?

○ All the time (1)

○ Most of the time (2)

○ A good bit of the time (3)

○ Some of the time (4)

○ A little of the time (5)

○ None of the time (6)

Page Break

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Q42 101. Select the number that seems closest to how you have felt generally during the past month.

|  | Very Concerned | Not Concerned at all |
|---|---|---|
|  | 0  2  4 | 6  8  10 |
| How concerned or worried about your health have you been? () | | |
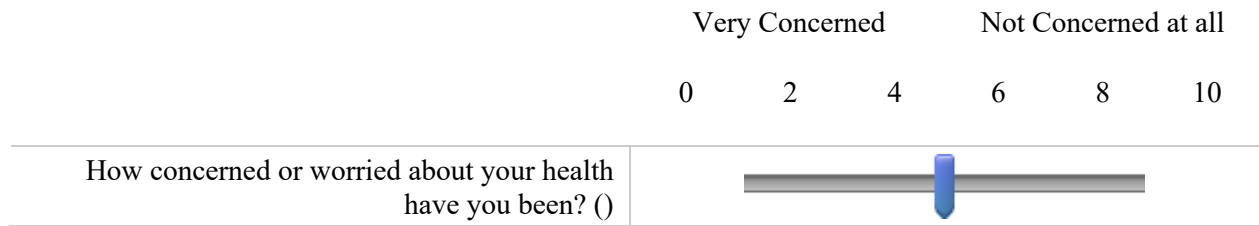
Q43 102. Select the number that seems closest to how you have felt generally during the past month.

|  | Very Tense | Very Relaxed |
|---|---|---|
|  | 0  2  4 | 6  8  10 |
| How relaxed or tense have you been? () | | |
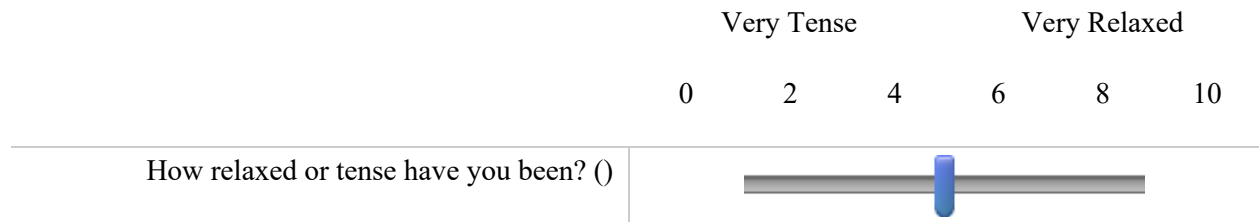
Q44 103. Select the number that seems closest to how you have felt generally during the past month.

|  | No energy at all; listless | Very energetic; dynamic |
|---|---|---|
|  | 0  2  4 | 6  8  10 |
| How much energy, pep, and vitality have you felt? () | | |
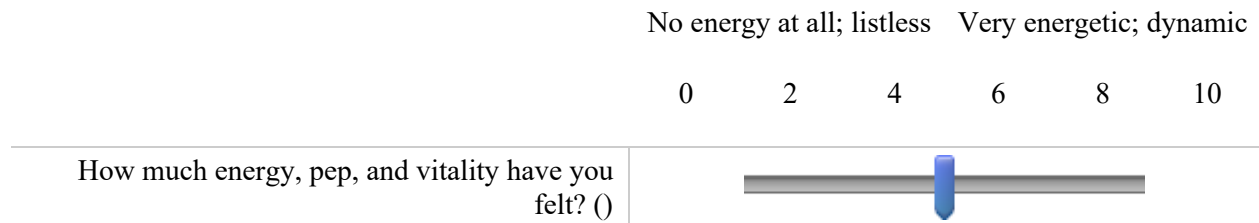
Q45 104. Select the number that seems closest to how you have felt generally during the past month.

|  | Very depressed | Very Cheerful |
|---|---|---|
|  | 0  2  4 | 6  8  10 |

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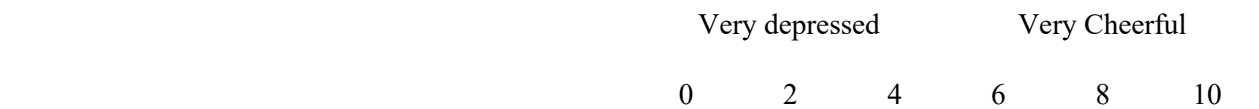
| How depressed or cheerful have you been? () | |
|---|---|

