

**Lancaster Theological Seminary**

**“Pastor Can We Talk.”  
A Retrospective Study of How the Black Church Fails to Support  
Sexually Abused Black Women**

**A Major Project Submitted to the Faculty  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry**

**By**

**Linda Denise Moore**

**Lancaster, Pennsylvania**

**May 2021**

**Pastor Can We Talk**

**© May 2021, Linda Denise Moore**

**Submitted by the author in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for a DMin degree  
and approved by:**

**Marty Kuchma, Project Supervisor**

**Anne T. Thayer, Chair, Doctor of Ministry Committee**

**April 28, 2021**

## **Pastor Can We Talk?**

A Retrospective Study of How the Black Church Fails to Support Sexually Abused Black Women.

### **ABSTRACT**

This major project seeks to address the issues of sexual abuse within the Black Church and to offer pastors and lay leaders' guidance to assist congregations in breaking the cycle of sexual abuse and silence. In the confounds of the Black Church and the greater African American community, issues of sexual misconduct, sexual abuse, or sexual behaviors have been neglected. To that end, this study aims to provide guidance and validation that the Black Church has a long history in supporting one another; however, sexual abuse and the treatment of Black Women were not given the adequate support. For far too long those issues have been secretly housed within the walls of our families, our civic organizations, and our Black Churches leaving victims without a platform of any kind, in which to express anything related to sex. As a result, men and especially women and children have undergone the effects of shame of not having an outlet or a safe place to unburden themselves of any form of sexual improprieties. In essence, this study is a compilation of personal experiences coupled with academic evidence that the Black Church needs a specific protocol and platform to combat the issues of sexual abuse.

## **Dedication**

### ***In memory of***

***Endia M. Moore (1932 – 2004) and Ethel L. Moore (1952 - 2006)***

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother the late Endia M. Moore and my sister, the late Ethel Moore. My mother and sister were unable to tell their stories. Now I have the opportunity to tell their stories. Without knowing their stories, this major project would not have been possible. My voice is for the voiceless and for all the voiceless Black Women who never had the opportunity to tell their story.

I would like to thank all of my professors, who throughout my educational career have paved the way to prepare me for this moment in life. From the very beginning: “Listening as an act of Love, and to the very end “Preparing for my Major Project”: I would not have been able to complete this assignment and achieve this learning without the help and support of these individuals that was placed in my life, “For Such a Time as This.”

I would like to thank all my mentors, Reverend Doctor Bernice Baxter, who came into my life in the midst of me losing my mother. Reverend Melody DuBouse and a dear sister in Christ Petra Hicks who pushed me from the beginning to the end of this major project. All these powerful women of God were praying for me.

I would like to give a special thanks to my writing coach, Dr. Brian McDonald, that despite his father passing, he was right there at my side to the very end. Thank you, Doctor Brian McDonald, for not giving up on me.

As for me as I continue this journey:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me  
Because the Lord has anointed me  
To bring good news to the poor,  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted  
To proclaim liberty to the captives,  
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

**Isaiah 61:1**

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>iv.</b>
<b>Chapter One Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Research Topic.....	1
Significance.....	3
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>I. Historical Context of the Black Church .....</b>	<b>13</b>
The Invisible Institution: The Black Church and Slavery .....	13
The Black Church .....	17
The Civil Rights Movement of the Black Church .....	27
The Role of the Black Pastor in the Black Church .....	32
<b>II. Historical Context of the Black Women in the Black Church.....</b>	<b>37</b>
The Product of the Invisible Black Women.....	37
The Product of the Invisible Black Woman: Toni Morrison’s Perspective.....	40
Role of Black Women in the Black Church.....	42
Black Women and Sexuality.....	49
Stereotype of the Black Women .....	51
Sexual Abuse and the Black Church.....	55
Strong Black Women.....	68
<b>III. How Womanist Theology Challenges the Role of the Black Pastor and the Black Women in the Black Church.....</b>	<b>70</b>
Womanist Theology.....	70
Womanist Theology Perspective and Black Liberation.....	84
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology .....</b>	<b>87</b>
Survey Questions for the African American Women .....	90
Survey Questions for the African American Pastors .....	91
<b>Quantitative Findings .....</b>	<b>92</b>
Pastors Data and Methodology .....	97
<b>Chapter Four: Analysis .....</b>	<b>100</b>
Limitations .....	101
<b>Chapter Five: Summary.....</b>	<b>105</b>
Implications of future recommendations .....	105
Significance of the Project.....	107
Missing Gaps .....	108
Conclusions.....	112
The story of the Samaritan Woman .....	113
The story of the Bent-Over Woman.....	114
<b>Epilogue .....</b>	<b>117</b>
Ar’n’t I A Woman.....	117
It’s Not Your Fault At All Speech .....	117
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>141</b>
Table 1: Summary of Quantitative Data from African American Women Survey .....	141
Table 2: Summary of Quantitative Data from African American Women Survey .....	141
Table 3: Summary of Quantitative Data from African American Women Survey .....	141

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

I thought the African American baby girl with brown eyes and a beauty mark on her face was living in a safe environment.

I was laying in my bed at sixteen years old, watching television, and eating popcorn just freshly popped from the stove. My grandmother's boyfriend, tall in stature, entered my bedroom and threw money on my bed. He made me an offer as if I was a prostitute. He started coming towards me and tried to take off my clothes. I remember picking up one of my brother's trophies and tried hitting him in the head. I ran outside, half-naked, into the arms of my neighbor, whom I looked up to as a father figure. I told him what happened, and that was the beginning of my story.

My mother, short in stature, and a loud voice, did not understand what was happening to me. I told my mother and my grandmother what happened. My grandmother had the audacity to say to me "you seduced him." I did not know what the word seduced meant. I called my sister and questioned her, "what does seduction mean?" She asked why? "Grandma stated that I seduced her boyfriend and he sexually abused me."

I grew up with these three powerful Black Women in my life, thinking they were supposed to protect me. They have all now passed away and in spite of this trauma, they have imparted great knowledge. Though I might have been considered a mere statistic, that does not make me who I am today. I am more than that.

My family history played a significant role in my life as it affects my identity today. I grew up in a dysfunctional household where alcohol dependency killed my mother, who was abused

herself, and whom I love dearly. She raised me to the best of her ability. Despite many challenges, growing up in low-income housing (New York Housing Authority), I can say today, I overcame many obstacles. Most of my life I lived behind a mask because I did not want to reveal the secret of being sexually abused, so I remained silent, like most Black Women. I would lose my identity in relationships, allowing the other person to have power over me. But that does not identify who I am. However, acknowledging the difficulties changed my path. Throughout this journey, I needed the spiritual guidance of my church; I needed the support of my pastor and my extended church family; however, that was missing. Thus, this is the crux of my argument: the Black Church needs to be more responsive and receptive to the needs of Black Women who have faced sexual abuse.

Are pastors of Black Churches providing the support needed by Black Women with regard to sexual abuse?

It is generally outside the cultural norms of the African American community to discuss sexual abuse or sexual misconduct of any kind. For far too long, talking about those issues has been taboo in our families, our civic organizations, and our Black Churches, leaving victims without a forum in which to constructively deal with related trauma, fear, or other consequences. As a result, men and especially women and children, have borne the effects of sexual victimization without having a safe place to unburden themselves and receive support. This major project seeks to offer pastors and lay leaders in the Black Church guidance to assist congregants in breaking the historic patterns of silence related to sexual abuse.

### **Significance of the Major Project:**

This research is especially significant for me as it relates to my own personal journey. As a child, I too, suffered sexual abuse at the hand of a family friend. As an adult, I have learned that my mother's silence in that moment was a result of having been abused herself. It crippled her, and it caused her not to be able to help me because she too was sexually abused as a child. Also, my older sister was a victim of sexual abuse that likely contributed to her use of drugs throughout most of her life. It was not until recent years that I discovered that the abuse I experienced was not my fault.

Throughout the years, I have been aware of other family members and close friends who were impacted by sexual abuse, and I am convinced that their voices need to be heard. Historically, victims struggle to find opportunities to tell their stories so they often choose to suffer in silence. As a result, people who have been sexually abused can feel like they have no voice in the Black Church. Instead, sexual abuse is a serious matter that the Black Church often acts to cover up, seemingly hoping it will one day disappear. As much as the Black community looks to the Black Church to counsel and support victims, the Black Church seems to avoid the moral issues of sexual abuse. Black Church leaders typically encourage the victims to keep silent or resolve the issues within their families, which are often unprepared and unwilling to delve into the matter. Church leaders often use prayer as a cure for any violation in the Black Church, and because sexual abuse is an immoral act, it tends to be otherwise denied- keeping the voiceless victims in a zone that offers no help or guidance.

A qualitative study of 13 focus groups sheds new light on the particular roles played by ministers in providing for members of their community. The researchers (Jacqueline S. Mattis



and N’jeri Mitchell, MA 2007) *Uses of Ministerial Support by African Americans: A Focus Group Study*) note that participants of their group study emphasize that experiences such as substance abuse and domestic violence/spousal abuse are not discussed with ministers. In addition, discussions of sexual issues with ministers, such as sexual violence, incest, and rape are considered “off limits”. For example:

Sexual Violence. Participants expressed reluctance to take issues of sexual violence (e.g. rape and incest) to their ministers. One group member, Adina (YW Group 3), indicating her reluctance to approach male ministers about sexual violence, stated: “I wouldn’t take...some of the women’s issues today. I don’t take those to ministers because historically down through the times the churches, they don’t even deal with that. And that’s why you have to be careful because sometimes what happens to you in the world, whether it’s rape or incest or even marital problems, you can tend to get victimized by going to men who have taken the same stand in the world, and they forgot to drop it when they became Christians.”<sup>1</sup>

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, in *The Black Church in the African American Experience* report on a ten-year study in which more than 1,800 Black clergy were interviewed<sup>2</sup>. While examining both the internal and external workings of the Black Church, the authors bring together the disciplines of spirituality, sociology, economics, and education, on behalf of Black Women in the Black Church. To support this major project, each discipline is unique in its special way. In fact, with the collection of field data through this study, will assist me in the methodology section of this paper. Based on Lincoln and Mamiya’s research in this field, their contributions have allowed others to see the significance of how the Black Church has served as the foundation for what people know as the African American journey which traces a long

---

<sup>1</sup>Mathis, Jacqueline S. N’jeri Mitchell. 2007. *Uses of Ministerial Support by Africans: A Focus Group Study*. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* Vo. 772: p. 254

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln Eric C. and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. (Durham: 1999), 1.

legacy that includes slavery, Jim Crow, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement and the development of Womanist Theology.

It is my intention to build on their work in order to help guide the voiceless and those who have not yet gained the strength to come forward. Much like some of their contemporaries, Lincoln and Mamiya had a shared vision of what the Black Church should look like. Although their focus is predicated on the Black Church, Black preachers and Womanist Theology, the Black Church should be a healthy and caring church supporting Black Women. In other words, the Black Church should be a healthy and caring church supporting Black Women who are hurting from any form of abuse. Along the same lines, supporting Black Women in leadership roles is another avenue that is often left behind by the Black Church clergy. For example, the concept of a caring church should enhance a pastoral care ministry or counseling sessions where Black Women can be equipped with new life skills.

Suppression of Black voices generally is a long-established pattern in American history. For instance, there are Black scholars and activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois who have contributed to a body of literature that has spanned such topics as Slavery, Emancipation, Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and ultimately the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. Throughout his text, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois uses his voice to ally with those who were oppressed and who were not granted the justice they deserved. Others have followed in the footsteps of Du Bois and helped to spread his message of equality and social justice. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Rosa Parks, and many other Civil Rights leaders kept up the fight; they kept Du Bois' message alive.

Du Bois became the influential voice of the Black community in the early part of the twentieth century. In contrast to Booker T. Washington, who advocated that Black people be content with working to support white power structures, Du Bois encouraged Black people to claim distinction and excel in their own right. To further his message, Du Bois played a prominent role in founding the Niagara Movement, an organization that was established to advocate for the establishment of equality, the end of discrimination, and the alleviation of poverty based on race. Although the Niagara Movement was short-lived, it was the forerunner for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP): which was founded in 1909 and remains a strong voice within and on behalf of the Black community.

As Du Bois put it, “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery”.<sup>3</sup> In making this aforementioned comment, W.E.B. Du Bois reminded us that former slaves had a moment of promised freedom and justice before they were relegated again to a status akin to slavery. This excerpt is interesting in several ways: The first reference is to physical bondage. Slavery is not just a state of being but a way of life. It has been argued that despite the presidential order in the Emancipation Proclamation and the broken promise of Reconstruction, slaves were still never free. Michelle Alexander, in her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, reminds us that although the name may have changed, laws were immediately put in place to perpetuate slavery:

These new rules have been justified by new rhetoric, new language, and a new social consensus, while producing many of the same results. This dynamic, which legal scholar Reva Siegel has dubbed “preservation through transformation,” is the process through which white privilege is maintained, though the rules and rhetoric change. This process, though difficult to recognize at any given moment, is easier to see in retrospect. Since

---

<sup>3</sup> Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 20.

the nation's founding, African Americans repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow which appear to die, but then are reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time.<sup>4</sup>

Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* argued that Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites.<sup>5</sup> Du Bois described how the collapse of the Reconstruction era and the failed promise to make it to the Promised Land was a set back and in reality, slaves were still never free. Du Bois states:

Years have passed away since then, - ten, twenty, forty; forty years of national life, forty years of renewal and development, and yet the swarthy spectre sits in its accustomed seat at the Nation's feast. In vain do we cry to this our vastest social problem: The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land. Whatever of good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people,-a disappointment all the more bitter because the unattained ideal was unbounded save by the simple ignorance of a lowly people.<sup>6</sup>

This phenomenon of being promised freedom only to have it revoked applies in a special way to Black Women who have continuously been forced to settle for less in every aspect of life because of being deemed second-class citizens. When opportunities arise for the Black Women, there are always obstacles that are sometimes not worth the fight. As a result, it is often the case that Black Women become a protector of others who may be impacted by her progress. Black Women choose to take care of others before taking care of themselves.