Page Break

Q46 Below are 8 statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item.

| | Strongly Agree (1) | Agree (2) | Slightly Agree (3) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) | Slightly disagree (5) | Disagree (6) | Strongly Disagree (7) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 105. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 106. My social relationships are supportive and rewarding (2) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 107. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities (3) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 108. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others (4) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 109. I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me (5) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 110. I am a good person and live a good life (6) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 111. I am optimistic about my future (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| 112. People respect me (8) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**End of Block: Well-being**

**Start of Block: Participant ID**

Q47 113. Here is your participant ID number:${e://Field/Random%20ID}


Please write down and keep a copy of this ID number. You will need to provide this participant ID number if you choose to provide contact information for follow up surveys and interviews. Once you've recorded your ID number, click submit to finish the survey.

**End of Block: Participant ID**

**Appendix F: Informed Consent for Interview Interest Survey**

**Welcome to the What Comes Next: An Exploration of Institutional Response to Clergy Abuse Disclosure Research Study**

Thank you for participating in the first round of data collection for this study. You are invited to provide contact information to participate in future research about this topic. I want to understand how different religious institutions treat and respond to the sexual abuse of adults. I want to learn from those who reported their abuse to their religious institution. I am interested in how the response from your institution impacts the survivor. I want to learn how the response impacts your well-being. I want to learn how the response impacts your views on spirituality and religion.

If you would like to be contacted for future research studies on this topic, please complete the following questions. It will take about 5 minutes to complete this survey.

You will be asked to provide contact information. You will also be asked to provide your gender. Lastly, you will be asked to provide your age at time of abuse, the time you disclosed at, and the type of religious institution you reported your abuse to.

You may not directly benefit from this research. This research may help religious institutions understand how they impact survivors. This research aims to help religious institutions respond to reports of abuse in ways that are helpful to survivors.

Data will be collected using an online survey. There are no guarantees data can be completely secured in an online survey. Confidentiality will be kept to the level possible based on the technology used. You should not use an employer issued electronic device, laptop, or phone. You should also avoid using Wi-Fi owned by your employer to respond to this survey. Many employers monitor use of all devices.

If you agree to be in the study, you can stop at any time. You can skip questions you do not want to answer. You have the right to leave the study at any point. You are not required to take part in an interview. You are not required to share your personal contact information.

You may feel stress or discomfort from memories of your abuse. If you need someone to talk to please reach out for help. You may reach out to the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673, and/or visit RAINN for more resources: https://www.rainn.org/

Please ask any questions you have about this study. You may contact me if you have questions. My contact information is 973-655-4268 or woolstonk@montclair.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban at 973-655-6884 or urbanj@montclair.edu.

Any questions about your rights can be directed to Dr. Dana Levitt. Dr. Levitt is the chair of the Institutional Review Board at Montclair State University. You can reach her at reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu or 973-655-2097.

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Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,
Krystal Woolston
PhD Candidate, Department of Family Science and Human Development
College of Education and Human Services

 By clicking the link below, I confirm I have read this form and will take part in the study described. The purpose of the study has been explained. I understand my part in the study. The possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can leave the study at any time. My consent also affirms that I am 18 years of age.

[Please feel free to print a copy of this consent.]

This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board #IRB-FY21-22-2390

☐ I consent, begin the survey     ☐ not consent (closes the survey)

**Appendix G: Interview Interest Survey**

Please enter your participant ID number:

Please enter your participant ID number:

What name would you prefer to be called?

What is your email address

What is your age?

|  |  | 18 | 28 | 39 | 49 | 59 | 69 | 80 | 90 | 100 |

Please slide the bar
to your age, which
will appear as a
number on the
right side.

To which gender identity do you most identify?

Male

Female

Transgender Female

Transgender Male

Gender Non-Conforming

Not Listed

Prefer Not to Answer

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

Bisexual

Heterosexual (straight)

Homosexual (gay)

Prefer not to say

Other

Did you experience clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse initiated after your 18th birthday?

For purposes of this study, clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse is defined as "abuse of a sexual nature of any individual by a member or

members of clergy".

Yes

No

At what age did the abuse start?



At what age did the abuse end?



Did you disclose this abuse to your religious institution?

Yes

No

What type of religious institution did you disclose to?

(Examples include, Catholic Church, Southern Baptist Convention Church, United Methodist Church, Jewish Synagogue, Mennonite Church, etc.)