For further clarification, Black Women who are sexually abused may settle for who they are instead of living into who they can become. They settle because they compromise their self-

---

<sup>4</sup>Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1903), 4

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

worth for accepting what happened to them because society states they “asked for it.” Terms like victim mentality, self-blame, low self-esteem, shame, guilt, complacency, negotiation, and acceptance, are applied to Black Women, so they settle.

Thirdly, this quote can also apply to sexual abuse as well. Many people experience sexual abuse as children or adolescents. The act and experience of being sexually abused has been described as involving loss of innocence, loss of childhood, loss of privacy and self-integrity. All are also consequences of being oppressed in general. As a result, in the midst of such loss, victims can become developmentally and psychologically stuck in ways that have implications for other aspects of their lives. In turn, traumatic experiences can lead to behaviors that may be unhealthy in their lives.

In the same way, Carolyn Holderread Heggen, in her book, *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches* identifies three (3) coping defense mechanisms. Heggen points out that these defenses keep victims unaware of the true depth of their woundedness. First, denial – denial prevents victims from telling anyone about their abuse; as adults, denial prevents them from facing their victimization and resultant pain, so they remain silent. Second, Repression – For example, living in a world of fantasy that they came from wonderful homes and had perfect childhoods. When she hears of sexual abuse in others, the victims using repression can say sincerely, although falsely, “Thank God, it never happened to me!”<sup>7</sup> For instance, according to Sigmond Freud, denial and repression are two different defense mechanisms. On the one hand denial is to refuse to admit the truth about something and on the other hand, repression refers to

---

<sup>7</sup> Heggen, Carolyn Holderread, *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1993), 29.

the act of restraining something. Despite these observations, Freud suggests that these kinds of behaviors can be seen in drug addicts and women who have been sexually abused. Third, Rationalization – involves a reinterpretation of behavior to make sexual abuse more acceptable. In other words, making excuses or convincing explanations of why someone abused them. For example, “He only abused me when he was drunk or under a lot of stress. He never did those things to me unless there was a good reason.”<sup>8</sup>

In my view, the act of sexual abuse triggers a mental and emotional bondage that isn’t so easy to escape. Freedom from bondage can come in the form of therapy, acceptance, forgiveness and most importantly, acknowledgement of it occurring. In light of that, the bondage remains when there is comfort in being a victim or a complacency that doesn’t allow one to grow up beyond their trauma; they become stuck at the age of occurrence. While they age and their bodies mature, too often their mental and emotional health hasn’t grown beyond their age of violation.

Long before the “Me Too Movement,” Black Women were being raped at a disproportionate rate more than white women. African American girls and women 12 years old and older are more likely to experience higher rates of rape and sexual assault than white, Asian, Latino girls and women. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010). Research has also shown that between the years 2005-2010 the rate for Black Women being raped was 2.8 per 1000 females versus 2.2 per 1000 females for white women. In addition, females who were age 34 or younger, who lived in lower

---

<sup>8</sup> Heggen, Carolyn Holderread, *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1993), 29.

income households, and who lived in rural areas experienced some of the highest rates of sexual violence (National Crime Victimization Survey NCVA 2010).<sup>9</sup>

Chelsea Hale and Meghan Matt *The Intersection of Race and Rape viewed through the Prism of a Modern-Day Emmett* emphasizes in their article that in the era of chattel slavery, being a victim of rape, conflated what it meant to be Black Women. The critical point that is made for Black Women, being a victim of rape, is fundamentally a racial stigma. This is not to say that white women who are victims of rape is not absent, it is definitely present. However, Chelsea Hale and Meghan Matt describes it this way:

The practice of exploiting and violating the bodies of African American women with impunity is an ancient one. During America's chattel slavery system, white slave owners freely and legally raped the women whom they enslaved, often in front of their families. They used rape to assert their power and authority over their property without accountability. In addition, the offspring of enslaved women were then also considered their master's property, giving these men more economic power and further stripping African American women of the rights to their own bodies and babies. In the era of Jim Crow, white men used rape and rumors of rape not only to justify violence against African American men but also to remind African American women that their bodies were not their own. In other words, white men in position of power over African American women, such as police officers and employers, used sexual assault and rape to dominate them.<sup>10</sup>

Black Women's experience is inextricably bound with the struggle of Black people for liberation from race, gender and class oppression in the United States. As Kimberle Crenshaw puts it by using the term intersectionality: the systematic oppression Black Women experience based upon race and gender, and class, Black Women remain vulnerable to sexual violence.

---

<sup>9</sup> [www.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov)

<sup>10</sup> Hale Chelsea & Meghan Matt, *The Intersection of Rape and Rape Viewed through the Prism of a Modern-Day Emmett Till*. [www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees.- 1-2](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees.-1-2)

Kimberle Williams Crenshaw's *Mapping Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women* asserts that the battering and rape of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourse of either feminism or antiracism. As a result of their intersectionality, identity as both women and people of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, the interests and experiences of women of color are frequently marginalized. For instance, intersectionality will center on two important issues of identifying women of color: First part, structural intersectionality: the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, counselors who provide rape crisis services to women of color report that a significant proportion of the resources allocated to them must be spent handling problems other than rape itself. Again, meeting these needs often places these counselors at odds with their funding agencies, which allocate funds according to standards of need that are largely white and middle-class women. Ultimately, these uniform standards of support ignore the fact that different priorities in terms of resource allocation, and accordingly, these standards hinder the ability of counselors to address the needs of nonwhite and poor women of color<sup>12</sup>

The second part: political intersectionality where she observe .....how both feminist and antiracist politics have functioned in tandem to marginalize the issue of violence against women

---

<sup>11</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberle' Williams. "*Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color*" [www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Mapping-tje-margins](http://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Mapping-tje-margins) DOI: 10.2307/1229309 Corpus ID:24661098, p. 11

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



of color. In both parts Crenshaw argues that the effect of both of these marginalizations is that women of color have no ready means to link their experiences with those of other women. Therefore, this sense of isolation compounds efforts to politicize gender violence within communities of color, and permits the deadly *silence* surrounding these issues to continue.<sup>13</sup>

To put it another way, Kimberle' Crenshaw's *The Urgency of Intersectionality*: WomanTalk (2016) provides an important concept of the word "Intersectionality." Crenshaw addresses an important question. She asks: "What do you call Black Women who are impacted by multiple forces such as homophobia, racism, classism, sexism, ableness, transphobia, and heterosexism who are left to defend themselves?" Such a question must be the root of her analysis on race and gender. Crenshaw's discussion as it relates to race and gender argues "The awareness of police violence that Black Women experience is exceeding low." Why don't we know their stories? She argues "when facts do not fit with the available frames, people have a difficult time incorporating new facts into their way of thinking about the problem. One may ask, why does a frame matter? Crenshaw emphasizes that the "Names of Black Women have slipped through our consciousness because there are no frames for us to see them, no frames for us to remember them, and no frames for us to hold them. Policy makers do not think about them, politicians are not encouraged or demanded that they speak with them, and reporters do not leave with them. But it does not have to be this way."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Kimberle Crenshaw "The Urgency of Intersectionality" YouTube Video, TedWoman 2016, 18:40, [www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency](http://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, the *Urgency of Intersectionality* analyzes the reality of Black Women being killed and as a result, no one knows their names. Similarly, Black Women who are being sexually abused, no one knows their name. Consequently, because they are Black and female, they are dealing with two roads: the harm on the race road and the harm on the gender road, but not where the roads intersect. Crenshaw argues that the traffic on the roads are where the policies and practices that ran through those roads meet.

As a result, Black Women are treated differently than white women and Black men. Which brings me to the Black Church. When Black Women have slipped through our consciousness from being sexually abused, molested or raped, there is no frame for us to see them. There are no frames for us to remember them, no frames for us to hold them. The church polity does not think about them; pastors are not encouraged or demanded to speak with them, and reporters do not leave with them. This is a framing problem. There is a framing problem within the Black Church. The frame of social justice. Nonetheless, intersectionality is part of a larger conversation that must be addressed. The bias is against Black Women and women of color. Where do we stand as a nation in this moment?

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **The Invisible Institution: The Black Church and Slavery**

According to Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, in their book, *Black Church History*, Pinn advocated that those enslaved Africans who sought to shape the Christian faith in ways that responded to their existential condition and spiritual needs developed what is known as the

*invisible institution*.<sup>15</sup> Pinn points out that the historical roots of the Black Church were not made from bricks. Further, Black Churches for “colored people” were established in the back alley, behind the woods, where slaves would sing and pray within spiritual spaces where slaveholders would not allow them to express freedom.

Historically, during the history of slavery, the Black church was defined as an *invisible institution* in the slave community: a community of slaves that developed a religious life of their own. Although the slaves were living in a white man’s world, having their legal rights denied, the *invisible institution* is where slaves fellowship together in this hidden place for the purpose of finding God. Pinn goes on to say by slaves using their own cultural memory of African practices; European notions of the Christian faith and reflections on the hardships of their enslavement in North America, Africans had the opportunity to produce their own unique form of Christian expression. As a result, this new version of Christian faith spoke to spiritual and physical freedom and opposed all faiths that denied the interconnectedness of these two freedoms.<sup>16</sup>

In short of these two freedoms the spiritual and the physical, the birth of the *invisible institution* came into existence. Slaves were more focused on freedom versus religion. Religion held them in bondage with their masters, justifying slavery by using scripture to keep slaves in bondage. Consequently, the interpretation of scripture has been the main problem in the Black Church. To put it bluntly, men use scripture as a way of keeping Black Women in oppressive roles. Vashti McKenzie *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Development for African American*

---

<sup>15</sup> Pinn H. Anne and Anthony B. Pinn. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

*Women in Ministry* asserts that Ministers have used the Bible to justify subordinate roles of women within the institution.<sup>17</sup> Using the example of the women, Apostle Paul says:

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (First Corinthians 14:33b-36b)

In my view, the Apostle Paul gave instructions to the Corinthian Church that included a demand for women to keep silent. Despite the fact that these instructions were given to a specific group of people to address a specific group of problems, at a specific time in culture, they have been historically used in the Black Church to silence and suppress the voices of Black Women. For years Black Women in the Black Church were not allowed to preach or serve in any significant leadership role. They were, however, permitted to sing, dance, teach, clean and monitor the behavior of children. Along the same line, Lincoln and Mamiya assert that the pulpit has been viewed as “men’s space” and the pew as “women’s place.”<sup>18</sup> Ironically, despite being objectified, Black Women have been the backbone and the sustaining power of the Black Church.

In short, scripture needs to be revisited to determine what the scripture is saying in that place and time. Even more important, the reason why scripture should be read, if the Black Church can be a place of such reading and voicing, then there is hope that the Black Church can be a place of hope and the Black Church can be prepared to take action against such patterns of

---

<sup>17</sup> McKenzie, Vashti M. *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry-Revised and Updated*. (Cleveland Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2011), 58.

<sup>18</sup> Lincoln Eric C. and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 274.

sexism and racism. However, it was in the Black Church that encouraged slaves to reject any teachings that attempted to reconcile slavery with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pinn goes on to say that enslaved Africans recognized the contradiction between word and deed, and those who still embraced the Christian tradition moved beyond falsehoods and hypocrisy. Despite these observations, Pinn suggests that they made the Gospel of Christ a liberating religious experience by dropping the message of docility and instead understanding the Christian life as a free existence.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the Black Church was founded on freedom, freedom for all.

Along the same lines, Lincoln and Mamiya argue that “the assumption that Black Churches constituted the central institution sector in Black communities is common in the American understanding of the Black subculture. As a result, reliable investigators have consistently underscored the fact that Black Churches were one of the few stable and coherent institutions to emerge from slavery. Nevertheless, slaves not only worshiped with their masters or under the conditions of their masters’ control, but they also held their own secret, independent worship services in the backwoods and bayous of plantations, and sometimes in their own slave quarters: a phenomenon which Frazier called the “invisible institution.” Adding to Lincoln’s argument, I would point out that among quasi-free Blacks, mutual aid societies and churches were among the first institutions created by Black people. Consider for example, the Free African Society, a mutual aid society founded by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in 1787, gave birth to Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in 1794. Along the same lines, during the

---

<sup>19</sup> Pinn H. Anne and Anthony B. Pinn. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 12.

antebellum period of Reconstruction the pattern for their central and dominant institutional role was set when churches became the centers of the numerous Black communities in the South that were formed as former slaves were separated from the plantation base to which they previously belonged. Even more important, Du Bois has called the building of these Black Churches the “first form of economic cooperation” among Black people. Even in northern urban Black communities the early historic Black churches like Mother Bethel in Philadelphia, Mother Zion and Abyssinian Baptist in New York City, and First African in Boston also became the central institutions of those communities.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Black Church**

The “Black Church” is defined as those independent, historic, and totally Black controlled denominations, which were founded after the Free African Society of 1787 and which constituted the core of Black Christians.<sup>21</sup> In 1936, the Black Church merged with the independent Black Churches after the Civil War. The portrait of the Black Church as it exists today is a combination of historic Black denominations and independent ones. Across the nation and abroad one can find denominational groups such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z) Church, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church, and many more who are in the Black communities. On the other hand, there are countless numbers of large and small Black Churches who identify themselves as independent or non-denominational. This group of Black

---

<sup>20</sup> Lincoln C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Churches are autonomous in the establishment of rules and regulations that govern their local body, have no “parent body” to answer to, coming from a Baptist perspective.

By extension, historically Black Churches have been the most important and dominant institutional phenomenon in African American communities. To take a case in point, Lincoln and Mamiya asserts that the proscriptions of 250 years of slavery, followed by another hundred years of Jim Crow segregation, permitted only the religious enterprise among Black people to become a stable, cohesive and independent institution. Consequently, Black Churches have carried burdens and performed roles and functions beyond their boundaries of spiritual nurture in politics, economics, education, music, and culture.<sup>22</sup>

Even though this compelling historical and cultural significance is relevant to the history of the Black church on the one hand. On the other hand, the sociology of Black Churches remains an underdeveloped area of scholarship and investigation. As a result, since the Black Church is plagued by a lack of reliable statistical data on surveys and finances<sup>23</sup>, this study of the Black Church is a significant part of this major project.

Furthermore, in order to better understand the history of the Black Church and its relationship with Black Women, it is important to understand where history begins and where history ends. Some believe it is in this disconnection that separates the Black Church from our Black communities. If one knows that the struggle did not just begin in the 1950s and 1960s, but had roots stretching back to the days of slavery, it would make a difference in our beliefs on how one

---

<sup>22</sup>Lincoln C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 92.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 93.

eternalizes information. Frederick L. Ware, Associate Professor of Theology at Howard University School of Divinity, in his book, *African American Theology*, asserts why history and historical studies are important in theology for three reasons. First, historical study shows the origin of beliefs and practices and their development over time. It is most advantageous because it enables one to see roughly when a belief or practice began, how that belief or practice has changed over a given period of time, and how that belief or practice compares or contrasts with other beliefs and practices from different periods. Second, history and historical study is important in the role of tradition, because it is passed on from one generation to the next. Third, history is important because it functions as a grand narrative<sup>24</sup>. To put it succinctly, how do stories impact the life of Black Women that have been sexually abused?

Equally, history is necessary as it examines all the data and facts to establish a grand narrative of the Black Church. The grand narrative makes the reader aware of all what happened and the many things that are connected with this grand narrative. Although this paper is written primarily about the Black Church and about the Black Women, it is important that the reader learn how the slavery of Black Women made an impact on how they are identified in society today.

Lincoln and Mamiya both emphasized that the Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the Black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low-income housing, but it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic

---

<sup>24</sup> Ware, Frederick L. *African American Theology: An Introduction* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 22.



development.<sup>25</sup> Both Lincoln and Mamiya argued that the Black Church was born fighting for social justice, political and economic issues, and it was the Black Church that provided an environment free of oppression and racism for African Americans. Nevertheless, the Black Church is where Black people felt secure of who they were.

Having just argued that the historical roots of the Black Church were not made out of bricks and Black Churches for colored people were established in the back alley, in the woods, where slaves would sing and pray within their spiritual spaces; slaveholders would not allow them to express freedom otherwise. However, now I want to complicate the point by emphasizing, Pinn argues, to accommodate its increasingly international makeup, the infrastructure became more layered, the hierarchy became more complex, and its opinions more theologically diverse. The Black Church went through periods of relative silence on social issues, but, in other periods, it was a major force for civil rights.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the Black Church changed into buildings built by brick and as a result, the Black Church remained potentially the most powerful organization in Black communities. As discussed above, this is when Black Churches like Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia was established.

While on this journey, observing the structure of how each brick was laid, and how each brick one by one represented the Black Church, with care, faith, and, knowing that this structure will be worthy enough to be called the “House of God.” The importance of assuring that God had a home in a Black community is a direct reflection of the souls of the Black Church. The purpose

---

<sup>25</sup>Lincoln C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>26</sup>Pinn, Anne H. and Anthony B. Pinn *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 15.

of building such a structure is to offer a place to worship, a house of refuge, and to indoctrinate the moral values of the Black community. The structure should be designed to discourage sin but offer redemption. Has the Black Church forgotten its true purpose?

In line with my argument above, I agree with Lincoln and Mamiya (1999) that the Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the Black community up to a certain point; I cannot accept their overall conclusion that by building new institutions in the Black community made such a great impact for Black people. In contrast, the Black Church has failed by overlooking the deeper problem within their institutions. It is sometimes within these same institutions that Black Women are sexually abused. Sexual abuse takes place in the school, home, work place, and even in the Black Church. While Black Women are continuously being sexually abused in these places, it is never reported nor is it considered a crime because of the pain and shame that is attached to these allegations.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson's *Places of Redemption* provides an important start for considering the role of an observer. Fulkerson observes the United Methodist Church Good Samaritan through the lens of ethnography and practical theology. She advocates that there is an emerging articulation of a wound as well as an incipient impulse for change. Fulkerson suggests that by selecting particular elements to take most seriously, my account of the subject matter for theological reflection already frames the issue woundedness must be traced out.<sup>27</sup> In other words, she recognizes that this woundedness creates an identity problem in the church, and the church is at stake because of the term "obliviousness". Not only does she observe this

---

<sup>27</sup> Fulkerson, Mary McClintock. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

identity problem in the church, Fulkerson recognizes that she too has a form of obliviousness, being a white woman, in a multicultural church, she would have never imagined. Fulkerson goes on to elaborate:

The generative would might be defined in terms of those whose bodies are marked as the “different” and the “Other” in my account-all who suffer the wounds of racism and able-ism in the US. The harm that needs tracing, however, includes but goes beyond even these injustices. That harm also concerns a level of contemporary social obliviousness that not only disregards the marginalizing forces of racism and able-ism, but represses complicity in the/my production of difference. It is an obliviousness symbolized by my first visit’s discomfort.<sup>28</sup>

And what is obliviousness one may ask?

Obliviousness is a form of not-seeing that is not primarily intentional but reflexive. Fulkerson goes on to say that obliviousness is founded in the power of the visceral, the pulse of attraction and aversion that characterizes all human interactions, says political theorist Iris Young. It is this visceral register where fear, anxiety, and disgust occur, those responses that all too often characterize human reactions to those who are different. This level of consciousness fertilizes the more intentional, overt forms of oppression and does so by nurturing apprehensions that fund various ways of dispensing with the other.<sup>29</sup>

What can be said about obliviousness? Does one not see racism and able-ness in the *Place of Redemption*, or are they simply ignored in the community? Fulkerson uses the term “*situation*” situation that matters. The challenge is to present the Good Samaritan Church with a contemporary situation that must be redressed. It must be redressed through the lens of transformation – transformation that can only take place through awareness. Awareness that oppression of racism still exists in the church. The primary task is concerned with several questions. Is your church a place where the disable and the ‘Other’ are accepted? Is it the fear,

---

<sup>28</sup><sup>28</sup>Fulkerson, Mary McClintock. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15. Ibid., 15.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 19.

anxiety, and disgust that often complicates people from doing ministry with people who are different?

If the Church is supposed to be a place of redemption, why are the elements of racism, sexism, classism, and able-ness ignored? Are they invisible? Just like the white taxi driver who refuses to pick up a Black man at night because of the color of his skin. And the white police officer who kills an innocent Black man because he feared that the Black man might kill him. And because of white privilege, whites do not recognize that they too have a problem with obliviousness.

To take a case in point, the story of Philando Castile who was shot by a police officer during a traffic stop in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Was Castile invisible or did the police officer have a form of obliviousness? It was simply a card of racism that was dealt in the hand of a white police officer who feared for his life based on not recognizing the “Other” as human. The brokenness of whiteness and that of being marked as bodied and “different” cannot be continued to collapse.<sup>30</sup> Understanding the focal points of theological reflection necessitates a conversation.

What Fulkerson does well to emphasize practical theology is by recognizing that she as a white woman has a problem with obliviousness. In a similar fashion, she paves the way through ethnography by opening the minds of those who are not aware of the term “obliviousness”. Fulkerson describes practical theology in a particular way of attending to the structure of a situation: *it is an inquiry shaped by a logic of transformation*.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Fulkerson, Mary McClintock. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 22.

But above all, if the church must be transformed – transformation must take place by redressing this social problem of obliviousness. How do the church begin to transform? What does it mean to be human? People are not just statistics, not saying statistics do not matter. But people are human beings, people who are disabled, and those who are sexually abused must be redressed. Again, these questions are concerned through engaging in theological reflection by simply having a conversation with others who are different in our churches and in our communities.

Along those same lines, sexual abuse in the Black Church is a woundedness that too must be traced out through theological reflection. As a sexual abuse survivor, my question, is the Black Church a Place of Redemption?

To summarize, Theologian Delores Williams argues that the fallacious merging of the Black Church and African-American denominational churches hides a multitude of sins against Black Women prevalent in the African-American denominational churches on a daily basis. Some of the sins are:

- The sexism that denies Black Women equal opportunity in the church's major leadership roles. Such action opposes God by denying God's call to Black women to preach.<sup>32</sup>

Recognizing this complexity and the painful irony of deep gender contradictions in a church founded for freedom, she continues to argue that the "Black Church "is invisible, but we know it

---

<sup>32</sup> Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 183.

when we see it.” While endeavoring to stand in solidarity with the principle that challenges “Black denominational churches.” As she call them, to live up to the promise of their highest liberationist ideals, I argue that the concept of an “invisible Black church” is too elusive to address the historical meaning and oppositional witness of a separatist Black Christian response to racism in the nineteenth century, its theological reemergence in the twentieth century, and the implications of both for all American churches in the twenty-first century.<sup>33</sup>

Williams argues that the “The Black Church is invisible, but we know it when we see it.”

“The truth, however, the Black Church is invisible, but we know it when we see it.” I will quote Williams at length:

The Black Church is invisible, but we know it when we see it: our daughters and sons rising up from death and addiction recovering and recovered; our mothers in poverty raising their children alone, with God’s help, making a way out of no way and succeeding; Harriet Tubman leading hundreds of slaves into freedom; Isabel, the former African-American Slave, with God’s help, transforming destiny to become Sojourner Truth, affirming the close relation between God and woman: Mary McLeod Bethune’s college starting on a garbage heap with one dollar and fifty cents growing into a multimillion dollar enterprise; Rosa Parks sitting down so Martin Luther King, Jr. could stand up. The Black Church is invisible, but we know it when we see oppressed people rising up in freedom. It is community essence, ideal and real as God works through it on behalf of the survival, liberation and positive, productive equality of life of suffering people.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, the Black Church has no true concrete definition. Through Black Women’s experience, Williams is able to provide her own narrative concerning the Black Church.

Williams argues that the Black Church does not exist as an institution because it is not literally a building made out of bricks. It is not a building controlled by a Black pastor nor white women.

---

<sup>33</sup> Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 182.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

On the other hand, the African American Church is an institution that sits on just about every street corner controlled by Black pastors and the white society. It could be three churches in one block, but there is no unity. The oppress Black Women, the killing of Black and Hispanic males, poverty, and loss of jobs, there is no unity coming from the African American church to assist in this matter.

I do agree with Williams that there is a distinction between the “Visible Church” and the “Invisible Church”. The distinction emphasizes two truths: First, the “Invisible Church” is the church that is led by leaders of the community that God has called who are truly connected to God. Scripture states: (2 Tim. 2:19): “Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his, and, everyone who confesses the name of the Lord, must turn away from wickedness.” (New International Version) Then there is the “visible church” who are not genuine believers, though they may look like they are (Matt 7:15-16; Acts 20:29-30; 1 John 2; 19).

But above all, the Invisible Church’s foundation is grounded in the work of God. God is the head of the Church, and the church is the community of God’s redeemed people. The relationship and the identity of God’s people is not predicated on distinctions of race, class, sex, culture or nationality. Yet, when it comes to the Black Women who is marginalized and underrepresented based on race, sex, and class, this is where the African American Church has failed.

People observe it in the lives of our community: sexual abuse, drug abuse, poverty, and alcohol abuse. Others see it in our school systems when mothers are struggling to keep their children educated. Others see it in our healthcare system when the community is fighting for a

new health care system. Some see it in our street corners, where Black lives should matter, but Blacks are killing Blacks every day. To take a case in point, for the year 2020 there were 499 homicides in the City of Philadelphia, and the majority of the victims were African Americans and Hispanics. By extension, already into the New Year of 2021, as of April 27, 2021, there were over 163 homicides in the City of Philadelphia. Where is the Black Church at this time? Black Lives Matter will not matter until Black people know their role and history.

It has been argued that the Black Church became the most powerful institution in the Black community, because it was a major force for the Civil Rights Movement. There was a strong relationship between the Black Church and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s: a movement that dare not be forgotten.