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│                                                         │
│                                                         │
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When did you disclose the abuse to your institution

Right after the abuse started

Right after the abuse ended

0-6 months after the abuse ended

6 months - 1 year after the abuse ended

1-2 years after the abuse ended

3-5 years after the abuse ended

More than 5 years after the abuse ended

Other time point

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│                                                         │
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**Appendix H: Email to Schedule Interview**

Hello (Name indicated on survey),

Thank you for your participation in the first phase of the What Comes Next: An Exploration of Institutional Response to Clergy Abuse Disclosure research study. You indicated at the end of the survey that you would be willing to participate in a follow up interview about your experience with sexual abuse by a religious leader.

I am reaching out to you today to schedule that interview if you would still like and are willing to participate. To schedule an interview, please follow this link: https://calendar.app.google/4uCa8CJZ4wP23BPd6

If you still wish to participate but the times available on the calendar do not work with your availability, please let me know and I will find time that fits within your schedule.

If you decide to take part, we will discuss your experience with sexual abuse by a religious leader. We will discuss how your religious institution responded to your report of abuse and how that impacted your wellbeing.  We will also discuss how the response from your institution impacts your views on spirituality and religion.

The interview is designed to understand your views on your experience reporting sexual abuse to a religious institution. It will take about 60-90 minutes to complete this interview. The interview will be broken into two sections. The first section will focus on understanding your experience and learning more about what happened to you. The second section of the interview will focus on how these experiences have impacted you.

You may not directly benefit from this research. This research may help religious institutions understand how they impact survivors. This research aims to help religious institutions respond to reports of abuse in ways that are helpful to survivors.

You may feel stress or discomfort from memories of your abuse. If you need someone to talk to please reach out for help. You may reach out to the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673, and/or visit RAINN for more resources: https://www.rainn.org/

Data will be collected using zoom. There are no guarantees data can be completely secured in an online platform. Confidentiality will be kept to the level possible based on the technology used. You should not use an employer issued electronic device, laptop, or phone. Many employers monitor use of all devices.

If you agree to be in the study, you can stop at any time. You can skip questions you do not want to answer. You have the right to leave the study at any point. After the interview the recording will be transcribed and then deleted.

If you have any questions, please contact Krystal Woolston at 973-655-4268 or woolstonk@montclair.edu, OR my faculty advisor, Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban at 973-655-6884 or urbanj@montclair.edu

Thank you for considering participation in this study. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, Study #IRB-FY21-22-2390.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best,
Krystal Woolston

**Appendix I: Informed Consent to Participate in Interview**

What Comes Next: An Exploration of Institutional Response to Clergy Abuse Disclosure
Research Study: Interview Protocol

Thank you for talking with me today. I'm inviting you to take part in this interview because of the feedback you provided previously. I want to understand how different religious institutions respond to the sexual abuse of adults. I want to learn from those who reported their abuse to their religious institution. I am interested in how the response from your institution impacts you. I want to learn how the response impacts your well-being. I want to learn how the response impacts your views on spirituality and religion.

If you decide to take part, we will discuss your experience with sexual abuse by a religious leader. We will discuss how your religious institution responded to your report of abuse and how that impacted your well-being.  We will also discuss how the response from your institution impacts your views on spirituality and religion.

The interview is designed to understand your views on your experience reporting sexual abuse to a religious institution. It will take about 60-90 minutes to complete this interview.

You may not directly benefit from this research. This research may help religious institutions understand how they impact survivors. This research aims to help religious institutions respond to reports of abuse in ways that are helpful to survivors.
You may feel stress or discomfort from memories of your abuse. If you need someone to talk to please reach out for help. You may reach out to the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673, and/or visit RAINN for more resources: https://www.rainn.org/
Data will be collected using zoom. There are no guarantees data can be completely secured in an online platform. Confidentiality will be kept to the level possible based on the technology used. You should not use an employer issued electronic device, laptop, or phone. You should also avoid using Wi-Fi owned by your employer to respond to this survey. Many employers monitor use of all devices.

If you agree to be in the study, you can stop at any time. You can skip questions you do not want to answer. You have the right to leave the study at any point.

Do you consent to take part in this interview?

Do you consent to a recording of this interview?

After the interview the recording will be transcribed and then deleted.
For purposes of this study and maintaining your confidentiality please change your zoom name so you cannot be identified and then I will begin to record.