### **The Civil Rights Movement of the Black Church**

During the 1950s, there were relatively few Black Women in leadership positions; men were prominent in the Civil Rights Movement. It was Black Women like Rosa Parks, Fannie Mae Hamer, and Ida B. Wells and many other names who risked their lives and worked tirelessly to make a difference in the Black community. However, they were not referenced in the history of the Black Church. While the Civil Rights Movement advocated for equality and justice for all, the act of gender equality was far from the agenda. By extension, while the Civil Rights Movement may have been the concept of Black men, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, and Ralph Abernathy, what is not said in the history of the Civil Rights Movement are the voices of Black Women who carried the torch.

In 1955, Rosa Parks illustrated the movement that predicted the Civil Rights Movement. This movement sparked a mass boycott by thousands, who were mainly Black Women. It was Parks'



determination not to give up her seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama. This was not the first time Parks had an altercation with this bus driver. But because she did not give up her seat, it ignited a movement such as the Civil Rights movement. In 1963, although Black Women who joined the March on Washington witnessed a tribute to prominent women, songs by several women, and brief remarks by entertainer Josephine Baker, Black Women were not allowed to speak. Although Martin Luther King appears to be the advocate, Parks worked behind the scene. Just as the Black Church initiates Black Women as volunteers to cook in the kitchen preparing meals, and cleaning up after the rallies, that was all what Black Women stood for.

Furthermore, in her book *At the Dark End of the Street*, Michelle L. McGuire articulates how Black Women were raped during the Civil Rights Movement. Black Women like Fannie Lou Hamer who was raped including her mother and grandmother. Hamer's grandmother gave birth to twenty three children, and twenty of them were products of rape. Hamer's mother and grandmother taught her the painful truth that in the Mississippi Delta, if not the entire South, a "Black Woman's Body Was Never Hers Alone."

In an article *The Vocation of Fannie Lou Hamer, Civil Right Activist*, Beverly E. Mitchell advocates: Nevertheless, this woman, Fannie Lou Hamer, lacking in the conventional traits which often propel women (or men) into the spotlight, became an important grassroots activist in the modern Civil Rights Movement. The late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is often viewed as synonymous with the modern struggle for Black freedom in America. But, as he would readily admit, if he were alive today, the movement would not have achieved the gains it did had it not been for the "foot soldiers" of the movement, such as Fannie Lou Hamer. King was an ordained

Minister of the Gospel, but Hamer was a missionary of the gospel of reconciliation of the races as an outgrowth of her faith in Christ. She bore witness to young and old.<sup>35</sup>

Just as important, such women emerged from the voiceless depths of the Black Church as referenced in the story of Ms. Recy Taylor. It was September 3, 1944, Recy Taylor, a mother and a sharecropper who was abducted after an evening of singing and praying at the Rock Hill Holiness Church in Alabama. Recy Taylor was raped by six men during the Jim Crow era. Her case never went to trial as with many other Black Women during the Jim Crow era. It was Rosa Parks, Recy Taylor's investigator for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who launched a movement that would ultimately change the world. Stories of countless others have allowed this project to take shape and intersect with the Black Church: consequently, allowing the reason for these such cases to be heard and to be helped.

Far too often, the struggle for racism and sexism has been perceived, especially by the Black Church, as a women's issue. Historically, during and following the Civil Rights Movement, the church often failed to recognize the sexism and racism oppression of Black Women's bodies. It was the Black Women that fought for social justice for men, women, and the Black community.

Surprisingly, even in the midst of the violent oppression of Black Women: Black Women found strength to move forward. The Civil Rights Movement, a movement that is inextricably bound to the African American Church, was primarily a movement for Black Women. It was Black Women who were the backbone during this era. For example, according to Janet

---

<sup>35</sup>Mitchell, Beverly E. "The Vocation of Fannie Lou Hamer, Civil Rights Activist." *American Baptist Quarterly*, 23, no. 2 (June 2004): 179-93.

Dewart Bell, Social Activist, Founder of the Derrick Bell Lecture on Race, in her book, *Lighting the Fires of Freedom* communicated this clearly in her introduction. The Civil Rights Movement was one of the most dramatic periods of American history, marked by rapid and profound change. During this short span of time-from the 1950s and the 1970s, African Americans led the fight to free this country from the vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow. She goes on to say: “It was African American women that played significant roles at all levels of the Civil Rights Movement, yet too often they remain invisible to the larger public.” It was women like: Dorothy Height, president of Delta Sigma Theta sorority, Dovie Hudson, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) president in Leake County, Mississippi, others did not have titles or official roles.<sup>36</sup> And others like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the lynching journalist, the gun -toting editor of the Memphis Press who led a crusade against lynching in the 1890s, and Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat to a white person on the bus that sparked the Montgomery bus boycott. In this era, the antebellum and Jim Crow South meant that Black Women’s lives and bodies did not matter; white men abused and raped Black Women at will without punishment.

Bell goes on to express that prior to the Civil Rights Movement, African American women played a significant role in struggling for racial justice. Given the opportunity to interview nine Black Women leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, such as Leah Chase, June Jackson, Aileen Hernandez, Diane Nash, Judy Richardson, Kathleen Cleaver, Gay McDougall, Gloria Richardson, and Myrlie Evers. Unlike Rosa Parks, they too were part of history.

---

<sup>36</sup> Bell, Janet Dewart. *Lighting the Fires of Freedom: African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2018), 1.

It was the Jim Crow laws from 1877-1966 in the U.S. history that enforced racial segregation in the South between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. Furthermore, Jim Crow was the name of a minstrel routine (actually Jump Jim Crow) performed beginning in 1828 by its author, Thomas Dartmouth (“Daddy”) Rice, and by many imitators, including actor Joseph Jefferson. Consequently, the term came to be a derogatory epithet for African Americans and a designation for their segregated life.

(<https://www.britannica.com>)

As a result, the Jim Crow era served as a history where Black Women were placed in an intimate and cultural setting of violence that would require a larger conversation about traditions that normalize violence against them. Along the same lines, it was during this era that Black Women were disrespected: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, in her book *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*: Higginbotham emphasized that the “rhetoric of violence” was not confined to Black men, however. Equally negative representatives of Black Women’s sexuality figured in popular and academic discourses. She goes on to say that indeed, the disjunction between images of white and Black Women was more glaring than that between white and Black men. As a result, Black manhood was represented as male sexuality rampant. Black womanhood and white womanhood were represented with diametrically opposed sexualities. As the typified white woman quoted in a newspaper in 1904:

“Negro women evidence more nearly the popular idea of total depravity than the men do...When a man’s mother , wife and daughters are all immoral women, there is no room in his fallen nature for the aspiration of honor and virtue...I cannot imagine such a creation as a virtuous Black women.”<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 189-190.

Consequently, the artistic imagery of Black Women added compelling realism to such presumptions. Portraits were displayed in art galleries, pictures in books, photographs, and drawings constituted not a mirror of human heterogeneity, but an icon that generalized all Black people. Their effect was to ascribe pathological uniformity onto Black Women as a group, such that every Black Women regardless of her income, occupation, or education became the embodiment of deviance. As a result, the Black Woman came to symbolize, according to Sander Gilman, an “icon for Black sexuality in general.” The issue of rape epitomized the breath of racial divide. From the days of slavery well into the twentieth century, widespread assumptions of the Black Women’s innate promiscuity prevented legal redress in the case of her victimization by rape. Along those same lines, Neil McMillen’s study of Jim Crow Mississippi observes that courts did not convict white men for the rape of Black females beyond the age of puberty.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, Black Women during this era were considered irresponsible, immoral, and unclean and presented as a symbol of weakness. However, during the Civil Rights era (before the 1960s), it continued to serve a history where Black Women did all the work but never received acknowledgement. Nevertheless, it is important to you as the reader to recognize it was during this era that Black Women had their own conventions.

### **The Role of the Black Pastor in the Black Church**

When I was a little girl, I was a permanent fixture by my grandmother’s side. Her favorite pastime was dedicating her time to her predominantly Black Southern Baptist Church. She was a perfect yes-woman where she did everything her pastor requested of her; she idolized him (the

---

<sup>38</sup>Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 190.

Black pastor). She had adoration for him that even to this day I cannot describe. Any time the Black pastor acknowledged her existence, her eyes would light up. Watching how my grandmother reacted and expressed her adoration for this mere man, I was encouraged and inspired by the importance of his position in the Black Church and in the community. Her devotion toward the pastor drove my motivation and dedication to become a leader in the Black Church. I remember expressing this sentiment to my grandmother one day, and she simply laughed without explanation...which brings me to the role of the Black pastor.

At the control level of the Black Baptist churches is the Black pastor. According to Lincoln and Mamiya: *The Black Church in the African Experience*: asserts that great emphasis is placed on being “called” to the ministry, while less significance is attached to formal education and training, although this varies from one locale to another. Those ministers who are responsible for a local church are called pastors, (that is, all pastors are ministers, but not all ministers are pastors)<sup>39</sup>.

Black pastors of Black Baptist Churches, once ordained and called to pastor a particular church, generally are granted considerable autonomy in conducting the affairs of the church. As one observer put it over sixty years ago, “These separate (Black Baptist) churches are a law unto themselves. They vary widely in doctrine and method. In government, they may be absolute monarchs ruled by a strong pastor who, in fact, is responsible to nobody.”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Lincoln C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 42.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 42.

Lincoln goes on to say that in a society dominated by patriarchal values, the Black Church became especially important for Black men who were denied the normative masculine role in every area of social life. From the period of slavery until the civil rights era, adult Black males were usually called “boy” by white southerners and only the Black males were usually given title such as “preacher” or “Rev.” On the contrary, it was the Black Women who were denigrated by always being called by their first names without customary titles. Men and women of talent were called to be preachers and only the most politically astute could reach the levers of power as bishops and presidents of the Black denominations and as pastors of large congregations.

Therefore, the role of the Black pastor in the Black Church was complicated by the long history of the exclusion and denigration of Black males from the normal prerogatives of masculine identity and power in American society, unable to fill their expected economic and political roles. To put it succinctly, only the Black preacher achieved a modicum of recognizable status in a society where all African Americans, whatever their level of attainment, were presumed to be an incurably defective. In the limbo of a caste society, as Albert Raboteau has pointed out, the slave “preacherman” was “relatively mobile and privileged”. Likewise, in the common, Black folk idiom the best preachers, those who were able to stir a crowd with fiery, silver tongued oratory, bring them to an enthusiastic, spirit-filled catharsis, was often known as a “son of thunder.”<sup>41</sup>

Today, some would call these Black preachers “The Good Old Boys Club.” For Black male preachers, preaching is the way to power, which leads to their hierarchy positions in the Black

---

<sup>41</sup> Lincoln Eric C. and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 278.

Church. Although Black Women numbers are increasing in the ordination process; nevertheless, Black Women still struggle to reach this pinnacle of their life in preaching.

In Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson's book, *A Baptist Manual on Polity and Practice*, the pastor's primary role is leading the congregation in public worship, presiding at other meetings of the Black Church, preaching to the faithful from the pulpit, discipline children, visiting homes, baptizing converts, counseling the perplexed and distraught, performing weddings, and conducting funerals. In other words, the pastor's role is to provide care for the members of the congregation. Aside from these responsibilities, the pastor, he or she, must find time for studying God's word. In sum, the authors remind the reader that the present role of the past has yet to be identified.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, James H. Cone, in his book, *For My People, Black Theology and the Black Church*, argues "Although Black male theologians and church leaders have progressive and often revolutionary ideas regarding the equality of Blacks in American society, they do not have similar ideas regarding the equality of Black Women in the Black Church and community. Cone begins with interesting questions to Black men. He asks:

Why is it that many Black men cannot see the analogy between racism and sexism, especially in the view of the fact that so many Black Women in the church and in society have clearly experienced their experience of oppression? What is it that makes Black churchmen insensitive to the pains of women ministers, and why do we laugh when they tell the story of their suffering that we have inflicted on them?<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Maring Norman H. and Winthrop S. Hudson. *A Baptist Manual on Polity and Practice*. Second Revised Edition. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012), 117.

<sup>43</sup> Cone. James H. *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church, Where have we been and Where are we going?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 123.



Although Cone makes the best possible case regarding the issue of equality of Black Women in the Black Church, I am not persuaded that the experience of oppression as it relates to gender, prevented Black pastors of the Black Church from seeing sexual abuse as a problem. My view, however, contrary to what Cone has argued, is that despite the many volumes that have been written, discussed, and suppressed on the subject of sexual abuse, church leadership have not taken a more aggressive stance on the wrongfulness of sexual abuse practices.

While I am not insinuating that the Black Church is not aware of the sexual abuse practices, I am suggesting that they must admit that it is a problem. The first step for me as a Black female pastor is to take the balcony approach. This should be done in small steps to avoid the pain of this adaptive challenge reaching another level. My interpretation can be totally different based on my own personal experience. I believe, as pastors, this is where we need to remain quiet and become an active listener. Where do I fit in this picture, being that I experienced similar pain?

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky in their book, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, argues that taking the balcony approach is more effective. Heifetz emphasizes that well designed interventions provide context; they connect your interpretation to the purpose or task on the table so people can see that your perspective is relevant to their collective efforts.<sup>44</sup> Specifically, the Black Church is the place where the elephant in the room of sexual abuse should be exposed. As with any conflict in the church, meetings should always take place in the discussion of sexual abuse. In the discussion of sexual abuse, the Black Church should recognized that sexual abuse

---

<sup>44</sup> Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 35.

is a sin, and it is a crime. But because of shame and stigma that is attached, Black Women failed to talk about sexual abuse and remain silent.

Too often, Black preaching women are not recognized as preachers. Lincoln and Mamiya go on to express the origins of the religious role models for Black preaching women is uncertain since Christianity was spread among most of the slave population largely by male preachers both Black and white. The historical records reflect very little influence, if any, from white women preachers who were active in the South. However, Black Women were carefully considered to preach based on three qualifications: (1) African strain in their African American heritage which made possible prominent roles in religion for women both in Africa and on American plantations (2) the influence of the Black oral tradition elevated preaching and the ability to speak in public to one of the highest levels of art forms, and (3) the independence and internal strength that Black slave women had to develop in a plantation system that often took their men or their children away.<sup>45</sup>

Historically, the Black Church validates the male position. In my view, Black men seize ownership of the leadership role in the Black Church because they do not receive recognition anywhere else. It is in the Black Church the only environment where the Black males do not have to sacrifice or fight for their leadership role. However, there is an honor of respect in being a leader of a Black Church; it goes beyond the role of the male or female.

My conclusion, then, is that I don't know if my grandmother's laugh was because she was humored, that it was impossible for me to be a woman pastor, or because she can see it coming

---

<sup>45</sup> Lincoln C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 278.

to fruition. However, I remember having a dream at the age of five years old. In the dream, the world around me was falling, buildings were collapsing, and there was nowhere for me to run and hide. Suddenly, a hand appeared from the sky and lifted me up to heaven. I awoke and told my grandmother about the dream: she stated “you were called for a time such as this, and she called me a pastor.”

## **I. Historical Context of Black Women in the Black Church**

### **The Product of an Invisible Black Woman**

Black Women have a long and involved history with the Black Church. According to the 2015 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life, women make up 59% in the Black Church, more than Black men at 41%<sup>46</sup>. Black women have always been part of the Black Church and “going to church” was constant in the lives of the majority of Black women. However, while Black Women have been able to find the institution of the Black Church a place of refuge, of solace and hope, there were times when their Black bodies were bound by the violence of slavery, rape and murder. Black Women are subject to a public scrutiny that affects their ability to be heard or seen as human beings. Consequently, Black Women are rendered invisible or cast as deserving of the mistreatment because of who they are perceived to be, Black and female. In other words, metaphorically, the Black Church did not see Black Women.

Elaine J. Lawless (2001), in her book *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative*. In chapter 4 “Hearing Silence,” Lawless advocates that the voices in this narrative

---

<sup>46</sup> Pew Research Center, “*Religious & Public Life Religious Landscape Study*, ([https://www.Pewforum.org/Religious-Landscape-Study/Gender-Composition/Among/Belief-In-God/2015/11/201.11.03\\_RLS\\_II\\_questionnaire.pdf](https://www.Pewforum.org/Religious-Landscape-Study/Gender-Composition/Among/Belief-In-God/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_questionnaire.pdf)).

remained silent for many years. As a result through ethnographic study, women were able to tell their stories for the first time in different light. The term “Silence” is so important to me in this research because being silent contributes to a silent death. Lawless sheds important light on this issue when she states:

When we listen to the life stories of women who now live in shelters to escape abusive and violent men, we find many persistent and significant patterns. We also find important clues about how critical it is that we actually listen to and hear their stories as they tell them. She goes on to say that some of the most formative experience, I think, are inseparably linked and need to be presented together: early molestation and not being able to speak that violation, speaking the violence and being further abused for the telling, and feeling betrayed by those the girls trust to help them. While the realities of beatings and babies, pain and despair have made their mark upon the minds and bodies of these grown women, the women say they felt invisible, because that was the easiest route “Feeling invisible because that was the easiest route.”<sup>47</sup>

To state differently, feeling invisible because that was the easiest route: not being heard, the absent mother, not being believed, the violation didn’t really happen, and being beaten for the sake of telling a story, one can only feel invisible. So too, if you grew up being sexually violated and told not to speak or tell no one, that’s the feeling of being invisible. Lawless reminds us that silence has become normal for some women. The majority of the women in these stories lacked the support of a loving mother, because most of the mothers were abused themselves. In this regard, it is helpful again to take the balcony approach and put the behavior of these mothers in the proper perspective. Feeling invisible was a coping mechanism, the only route to survival. In other words, when most women tell their stories to regain some self-esteem, only to find more pain and shame from not being believed, is devastating.

---

<sup>47</sup> Lawless, Elaine J. *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 75.

In short, the abused have been an invisible population, especially in the Black Church. Silence was encouraged because it dismissed the immorality of the acts committed against the abused and sometimes celebrated the abusers. Oftentimes, sexual abuse is seen as one of the darkest forms of violation, yet something no one wants to believe or address because it goes against the mere essence of what the Black Church represents and offers to its members and the Black community: service, sanctuary, support and protection. If this isn't extended to all members, then it softens the foundation, allowing those who have been abused and even their abusers, to fall through the cracks.

However, when I think about Black Women whose stories are never told now, having the opportunity to speak for the first time created a safe space. Not only created a safe for them, but I too felt safe in the presence of other Black Women whom I can identify with. What I learned was that being vulnerable and authentic through this research allowed me to know who I am. What I am saying here is that, yes, sometimes feeling invisible was the easiest route and sometimes it is comforting to remain silent because it's easy, but when you cultivate a space for people to feel safe and vulnerable anything is possible (taken from the words of Oge Egbuonu, Director of "(IN) Visible Portraits").

Stories are the main ingredients for healing a congregation in conflict. Stories are important because they pave the way for open conversations. Stories have beginnings and endings. Stories bring transformation. Heifetz (2009) emphasizes that stories are the explanations you tell

yourself and often others to show why things happen the way they do and convey their meaning.<sup>48</sup> But some stories are never told, such as stories of sexual abuse.

### **The Product of an Invisible Black Woman: Toni Morrison's perspective**

As an illustration, Stephanie Crumpton emphasizes the story of Baby Suggs: Toni Morrison *In Beloved*; Baby Suggs provides ways pastoral practitioners can bring invisible women to life where Baby Suggs, holy, calls the community to gather, to come heal from Sethe and everyone else's pain together. Fully aware of the evils of American enslavement, Baby Suggs, holy calls women, men, and children who had been beaten, raped, and assaulted to come worship in secret, out in the woods. There, in a clearing, she invites them to remember the basics of their humanity (joy, desire, sadness, freedom). She commands them to dance, laugh, and weep in spite of their circumstances. Ultimately, when they respond they find themselves safely re-bodied and open to what the Spirit has to say about their humanity through her. She responds with a sermon that clearly names racism and patriarchy while also offering a space to practice embodied spiritual resistance:

Consider listening to these words!

“Let the children come! And they ran from the trees toward her. “Let your mothers hear your laugh, she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling. Then “Let the grown men come,” she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees. “Let your wives and our children see your dance,” she told them, and ground life shuddered under their feet. Finally she called the women to her. “Cry,” she told them. “For the living and the dead. Just cry.” And without covering their eyes the women let loose. It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and

---

<sup>48</sup> Heifetz Ronald, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactic for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA. Harvard Business Press, 2009), 228.

cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs offered up to them her great big heart...<sup>49</sup>

Morrison reminds us that the story of Baby Suggs represents the product of an invisible woman who invites her family and community to a sacred space where they can come together in unity and worship God. They dance, sing, clap their hands and stomp their feet and some even holler. But that is the true role of a Black Woman bringing the Black community together. This was truly an outdoor worship experience like no other.

Morrison used this scene of Baby Suggs, holy convening an outdoor worship experience based on historical accounts of enslaved Africans who secretly withdrew to the woods where they could worship God in ways that were authentic to their spirituality and completely apart from the ways they were forced to worship in Christian churches under the watchful eye of slave-owners.

### **Role of the Black Woman in the Black Church**

The role of Black Women in the Black Church today- both within the wider society and within religion-is normally prescribed by what is deemed to be beneficial to the welfare of the whole community of women and men. Unfortunately, most of the prescribing tends to be carried out by male authorities, and the resulting role of women tends to be circumscribed by an unchanging set of norms enshrined in a culture that appears to be equally unchanging.<sup>50</sup>

To put it another way, the role of Black Women in the Black Church is secondary to men. Although it is true that Black women are being ordained at a greater level than usual, their roles

---

<sup>49</sup> Crumpton, Stephanie M. *A Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 132.

<sup>50</sup> Oduyoye, Mercy Amba and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*. (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 10.

do not change. It is even more obvious that there are more women than men in the church, but men make up most of the leadership positions.

Along the same lines Daphne C. Wiggins, in her book, *Righteous Content: Black Women's Perspectives of Church and Faith*, states in her introduction, "if you enter most African American congregations, you are likely to see male pastors standing before predominantly female audiences. How do we explain the dedication of African American Women to the church, particularly when it seems that men dominate the formal clergy leadership roles? This pattern has been characteristic of the Black Church since the late nineteenth century".<sup>51</sup> Although Black Women are faithful in their congregations, they are still outnumbered by men in the pews. In other words, Wiggins believes that a book centered on the lives of Black Church women is long overdue and provides another ways to bring the voices of Black Women to the forefront, so that they too can be heard.

In the same way, Raphael G. Warnock, in his book *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety & Public Witness*, argues "Born protesting discrimination on racial terms, Black churches have been shamefully slow in applying the theo-ethical principles of their own liberating heritage to the issue of gender within their own ranks. While increasing numbers of Black Women are being ordained for professional ministry in the second decade of the twenty-first century, few Black male pastors see active participation in the work of eradicating sexism and uprooting patriarchal structures in the churches and the society as fundamental to the work of witnessing to God's justice in the world or inextricably linked to the liberationist mission of

---

<sup>51</sup> Wiggins, Daphne C. *Righteous Content: Black Women's Perspective of Church and Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1.



the Black church. Warnock quotes: “If racism is for them a sin, sexism is, at worst, an inconvenience.”<sup>52</sup>

To take a case in point, I am a Black Woman first. In spite of my personal experiences in life, I am still a Black Woman, and that will never change. However, being a Black Woman is often an inconvenience. However, how can a Black man fight for racism through Black liberation in a white church, but not fight for a Black Woman who experiences sexism and racism in a Black Church? It’s okay to be a Black Woman, when it is time to pay tithes, it is okay to be a Black Woman, when it is time to cook in the kitchen, and it is okay to be a Black Woman, when it is time to have a baby, but being a Black Woman is often an inconvenience. Historically, my ancestors, grandmothers, and my mother paved the way for me. But being a Black Woman over the centuries, has been an inconvenience.

Along those same lines, James H. Cone in *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church: Where have we been and where are we going?* succinctly emphasized:

Just as struggles of the 1960s and ‘70s reinforced sexism in the Black community generally, sexism in the church particularly seemed more blatant in those years. Black clergymen became bold advocates of women’s inferiority, emphasizing their supposed lack of intelligence, natural weakness, and passivity. As some white male ministers began to retreat in the face of the emerging power of the women’s movement in the seminary and church, Black clergymen laughed at white men’s inability to keep women in their place.<sup>53</sup>

Cone goes on to say:

A man’s call is never questioned until a lack of faith or talent or moral integrity create skepticism among the community of believers. A man may live the most immoral life imaginable, be “converted,” and still be accepted by the church for service in God’s

---

<sup>52</sup> Warnock, Raphael G. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety & Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 156-157.

<sup>53</sup> Cone, James H. *For My People. Black Theology and the Black Church: Where have we been and where are we going.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 132-133.

ministry. But an immoral woman who “gets” religion and then receives the call would hardly be given a similar opportunity for service in the church.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, Black men can join the church with no credentials and be ordained two to three months later with the support of the Pastor. And while it is true that some African American men do not believe in ordaining women, there are African American women as well who do not believe that women should be ordained.

The audacity to silence the voice of Black Women in the Black Church diminishes the purpose of the church’s mission. Although women are encouraged to be missionaries and evangelists, they were allowed to remain a strong presence at the altar but not at the pulpit because of the hierarchy of the Black preacher.

To put it bluntly, Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, in her book *Family Violence: Reclaiming a Theology of Nonviolence* advocates:

A more subtle form of abuse occurs when women’s voices are removed from the decision-making processes in churches or when churches refuse to ordain women into ministry or to appoint them as supervisors or overseers. Although these issues have been resolved for many mainline Protestant denominations, even today some churches do not allow women to preach.<sup>55</sup>

Albrecht reminds us that not allowing women to preach can be a form of emotional abuse that can impact the lives of women for years. While emotional abuse does not leave any physical scars, its power can be devastating leaving women to remain silent.

Therefore, Black men seize ownership of the leadership role in the Black Church because they do not receive recognition anywhere else. In the Black Church in one of the only environments where Black males do not have to sacrifice or fight for their leadership role.

---

<sup>54</sup>Cone, James H. *For My People. Black Theology and the Black Church: Where have we been and where are we going.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 132-133.

<sup>55</sup> Albrecht, Elizabeth Soto: *Reclaiming A Violence of Nonviolence* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 13.

Nevertheless, there is an honor of respect in being a leader of a Black Church; it goes beyond the role of the male or female. The role of the Black Woman in the Black Church is significant to this major project because for too long, they have not been part of the conversation. However, historically, the Black church validates the male position.