This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board #IRB-FY21-22-2390
I will begin recording now.

**Appendix J: Interview Protocol**

For the recording, do you consent to participate in this interview?

1.  What name would like to use throughout this interview?
    a.  In any publications that result from this study, I will not identify you by your actual name. Do you have a preference for a name you would like me to use in any published articles that may emerge from this study?

This section of the interview will focus specifically on understanding your experience and what happened to you.

2.  Please share what you feel comfortable discussing about your experience with clergy abuse.

3.  Who did you first disclose to? When did you first disclose your abuse?
    a.  Who else did you disclose to? When did you disclose to them? (prompt multiple times until complete list)

4.  In my survey, I found a sizable number of women who did not report their abuse to their religious institution, what led you to disclose your abuse?
    a.  Why did you report your abuse at the time you did?
    b.  How was the reporting process for you?

5.  How did the religious institution respond to your disclosure?
    a.  How many people from your institution were involved in the response?
    b.  Who was involved in the response from the religious institution? How did they respond to you?
    c.  Was there anyone else from your institution involved in the response? How did they respond? (prompt multiple times until complete list)
    d.  How do you make sense of the response you received?

6.  Were you offered any kind support by the religious institution you disclosed to?
    a.  If yes, what kind of support (i.e. emotional, financial, etc.)
    b.  If yes, was there any additional support?

7.  What happened to the clergy person you reported?
    a.  Were there any repercussions for the person who abused you?

8.  Before we move into the next section of the interview where I will ask about how these experiences impacted you, is there anything else about what happened to you that you didn't share already that you want me to know?

This next section of the interview will focus on how these experiences have impacted you.
9.  Looking back to the first time you disclosed your abuse, how would you characterize your well-being then? (If needed, well-being is defined as: "the subjective feeling of contentment,

happiness, satisfaction with life's experiences and of one's role in the world of work, sense of achievement, utility, belongingness, and no distress, dissatisfaction or worry, etc."
   a. Do you feel your well-being has changed over time?
   b. How would you describe your current well-being?

10. Would you say this experience has had an impact on your spiritual or religious beliefs and practices?
   a. If yes, can you share some examples of how.

11.  Are you currently a part of a religious institution?
   a. If yes, is it the same type of religious institution where you experienced abuse? What caused you to stay or leave your initial institution?
   b. If yes, do you think the way you experience the institution has shifted in any way?
   c. If currently a part of a religious institution, has your involvement changed over time? If yes, please describe.

12. Do you have any recommendations for ways religious institutions can support survivors after disclosing clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse?
   a. Is there any support you received from your religious institution that you would describe as helpful after your disclosure?
   b. Is there any response you received from your religious institution that you found to be unhelpful after your disclosure?

13. Is there anything else specific to how these experiences have impacted you that you didn't share already that you want me to know?

**Appendix K: Institutional Betrayal and Support Questionnaire Version 1 (IBSQ.1)**

**A. Responses to Survivors**
*Instructions: In thinking about the events related to sexual misconduct described in the previous sections, did the [INSTITUTION] play a role by...*

|  | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Actively supporting you with either formal or informal resources (e.g., counseling, academic services, meetings or phone calls)? | | | |
| 2. Apologizing for what happened to you? | | | |
| 3. Believing your report? | | | |
| 4. Allowing you to have a say in how your report was handled? | | | |
| 5. Ensuring you were treated as an important member of the institution? | | | |
| 6. Meeting your needs for support and accommodations | | | |
| 7. Create an environment where this type of experience was safe to discuss? | | | |
| 8. Create an environment where this type of experience was recognized as a problem? | | | |
| 9. Not doing enough to prevent this type of experience/s? | | | |
| 10. Creating an environment in which this type of experience/s seemed common or normal? | | | |
| 11. Creating an environment in which this experience seemed more likely to occur? | | | |
| 12. Making it difficult to report the experience/s? | | | |
| 13. Responding inadequately to the experience/s, if reported? | | | |
| 14. Mishandling your case, if disciplinary action was requested? | | | |
| 15. Covering up the experience/s? | | | |
| 16. Denying your experience/s in some way? | | | |
| 17. Punishing you in some way for reporting the experience/s (e.g., loss of privileges or status)? | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 18. Suggesting your experience/s might affect the reputation of the institution? | | | |
| 19. Creating an environment where you no longer felt like a valued member of the institution? | | | |
| 20. Creating an environment where staying at your religious institution was difficult for you? | | | |
| 21. Responding differently to your experience/s based on your sexual orientation? | | | |
| 22. Creating an environment in which you felt discriminated against based on your sexual orientation? | | | |
| 23. Expressing a biased or negative attitude toward you and/or your experience/s based on your sexual orientation? | | | |
| 24. Responding differently to your experience/s based on your race? | | | |
| 25. Creating an environment in which you felt discriminated against based on your race? | | | |
| 26. Expressing a biased or negative attitude toward you and/or your experience/s based on your race? | | | |