Nevertheless the words of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham quotes in the beginning of her introduction: Higginbotham asserts:

“Much has been written about the importance of the Black Church in the social and political life of Black people. Much less has been written about Black Women’s importance in the life of the church.”<sup>56</sup>

When *Righteous Discontent* was published in 1993 – Higginbotham’s insights on the history of Black Women were represented in many ways. She was favorably reviewed in major publications and won the American Academy of Religion’s Award for Excellence and American Historical Association Prize in Women’s History. Higginbotham sees this book as the driving force behind the study of Black Women in the Black Church between 1880 and 1920, a period that has come to be simultaneously known as the “women’s era.” Both Higginbotham and Wiggins drew on all major stories of Black Women but had different views. On one hand, Higginbotham focused more on the Baptist faith of Black Women, using one denomination. On the other hand, Wiggins took a broader approach through her ethnographic work of interviewing thirty-eight Black Women from different denominational traditions. Wiggins emphasizes that the “*Righteous Content*” examined the religious lives, perspectives and involvement of African

---

<sup>56</sup> Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1.

American women today. She argues that her book is not a replication of Higginbotham study, but rather, that the two texts may be seen as a pair of bookends.<sup>57</sup>

On the contrary, Higginbotham argues that this study attempts to rescue women from invisibility as historical actors in the drama of Black empowerment. Since women have traditionally constituted the majority of every Black denomination, I present the Black Church not as the exclusive product of a male ministry but as the product and process of male and female interaction. In offering a corrective to the near exclusion of women in most studies of the Black church, my book departs from the more recent and positive discussion of exceptional women, the early women preachers.

Research on some preachers, while of great value, does not capture the more representative role of the majority of women church members. If taken alone, such discussion continues to render women's role as marginal. "Left obscured is the interrelation between the rising Black churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the indefatigable efforts to Black Women's organizations. Left unheard are women's voices within the public discourse of racial and gender self-determination".<sup>58</sup>

To put it bluntly, Black Women are the caretakers of the world. They uplift those who need encouragement; they advocate for the voiceless, and they often attempt to take on leadership roles either in society or in the church but, in either circumstance, are not respected or taken seriously. For instance, Shirley Chisholm was the first Black Woman elected to the United States Congress, but she is most noted for being the first Black person to receive a nomination for Presidency. Her campaign was flawless; she had a phenomenal team. Her views and what she stood for were favored by the majority. But, because she was a woman and she was Black,

---

<sup>57</sup> Wiggins, Daphne C. *Righteous Content: Black Women's Perspectives of Church and Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>58</sup> Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2.

she wasn't given a fair chance. She was not only criticized by her white counterparts but harshly judged by Black male leadership. This is an example of the blatant disrespect and disregard of the importance of the Black Women in society. They continue to be martyrs while placing the Black male on a pedestal: exalting, protecting and preserving their place as the head and leader in the Black community where they have been historically degraded and demeaned by the world. As the center of Black community, the Black Church has its own set of doctrines, traditions and practices that hasn't openly accepted the Black Women in leadership roles, mainly in fear of feelings of emasculation submitting to the instruction of the Black Women.

In many congregations, although Black Women aren't allowed to take on leadership roles, they make up a significant proportion of the population and are responsible for the overall operations and livelihood of the Black Church. They plan, advise, fundraise and ensure that services and programs are scheduled and executed. So when the desire or opportunity for Black Women to be leaders in the Black Church is presented, based on their work and contributions, it should be openly accepted and even welcomed. However, the Black Woman is routinely dismissed and even chastised for such a suggestion. The voice of Black Women is silenced so often it continues to join the whispers of the ancestors: unheard, stolen and exploited.

It is important to note that Black Women were not allowed to speak in public concerning any racial or gender issues; they already did enough, so remain silent. However, Higginbotham argues that preaching was not the only talent that Black Women were gifted with. The roles of Black Women in the Black Church speak volumes above their expected silence.

In many instances, Black Women seek refuge in the Black Church and the Black community. "Going to Church" was traditional in the Black family. Black Women are the creators, the

innovators, and even laid the foundation for the existence of the Black Church, but receive no recognition for their contributions to the Black Church. Black Women demonstrated leadership roles in many organizations. Black women are not only qualified to teach they are qualified as leaders to lead many organizations.

### **Black Women and Sexuality**

In her book, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*” Kelly Brown Douglas addresses three key points: (1) to understand why sexuality in general has been a “taboo” subject in the Black Church and community, (2) to advance womanist discourse of Black sexuality, and (3) to promote the kind of theological discourse and analyses that might nurture healthier attitudes and behaviors toward sexuality-related concerns within the Black Church and community, especially concerns about homophobia/heterosexism.<sup>59</sup>

In an effort to demonstrate her commitment in this course of Black sexuality, she begins with a question having a conversation with womanist God-talk. How do we understand the social-historical context that has shaped Black people’s response to sexuality? As explained by Christian ethicist James Nelson:

Sexuality is a sign, a symbol, and a means of our call to communication and communion. This is the most apparent in regard to other human beings, and other body-selves. The mystery of our sexuality is the mystery of our need to reach out to embrace others both physically and spiritually... [Sexuality] is who we *are* as body-selves who experience the emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual need for intimate communion -human and divine.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Sexuality and The Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY Orbis Books, 1999), 6.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

To put it another way, why have Black Churches and the Black theological community in particular been so reluctant to discuss matters of sexuality? But yet, the Europeans were allowed to dehumanize bodies through images that stereotype Black Women.

Throughout much of Black Women's history in the United States, African Americans' identities have been popularly portrayed by negative stereotypes: Mammy, Jezebel, and the Welfare Queen. In other words, there is an identity crisis that affects the consciousness of Black Women. Black sexuality not only effects Black women it effects the Black Church and the community.

However, Douglas goes on to say that Black sexuality, the practice of dehumanizing Black people by maligning their sexuality, has been a decisive factor in the exercise of White patriarchal power in America. The exploitation of Black sexuality in the service of White dominance has had broad implications for the violation of Black bodies and intimacy.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, Douglas continues to argue that this violation has been grounded in numerous sexually charged stereotypes. As a result, these stereotypes have been critical to the achievement of unprincipled racist power. By disguising and mystifying objective reality, they have been indispensable to the maintenance of the social, political, and economic status quo in America. Even more important, they have functioned to make White supremacy appear not only necessary but also "natural, normal and an inevitable part of everyday life." At the same time, these sexuality stereotypes have impacted Black lives in such a way as to render sexuality a virtually taboo topic for the Black Church and community.

---

<sup>61</sup> Douglas, Kelly Brown *Sexuality and the Black Church; a Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 31.

As a result, based on racist power, Black people and especially Black Women have historically been viewed and treated within the context of the majority culture in the United States, numerous negative stereotypes that are demeaning to the Black Church and the community, leaving no room for discussion. For example, the caricatures of “Jezebel, Mammy, and the Welfare Queen and others, Black Women were gender biased. Black Women were victimized by these cultural dispositions. Douglas continues to remind us that they personify the intersection of race and gender- of being Black and a female. Along the same lines, she advocates that the institution of slavery forced Black Women to display their bodies in a manner that was considered contrary to antebellum notions of moral, chaste, and decent women. The essence of Douglas’ argument was that during this era when a “proper” lady was marked not only by her innocence, her attention to home, and the moral upbringing of her children, but also by her manner of dress.<sup>62</sup> In other words, clothing signified one’s moral status as well as class. Essentially, Douglas argues that a “respectable” White woman was thus “adorned” in layers of clothing. Nevertheless, the enslaved Black female was often given barely enough clothing to cover her body. Moreover, the enslaved women’s work in the fields often required her to raise her dress above her knees. One may assume that this is defined as sexuality, which contributes to how African American women are treated today.

### **The Stereotype of Black Women**

---

<sup>62</sup> Douglas, Kelly Brown *Sexuality and the Black Church; a Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 37.



According to Douglas, “Black women were helplessly trapped in the mythology of being Jezebels by the very institution that demanded them to be precisely that.” Consider the Jezebel Image, for example:

### **“The Jezebel Image”**

According to Douglas, the term “Jezebel” has been characterized as: “a Black female, a person governed almost entirely by her libido.” Jezebel was considered promiscuous, a whore, and a scandalous woman. In other words, she believes this term was used to describe Black Women as having an insatiable sexual appetite, being extraordinarily passionate, and being sexually aggressive and cunning (Douglas, 1999). The Black Woman was known for symbolizing evil, scheming, and being seductive. In other words, “Jezebel” was a term used to describe an outward appearance of a Black Woman’s buttock. She goes on to say, “To justify rape, white male rapists justified their defilement of Black females by claiming the woman “asked for it,” as they (the) Jezebels they were the seducers. To make matters worse, white molesters were not held accountable for their misdeeds or responsible for any offspring that may have resulted from their sexual rampages. How interesting to know that this repeated cycle still exists today.

### **“The Mammy Image”**

Mammy was described as an older female, yet sometimes young and attractive. The perfect female slave, obedient and completely loyal to her master’s family thus conformed to the image of being maternal and asexual. She was not as sexually seductive as Jezebel, and her appearance was less good-looking as her outer look was more of a housemaid. As a result of being characterized in this image, the Black women would be constantly victimized by the white men

of the household. Mammy, another misrepresentation that has created havoc for Black Women who were sexually abused, challenged the role of the white women slave owners. Mammy's position in the household sometimes made the white women of the house feel threatened that their white men would take permission to rape, beat and victimize the Mammy figure of the house.

Douglas describes intensely the hopelessness of Black Women who had experienced sexual abuse among Black Women during slavery. Each time a Black Woman looks at herself in the mirror, she is reminded to look at herself through the lens of other slave women, who have been abused over a long period of time. Thus, to watch other Black Women being raped and unable to help for fear of being murdered evokes astonishing powerlessness.

Black women have been exposed to the myths of being called "Jezebel, Mammy, and the Welfare Queen." For the Black Women, all three falsifications were formed out of the institution of slavery, which produced a form of inner oppression. Black Women came to accept and internalize the erroneous myths and stereotypes they had been exposed to. Ultimately, Black Women became a product of their own cultural and ethnic environment.

### **"The Welfare Queen Image"**

The "Welfare Queen" is another moniker for a Jezebel woman. The new Jezebel, the "Welfare Queen" of today, is someone who "represents a woman of low morals and uncontrolled sexuality, factors identified as the cause of the impoverished state." People often describe them as living off the system, often living in a housing complex of low income, with plenty of children and no male figure in the household. During slavery, if Black Women would attempt to refuse the unwanted sexual abuse, it is probable that they would be beaten to death. Nowadays, Black

Women stereotyped as the Jezebel, the Mammy and the Welfare Queen, are victimized by a similar but somewhat different type of abuse.

Furthermore, the institution of slavery is no difference than the institution of the African American Church. Black Women find themselves in the theology of being Black Women by the very institution that demanded them to be precisely that: “The Black Woman” in “The Black Church.” The Black Woman has no true identity, living in a double-conscious world, fighting for racism and sexism. That is, Black Women continue to fight for equality in the Black Church, becoming ordained, other than being called by any other name including Evangelists.

To put it simply, the terms Jezebel, Mammy, and the Welfare Queen speak to Black Women of today, reminding us that much did not change. Consequently, Black Women in the twenty-first century can fall into the trap of believing that sex is all they have to offer, especially those who were sexually abused as a child. Often, women who were sexually abused as children develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When these children become adults, they are unable to make the connection between being sexually abused and the behavior that is impacted by the sexual abuse, such as amnesia, nightmares, and disturbing flashbacks. On one hand, some survivors of child abuse respond in a counterphobic way, becoming hypersexualized, discriminately displaying their bodies, flaunting their sexuality in a compulsive manner and turning sexually promiscuous.<sup>63</sup>

Sexual abuse, furthermore, leads to increased rates of psychiatric disorders that involve a cluster of characteristic symptoms which develop following a psychological distressing event

---

<sup>63</sup> Heggen, Carolyn Holderread. *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*: Forward by Marie M. Fortune (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1993), 40.

that is outside the usual range of human experience. (Heggen 1998). In addition, memories are selective and muted. Concerns about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is overlooked in the lives of Black Women who are sexually abused. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is only identified through men who are connected to the military. Consequently, there are doctors and psychiatrists talking about PTSD - but they are not talking about PTSD within the context of the Black Church. Why not?

### **Sexual Abuse and the Black Church**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual abuse as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” Sexual abuse takes many forms, including rape, date rape, nonconsensual intercourse, sexual abuse of children, forced marriage, denial of one's right to use contraception, forced abortion, female genital mutilation, and obligatory inspections for virginity.<sup>64</sup>

Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, in *Family Violence: Reclaiming a Theology of Nonviolence* asserts that sexual abuse is one of the most devastating types of violence a person can experience. Albrecht's point is that for a woman it represents an injury and a brokenness to the most intimate part of who she is. Even more important, a woman's sexuality is shattered into pieces, and it may take a lifetime to patch it together again. Consequently, the terrible possibility that the abuse may recur hovers grimly throughout her life.<sup>65</sup>

Historically, sex and the Black Church were stigmatized as early as the days of slavery. Black females were abused by white masters and placed under the threat of separation if

---

<sup>64</sup> Albrecht, Elizabeth Soto. *Family Violence: Reclaiming a Theology of Nonviolence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 12.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 12.

she protested. The disposition of silence became a way of life for Black Women who were sexually abused and for Black men who felt powerless to stop the abuse. For as far back as others can recall, the issues of sex, sexuality, sexual abuse, or sexual pleasure were never discussed within the Black family structure. In the literature, sexual abuse occurs whenever anyone with less maturity or power is tricked, trapped, coerced, or bribed into a sexual experience, highlighting the imbalance of power between victim and perpetrator which is critical in the determination of abuse. The power imbalance may result from the perpetrator's greater age, size, position, experience, or authority.<sup>66</sup>

For example: *According to sources accessed July 25, 2019 titled: "Pastor Always Seen Holding a Bible Held on \$1 Million Bond for Molesting Teen Whose Mom Prayed Instead of Calling Cops"*<sup>67</sup>

As stated in the article, the 48-year-old perpetrator had been pastor of Hour of Restoration, Church of God in Christ for the past three years and previously an elder at Greater Community Temple (COGIC). He was accused of taking advantage of a woman's work schedule to abuse her teenage daughter

For the last two years, according to WREG-TV, he would enter the girl's bedroom whenever her mother was at work or asleep and expose his genitals and fondle her, when the girl turned to her mother for help, he admitted to fondling her. However, the teen's mother prayed that God would remove "these thoughts" from the perpetrator's mind instead of taking her daughter's

---

<sup>66</sup> Heggen, Carolyn Holderread. *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*, Forward by Marie M. Fortune (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1993), 20.

<sup>67</sup> COGIC Pastor Arrested for Sexually Abusing Teen Family member. Newsone.com/2817780/Michael-Bryant-cogic-pastor (accessed July 25, 2019).

story to the authorities. Other members of the Hour of Restoration COGIC congregation reportedly also knew of the alleged abuse, but did nothing, which could make them culpable for the crime.

According to this article, in recent years, countless accusations have been made against members of clergy, especially males, for all types of sexual improprieties. Catholic priests have countless indictments for sexually abusive behaviors brought against them by nuns and altar boys. Many church organizations have taken measures to require individuals seeking ministerial licenses to take boundary training, sexual misconduct orientation, and pastoral counseling to heighten awareness of the issues of sexual misconduct. Additional precautions have been taken to reduce the cost of legal fees associated with payment to the victims.

The Black Church has also found itself in the throes of many sexual misconduct indictments. As a result, many denominations have incorporated mandatory sexual abuse training and required all leaders to have sexual abuse clearances from their state of residence. As much as the practice of sexual misconduct is prolific in the Black Church, many pastors and church leaders in the Black Church have been predators or too close to name it.

Furthermore, when it comes to the topic of sexual abuse, most will readily agree that sexual abuse is a problem. Where this agreement usually ends is in the question: Why has the silence persisted?

Marie Marshall Fortune, in her book, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (1983) she quotes at length:

This is the most common response heard from clergymen when questioned about their pastoral contact with victims and perpetrators of sexual violence. (I say clergymen because women pastors are more frequently approached with this problem.) The

clergymen then draw disturbing conclusions from this piece of information: “Because no one ever comes to me with this problem, there is no problem among my congregation. Since there is no problem, I do not need to learn about it.” Seldom does it occur to a pastor that the reason he does not hear about his congregation’s experiences of sexual violence is that he has made it clear that he is not prepared to hear or is unable to be of assistance. Ironically, we have not heard about sexual violence in the Church because we have not spoken about it.<sup>68</sup>

Fortune surmises further that the silence is not an indication of the absence of the problem: it is itself a loud, orchestrated denial of a problem which certainly exists. For centuries the message has been effectively communicated; speak not about rape, incest, child molestation- especially in the church. So the sin of sexual violence (and some even argue it is no sin) has remained unmentionable.

As a result of this silence, Fortune argues that the activity may be interpreted as (1) sexual abuse is not a problem (2) the Black Church may not feel equip to handle sexual abuse (3) shame is attached to sexual abuse (4) sexual violence if not recognized for what it is (5) lack of ethnical or theological authority clarity in the religious community (6) sin of sexual violence has not been clearly identified, and (7) there is no adequate guidance to clergy or laypeople.<sup>69</sup>

The Black Church does not recognize sexual violence for what it is, because there is a confusion between defining sexual violence and sexual activity. Thus, what is not being said in the Black Church is that rape is violence, not sex. Fortune states “For many, in both experience and attitudes, sexual activity and sexual violence have been equated: distinctions between the two are seriously blurred. “ Fortune argues that the purpose of this emphasis is to undo the long-held belief that rape is primarily the sexual act of a man who cannot control his sexual feelings.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Fortune, Marie Marshall. *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), xi.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 15.

In other words, sexual violence is a confusing act because it comes with many immoral implications. The act itself feels good physically and emotionally because it fulfills the dark desires of the abuser, and it prematurely awakens the sexual appetite of the abused and because the engagement in this activity is often sworn to secrecy, the abused may either feel special or alone.

Fortune's point is that sexual abuse is an unspoken truth that if addressed, can impede the spiritual growth of the Black Church. Fortune's theory of sexual violence in the church is extremely useful. It sheds light on the difficult problem of the "silence" that remains in the church. To put it succinctly, sexual abuse in the Black Church is considered just as important as that white sheet of paper collected from the suggestion box. It is read with minimal consideration and regard, tossed aside and long forgotten by its receiver.

From my past experience, Black pastors do not see sexual abuse as a problem and this is where the silence begins; the majority of the time they are not equipped to handle sexual violence in the church. Relatedly, how can the Black Church begin to eradicate a problem if they do not know where to start? For decades, the Black Church has ignored or denied that sexual abuse is a problem. And church leadership often fails to report sexual abuse. Therefore, identifying the losses is not easy, that is why I believe the Church remains silent. Most of the time the church hides the problem because it is embarrassing or a disgrace to the community. The pastor loses their identity and their power, while the victims are still hurting. Consequently, the church has to spend money on education for clergy and lay leaders as well as on attorney fees for failure to expose sexual violence, not including the actual consequent and retributive cost of rape per victim: It starts with education and communication, but to no avail neither element is being implemented.



Consider the cost and impact of sexual violence: For example according to National Sexual Violence Resource Center:

- Each rape cost approximately \$151,423 (d)
- Annually, rape costs the U.S. more than any other crime (\$127 billion), followed by assault (\$93 billion), murder (\$71 billion), and drunk driving (\$61 billion).
- 81% of women and 35% of men report significant short-term or long-term impacts such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- Health care is 16% higher for women, who were sexually abused as children.

Marie Fortune couldn't have said it better herself:

“Silence begets more silence, the tightness of the circle is overwhelming at times. The victim's silence about her or his experience feeds society's silence, which encourages the victim's silence to continue. The pastor's silence reflects and sustains society's silence which insures the victim's silence. Will these circles be unbroken? Only so long as our collective desire is not to know the extent and severity of acts of sexual violence against, women, children and men. We have far too long denied the evidence which has appeared in the midst of the silence of fear that it was true. We have all participated in this conspiracy of silence. We do not want to know. Hearing and acknowledging the reality of sexual violence, tracing its roots, seeing its victims and its aftermath are disquieting, frightening, and at times overwhelming experiences. So we have collectively passed by on the other side, unwilling or unable to even see and hear the reality before us.”<sup>71</sup>

Along those same lines, one of the major problems in the Black Church is treating sexual abuse like it is a technical problem. For example: temporarily fixing the problem by sending the perpetrator to another location without ever addressing the problem. With this solution, the problem seems to go away only for the perpetrator. But the victim still has to deal with the

---

<sup>71</sup> Fortune, Marie M. *Sexual Violence. The Unmentionable Sin* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), xiii.

shame, guilt, and trauma of being raped, as well as being raped by the Church through its authorities or its representatives.

The long and painful history of the patriarchal oppression of Black Women in the church has contributed to denial of sexual violence as a problem. The primary victims of sexual violence are women and girl children, and this victimization has been lost in silence for years, regarded as insignificant. Not coincidentally, this silence has served to maintain the status quo of women's oppression and isolation.

Furthermore, victims of sexual abuse struggles with sexual problems, such as powerlessness, pain, fear, anger, disgust, sadness, shame, and humiliation (Heggen, 1998). As a result, shame associated with sexual abuse has crippled women's ability to be effective in family life, schooling, the work place, and the church. Because silence is the norm, silence is attached to shame and confusion. Most victims refused to do anything due to shame and the fear of being blamed for their victimization. The victim is encouraged not to report the incident to the police, nor to a physician because little will be done to the perpetrator, especially if it is a friend or family member.

According to an article "*The Persistent of Shame following Sexual Abuse: A Longitudinal Look at Risk and Recovery*:"

In a study by Fairing and Tasks (2005) Shame can be described as a negative and disturbing emotional experience involving feelings of self-condemnation and the desire to hide the damaged self from others (Lewis, 1992; Tangney, 1995). It is a state in which the whole self feels defective, often as a result of perceived failure to meet social and self-imposed standards.

Furthermore, Clinical, theoretical and empirical work have emphasized shame as a common consequence of child sexual abuse.<sup>72</sup>

Along the same lines, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the impact of sexual and physical abuse in our Black Churches, Stephanie Crumpton's *Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Cultural Violence* takes a frames this question: Why do they cling to an institution whose practices and disembodied theologies fail to affirm all of who they are: Black and Female?

To understand how some Black Women are able to cling to an institution whose practices and disembodied theologies fail to affirm all of who they are: Black and Female? Crumpton uses the term "*Intrapsychic development.*" "The Self psychological perspective, intrapsychic development and growth take place in a shared relational context in which interpersonal encounters provide emotional exchanges that either promote or distort personality development." Crumpton addresses the work of Heinz Kohut, who developed the "selfobject" concept to describe the impact of relational contexts on intrapsychic development: Kohut himself writes:

Self-objects are objects which we experience as part of our self; the expected control over them is, therefore, closer to the concept of the control which a grown-up expects to have over others. There are two kinds of selfobjects: those who respond to and confirm the child's innate sense of vigour, greatness and perfection and those to whom the child can look up and with whom he can merge as an image of calmness, infallibility and omnipotence. The first one is referred to as the mirroring selfobject, the second as the idealized parent image. The self, the core of our personality, has various constituents which we acquire in the interplay with those persons in our earliest childhood environment whom we experience as selfobjects.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Feiring, Candice, and Lynn S. Taska. "The Persistence of Shame Following Sexual Abuse: A Longitudinal Look at Risk and Recovery." *Child Maltreatment* 10, no. 4 (November 2005): 337–

49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559505276686>.

<sup>73</sup> Crumpton, Stephanie M. *Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

Kohut's concept of Intrapsychic development is extremely useful because it sheds light on the difficult problems and the long-term effects of trauma. Self-objects seem to have two kinds: One selfobject: are those who respond to and confirm the child's innate sense of vigour, greatness and perfection and the second selfobject: are those to whom the child can look up and with whom he can merge as an image of calmness, infallibility and omnipotence.

My own efforts to make sense of this concept bring me to the term "Arrested Emotional Development": When people experience sexual abuse, they become stuck at the age of occurrence. While they age and their bodies mature, often their mental and emotional health hasn't grown beyond their age of violation.

For example, an adult who feels confident one minute may, after something upsetting happens, suddenly see the world through the eyes of a sad, angry, or fearful child. Erik Homburger Erikson defines this trauma as "Arrested Emotional Development" which means that behaviors, beliefs, or emotions connected to unresolved childhood experiences could still be triggered today. Once triggered the now adult reacts like the age of the child when emotionally arrested. Arrested Emotional Development is defined as "An abnormal state in which development has stopped prematurely."

To take a case in point, in part 12 of her 1969 autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou gives an account of the impact rape had on an eight-year-old mind and body. Marguerite (Maya Johnson) was sexually abused and raped by her mother's boyfriend. Like many other children, she was told to remain silent and not to tell anyone. Maya Angelou's story exemplifies the millions of rape, incest, and molestation stories that are untold. She writes:

“Then there was the pain”. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight year old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can’t. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot.

I thought I had died-I woke up in a white-walled world, and it had to be heaven. But Mr. Freeman was there and he was washing me. His hands shook, but he held me upright in the tub and washed my legs. “I didn’t mean to hurt you, Ritie. I didn’t mean it. But don’t you tell. Remember, don’t you tell a soul.”<sup>74</sup>

Like in other instances of sexual abuse, the victim was compelled to remain silent. The effects were so devastating that she refused to talk for the next four years of her life.

In other words, if the trauma happened at eight years old and although the woman is maturing physically, the mind stops developing and remains in a dark place. To put it succinctly, the abused Black Woman is never free, never having the opportunity of becoming an adult, living the repeated cycle of memories that is attached to shame and pain that keeps the woman in darkness.

For example, for far too long children, youth, and adults (especially women) have been victims of sexual abuse in one of the places where they are supposed to feel safe, the church. For the most part, victims of sexual abuse frequently report situations of sexual abuse or sexual impropriety in the church. In contrast, Black Women are more often sexually abused compared to women overall. According to the National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community: (<https://ujimacommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ujima-Womens>).

■ For every Black Woman who reports rape, at least 15 Black Women do not report.

■ One in four Black girls will be sexually abused before the age of 18.

---

<sup>74</sup> Angelou, Maya. *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1997), 77.

- One in five Black Women are survivors of rape.
- Thirty-five percent of Black Women experienced some form of contact sexual violence during their lifetime.
- Forty to sixty percent of Black Women report being subjected to coercive sexual contact by age 18.
- Seventeen percent of Black Women experienced sexual violence other than rape by an intimate partner during their lifetime.

According to The Institute for Women's Policy research:

- More than 20 percent of Black Women are raped during their lifetimes - a higher share than among women overall.
- Black Women were two and a half times more likely to be murdered by men than their white counterparts. And, more than 9 in 10 Black female victims knew their killers.
- Black Women also experience significantly higher rates of psychological abuse - including humiliation, insults, name-calling and coercive control - than do women overall.