27. Please list the type of institution involved:
28. Did you tell anyone about your experience/s?
29. If you told anyone about your experience/s who did you tell?
30. If you told anyone about experience/s how did they react?
30. Please briefly described what occurred:

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**Appendix L: Posttraumatic Growth Inventory**

Instructions: Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result of the crisis/disaster, using the following scale.

| | 0 = I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis. | 1 = I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my crisis. | 2 = I experienced this change to a small degree as a result of my crisis. | 3 = I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my crisis. | 4 = I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my crisis. | 5 = I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I changed my priorities about what is important in life. | | | | | | |
| 2. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life. | | | | | | |
| 3. I developed new interests. | | | | | | |
| 4. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance. | | | | | | |
| 5. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters. | | | | | | |
| 6. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble. | | | | | | |
| 7. I established a new path for my life. | | | | | | |
| 8. I have a greater sense of closeness with others. | | | | | | |
| 9. I am more willing to express my emotions. | | | | | | |
| 10. I know better that I can handle difficulties. | | | | | | |
| 11. I am able to do better things with my life. | | | | | | |
| 12. I am better able to accept the way things work out. | | | | | | |
| 13.I can better appreciate each day. | | | | | | |
| 14.New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise. | | | | | | |
| 15.I have more compassion for others. | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. I put more effort into my relationships. | | | | | | |
| 17. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing. | | | | | | |
| 18.I have a stronger religious faith. | | | | | | |
| 19. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was. | | | | | | |
| 20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are. | | | | | | |
| 21.I better accept needing others. | | | | | | |

**Appendix M: Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES)**

The list that follows includes items you may or may not experience. Please consider how often you directly have this experience, and try to disregard whether you feel you should or should not have these experiences. A number of items use the word 'God.' If this word is not a comfortable one for you, please substitute another word that calls to mind the divine or holy for you

|  | Many times a day | Everyday | Most Days | Some Days | Once in awhile | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel God's presence. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I experience a connection to all of life. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find strength in my religion or spirituality. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find comfort in my religion or spirituality. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel deep inner peace or harmony. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I ask for God's help in the midst of daily activities. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel God's love for me, directly. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel God's love for me, through others. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation. |  |  |  |  |  |  |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel thankful for my blessings. | | | | | | |
| I feel a selfless caring for others. | | | | | | |
| I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong. | | | | | | |
| I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine. | | | | | | |

| | As close as possible | Very close | Somewhat close | Not at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| In general, how close do you feel to God? | | | | |

## Appendix N: Religious Commitment Inventory

Instructions: Read each of the following statements. Using the scale to the right, CIRCLE the response that best describes how true each statement is for you.

| | 5. Totally true of me | 4. Mostly true of me | 3. Moderately true of me | 2. Somewhat true of me | 1. Not true of me at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I often read books and magazines about my faith. | | | | | |
| 2. I make financial contributions to my religious organization. | | | | | |
| 3. I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith. | | | | | |
| 4. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life. | | | | | |
| 5. My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life. | | | | | |
| 6. I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation. | | | | | |
| 7. Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life. | | | | | |
| 8. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection. | | | | | |
| 9. I enjoy working in the activities of my religious affiliation. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. I keep well informed about my local religious group and have some influence in its decisions. | | | | | |

**Appendix O: General Well-Being Scale**

Instructions: For each question, choose the answer that best describes how you have felt and how things have been going for you during the past month.

1. How have you been feeling in general?
5 _____ In excellent spirits
4 _____ In very good spirits
3 _____ In good spirits mostly
2 _____ I've been up and down in spirits a lot
1 _____ In low spirits mostly
0 _____ In very low spirits

2. Have you been bothered by nervousness or your "nerves"?
0 _____ Extremely so—to the point where I could not work or take care of things
1 _____ Very much so
2 _____ Quite a bit
3 _____ Some—enough to bother me
4 _____ A little
5 _____ Not at all

3. Have you been in firm control of your behavior, thoughts, emotions, or feelings?
5 _____ Yes, definitely so
4 _____ Yes, for the most part
3 _____ Generally so
2 _____ Not too well
1 _____ No, and I am somewhat disturbed
0 _____ No, and I am very disturbed

4. Have you felt so sad, discouraged, hopeless, or had so many problems that you wondered if anything was worthwhile?
0 _____ Extremely so—to the point I have just about given up
1 _____ Very much so
2 _____ Quite a bit
3 _____ Some—enough to bother me
4 _____ A little bit
5 _____ Not at all

5. Have you been under or felt you were under any strain, stress, or pressure?
0 _____ Yes—almost more than I could bear
1 _____ Yes—quite a bit of pressure
2 _____ Yes—some, more than usual
3 _____ Yes—some, but about usual
4 _____ Yes—a little
5 _____ Not at all

6. How happy, satisfied, or pleased have you been with your personal life?
5 _____ Extremely happy—couldn't have been more satisfied or pleased
4 _____ Very happy
3 _____ Fairly happy
2 _____ Satisfied—pleased
1 _____ Somewhat dissatisfied
0 _____ Very dissatisfied

7. Have you had reason to wonder if you were losing your mind, or losing control over the way you act, talk, think, feel, or of your memory?
 5 _____ Not at all
4 _____ Only a little
3 _____ Some, but not enough to be concerned
2 _____ Some, and I've been a little concerned
1 _____ Some, and I am quite concerned
0 _____ Much, and I'm very concerned

8. Have you been anxious, worried, or upset?
0 _____ Extremely so—to the point of being sick, or almost sick
1 _____ Very much so
2 _____ Quite a bit
3 _____ Some—enough to bother me
4 _____ A little bit
5 _____ Not at all

9. Have you been waking up fresh and rested?
5 _____ Every day
4 _____ Most every day
3 _____ Fairly often
2 _____ Less than half the time
1 _____ Rarely
0 _____ None of the time

10. Have you been bothered by any illness, bodily disorder, pain, or fears about your health?
0 _____ All the time
1 _____ Most of the time
2 _____ A good bit of the time
3 _____ Some of the time
4 _____ A little of the time
5 _____ None of the time

11. Has your daily life been full of things that are interesting to you?
5 _____ All the time
4 _____ Most of the time
3 _____ A good bit of the time
2 _____ Some of the time

1 _____ A little of the time
0 _____ None of the time

12. Have you felt down hearted and blue?
0 _____ All of the time
1 _____ Most of the time
2 _____ A good bit of the time
3 _____ Some of the time
4 _____ A little of the time
5 _____ None of the time

13. Have you been feeling emotionally stable and sure of yourself?
5 _____ All of the time
4 _____ Most of the time
3 _____ A good bit of the time
2 _____ Some of the time
1 _____ A little of the time
0 _____ None of the time

14. Have you felt tired, worn out, used up, or exhausted?
0 _____ All of the time
1 _____ Most of the time
2 _____ A good bit of the time
3 _____ Some of the time
4 _____ A little of the time
5 _____ None of the time

Instructions: Select the number that seems closest to how you have felt generally during the past month.

15. How concerned or worried about your health have you been?
10          8          6          4          2          0
Not Concerned at all                                        Very Concerned

16. How relaxed or tense have you been?
10          8          6          4          2          0
Very Relaxed                                               Very tense

17. How much energy, pep, and vitality have you felt?
0          2          4          6          8          10
No energy at all; listless                          Very energetic; dynamic

18. How depressed or cheerful have you been?
0          2          4          6          8          10
Very depressed                                        Very Cheerful

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## Appendix P: Flourishing Scale

Instructions: Below are 8 statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1–7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by indicating that response for each statement.

| | 1. Strongly Agree | 2. Agree | 3. Slightly Agree | 4. Neither Agree nor Disagree | 5. Slightly disagree | 6. Disagree | 7. Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I lead a purposeful and meaningful life | | | | | | | |
| My social relationships are supportive and rewarding | | | | | | | |
| I am engaged and interested in my daily activities | | | | | | | |
| I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others | | | | | | | |
| I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me | | | | | | | |
| I am a good person and live a good life | | | | | | | |
| I am optimistic about my future | | | | | | | |
| People respect me | | | | | | | |