Black Women who are fighting for freedom are pulled from their inner-self and struggle to see God's image in their existence. They are forever reminded that being Black and being a female never constitutes their freedom. What does it take for the Black Church to recognize that sexual abuse of any kind is a sin? When women are not allowed to preach, and their voice is taken away from them, along with their identity, this is another form of abuse. Black women are still in bondage. How many lives had to be lost through injustice and oppression before the Black Church takes a stand on sexual abuse.

Freedom for the Black Woman happens when fear of the unknown dissipates and becomes less daunting, but the darkness is comforting because it's easy; it's silent; it's sometimes death.

Sometimes it is comforting to remain silent because it's easy. However, God is light/sun and anything that represents this light is great, too great for a person in captivity to ever hope for.

As a result, Intrapsychic consequences of these co-occurring dynamics are critical to understanding this subject matter. By intrapsychic, the complex unconscious and subconscious processes that influence a woman's sense of herself as a cohesive, continuous self whose identity forms in response to intrapsychic dynamics with others. When these interactions include childhood sexual assault, molestation, incest, rape, battering/partner violence and stereotypes that normalize these assaults in a particular way for Black girls and women, trauma is bound to persist.<sup>75</sup>

Crumpton goes on to say that self psychological perspective, intrapsychic development and growth take place in a shared relational context in which interpersonal encounters provide emotional changes that either promote or distort personality development. In other words, while the theory asserts that the personality's core forms in infancy, it also affirms that personalities continue to develop throughout life, and that interactions with others are critical components in this ongoing process.

Kohut advocates that the envisioned of the mother as the primary, mirroring self-object in a dyadic configuration with the infant, and the father as the primary idealizing selfobject at a later time in the child's development. The infant's narcissistic experience of self objects constitutes a form of transference in which the child experiences others as a part of her own self, rather than as an interdependently related other. In optimal nurturing environments caregivers take practical actions and offer affective responses to narcissistic transference that support the developmental maturation away from prima, need-seeking connections, toward interdependent, reciprocal connections with others. As a result, when selfobjects fail to provide empathic resonance as the platform for psychological growth, the personality that develops remains centrally organized around narcissistic

---

<sup>75</sup> Crumpton, Stephanie M. *A Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

need-seeking behaviors. In Self psychological perspective, this failure creates a form of trauma.<sup>76</sup>

When Black Women abused as children or adolescents, their experience may be equivalent to loss. Loss of innocence, loss of childhood, loss of privacy and self-integrity are all equivalent to the impact of sexual abuse. As a result, with the loss of all those elements, mentally, a victim cannot easily move beyond that point in her life so her experience exacerbates other behaviors that may be unhealthy. The act of sexual abuse triggers a mental and emotional bondage that isn't so easy to escape. In light of that, the bondage remains when there is comfort in being a victim or a complacency that doesn't allow one to grow up beyond their trauma, they become stuck at the age of occurrence. While they age and their bodies mature, too often their mental and emotional health hasn't grown beyond their age of violation thus creating childlike behavior.

And to articulate rape from a child's perspective on how wrong sexual abuse can be emotionally and physically can be devastating and confusing.

Another potential consequence of being sexually abused is the need to seek affectionate connection with a parent. I grew up without a father. My mother was present physically but not emotionally. When my mother failed to provide empathic resonance as the platform for psychological growth, the personality I developed as a child remained centrally organized around narcissistic need-seeking behaviors. In other words, in self psychological perspective, this failure created a form of trauma. Trauma breeds more trauma, just like rejection breeds more

---

<sup>76</sup> Crumpton, Stephanie M. *A Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10-11.



rejection. Seeking for someone to love me only to find myself attracted to someone with the same behavior.

But above all, Black Women who were sexually abused as a child become codependent on others to survive. As myself, living as a codependent Black Woman created an atmosphere of fear. As being sexually abused, I needed a place of belonging to be accepted by someone, even with my mother. “All I ever wanted was my mother to love me.” We all heard those words before. It appeared that I could never satisfy her no matter what I did. I tried to fix everything. By fixing, I mean making sure everyone else was taken care of versus my own self-care.

In short, Kohut’s concept of Intrapsychic development is extremely useful because it sheds light on the difficult problems and the long term effects of trauma.

### **The Strong Black Woman Image (SBW)**

Another strength of Black Women lists is the capacity to be a “Strong Black Woman”. In America, as mentioned previously, Black Women’s identities have been popularly portrayed by three negative stereotypes: the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Welfare Queen. However, during the Civil Rights era, Black Women began to articulate their own archetype, the strong Black Woman (SBW).

According to an article “*Trauma, Binge Eating, and the “Strong Black Woman”*”

The Strong Black Woman (SBW) is defined as a salient cultural symbol that may be relevant to African American’s women’s trauma recovery and binge eating. Historically, the symbol originated as a rationalization/justification for slavery because African American women were

touted as physically and psychologically stronger and more resilient than White women (Harris-Lacewell, 2001).<sup>77</sup>

Over time, the image was appropriated within Black communities in response to derogatory images of Black womanhood. By adopting the SBW ideal, African American women have defined themselves in a positive light. Indeed, the image encompasses many positive attributes, imbues pride steeped in a rich cultural and historical legacy, engenders self-efficacy for confronting challenges, and provides encouragement during adversity.<sup>78</sup>

In others words, to understand the “Strong Black Women” it is necessary to place it in its immediate historical context. Historically, the symbol originated as a rationalization/justification for slavery, because African American women were touted as physically and psychologically stronger and more resilient than White women (Harris-Lacewell, 2001).

The Strong Black Woman, for instance, demonstrates a woman being a burden to society. She represents an unobtainable state of being, on the level of regality, that she is a constant target. The Black Woman is hated by the white woman because she can’t be her; the white man hates her because he can’t have her and the Black man hates her because he can’t live up to her expectations. Those who are unreachable are often ridiculed, bullied, abused, and demeaned. History continues to record, in an article: *Sexual Violence in the Lives of African American Women*”: Carolyn M. West and Kalimah Johnson, West further reports that according to poet Laureate, Angela Davis, a Black Activist:

---

<sup>77</sup> Harrington Ellen F. Crowther, Janis J. and Shipherd Jillian C. *Trauma, Binge Eating, and the “Strong Black Woman”* *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 2010 Vo. 78 p.469

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 470.

“Black Women were and continue to be sorely in need of antirape movement”

West and Johnson describes the “Strong Black Woman” this way:

Some Black Women are reluctant to disclose sexual assault to rape-crisis centers, medical providers, friends, and family members (Washington, 2001; Wyatt, 1992). The internalization of racial images may make it more difficult for some African American women to reveal their sexual assault. More specifically, some Black Women adhere to the “Strong Black Woman” expectation, which requires them to display inner strength and minimize the impact of their rape. One participant in Washington’s (2001) study explained: “We Black Women believe we can cope. [But] we can’t always cope, and sometimes when we’re are not coping, we are ashamed of that...It’s almost like it’s seen as a luxury to go into a group setting and talk about sexual violence...”(p.1271). “This culture of silence may be a short-term coping strategy; however, remaining silent may leave the impression that Black Women are relatively unscathed by their sexual trauma.”<sup>79</sup>

Black Women and women of color cannot cope with being sexually assaulted. They are either in denial or just do not want to confront the problem. Heggen quotes:

While safe-blame is a common defense against feelings of utter powerlessness for child victims, it becomes more destructive when carried into adulthood. Many adult survivors still believe that because they feel guilty, they are guilty. And because they feel unworthy, they are unworthy.<sup>80</sup>

### **How Womanist Theology Challenges the Role of the Black Pastor and the Black Women in The Black Church**

According to the Rev. Dr. Emilie M. Townes, in Womanist Theology:

Womanist Theology is a form of reflection that places the religious and moral perspective of Black Women at the center of its method. Issues of class, gender (including sex, sexism, sexuality, and sexual exploitation), and race are seen as theological problems. Townes goes on to say that Womanist Theology takes old (traditional) religious language and symbols and gives them new (more diverse and complex) meaning. As a result, this form of theological reflection cannot be termed “womanist” simply because the subject is Black women’s religious experiences. In other words, the key for womanist theology is the use of an inter-structured analysis is both descriptive (an analysis and sociohistorical perspective of Black life and Black religious worldviews) and prescriptive (offering

---

<sup>79</sup> West, Carolyn M. and Kalimah Johnson. *Sexual Violence in the Lives of African American Women*, website: [vawnet.org/.../files/2016-09/AR\\_SVAAWomenRevised.pdf](http://vawnet.org/.../files/2016-09/AR_SVAAWomenRevised.pdf). Accessed May 15, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Heggen, Carolyn Holderread. *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. Forwarded by Marie M. Fortune (Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press, 1993), 31.

suggestions for the eradication of oppression in the lives of African Americans and, by extension, the rest of humanity and creation).<sup>81</sup>

My view, however, contrary to what Townes has argued, is that the term “Womanist Theology” has recently been integrated into the fabric of the Black Church’s language. The practices included are as old as time.

Along the same line, according to Delores Williams: “Womanist theology is a prophetic voice reminding African-American denominational churches of their mission to seek justice and voice for all their people, of which Black Women are the overwhelming majority in their congregations. Yet this prophetic voice is concerned about the well-being of the entire African-American community, female, male, adults and children.”<sup>82</sup>

However, while learning about the term Womanist Theology, I have spent a great deal of time and energy attempting to find a way to address those deep rooted needs of Black Women without my own embedded theology. Just to be clear, I am not an expert on Womanist Theology, but I urge the reader to explore its attributes with me through the many conversations that I am having with Delores S Williams, Stephanie M. Crumpton, Eboni Marshall Turman, Daphne C. Wiggins and Kelly Brown Douglas. Williams argues:

“I had not realized before that I read African-American sources from a Black male perspective. I assumed Black women were included. I had not noticed that what the sources presented as “Black experience” was really Black male experience.”<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> ir.vanderbilt.edu}xmlu.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), xvii.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 1.

However, the voices of Black Women were always introduced by a male perspective or a white woman telling their history. A Black Woman's experience can only come from a Black Woman.

To put it bluntly, a Black man cannot tell a Black woman's story because he has not experienced their stories. They can only make assumptions. Fortune argues that experience, which is the basis for all knowledge, has become the primary source of comprehending sexual violence. Those who have been raped have walked through "*the valley of the shadow of death*" and most have returned to tell about it. Whether or not physical violence was inflicted, the most common reaction of a victim is "I thought I was going to be killed." The victim is overwhelmed and overpowered by both the physical strength and the hatred of the rapist.<sup>84</sup> For example: According to The Institute for Women's Policy research reports:

■ Black Women were two and a half times more likely to be murdered by men than their white counterparts. And, more than 9 in 10 Black female victims knew their killers.

Delores S. Williams, Professor of Emerita of Theology and Culture, Union Theological Seminary in New York (1999), explains that "Womanist theology is a prophetic voice reminding African-American denominational churches of their mission to seek justice and voice for all people, of which Black Women are the overwhelming majority in their congregations. Yet this prophetic voice is concerned about the well-being of the entire African American community, female, male, adults, and children"<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Fortune, Marie Marshall. *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin: An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press), 5-6.

<sup>85</sup> Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), xvii.

Williams' conversation begins with an interesting question. Where would I begin to order construct Christian theology (or god-talk) from the point of African American women?<sup>86</sup> She emphasizes that the history of Black Women's experiences are never told in the Black Church and have always been viewed from a Black male's perspective. In other words, Williams compares Black Women with the story of Hagar, who is a prototype for the struggle of Black Women living today. For instance, Because Hagar was a slave, she had no control over her body or her labor. Her body, like her labor, could be exploited in any way her owners desired. Her reproduction capacities belonged to her slave holders, Abraham and Sarah. Consequently, surrogacy became a major theme for Hagar. Along the same lines, surrogacy became a major theme for Black Women. Consider, Black Women that are impacted by economics issues sometimes have to use their body as a means of income.

Williams acknowledged herself that the biblical story of Abram, Sarai and Hagar touches on an interesting point. For many African American women in the Black Church, it could be argued that their voice and identity has been lost in the foundation of the Black Church, which is supposed to cultivate a culture of freedom, freedom for all, not just men. However, the freedom of Black Women's voice continues to be taken for granted. In my view, African American women are being raped all over again, the only difference; it is done through the authorities or its representatives of the Black Churches. The neglected voice of Black Women in the Black Church has been the main theme for womanist theology. Williams uses a "*theological*

---

<sup>86</sup> Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 1.

*corrective*” for bringing Black Women’s experience into theology so that Black Women will see the need to transform the sexist character of the churches and their theology:

### **Womanist Theological Corrective**

- Womanist Theology attempts to help Black Women see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of Christian religion in the African American community.
- Womanist Theology challenges all oppressive forces impeding Black Women’s struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women’s and the family’s freedom and well-being.
- Womanist Theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical disability and caste.
- Like Black male liberation theology, Womanist Theology assumes the necessity of responsible freedom for all human beings. Womanist Theology especially concerns itself with the faith, survival, and freedom-struggle of African-American women.
- Womanist Theology identifies and critiques Black male oppression of Black females while it also critiques white racism that oppresses all African Americans, female and male.
- Like white feminist theology, womanist theology affirms the full humanity of women. But womanist theology also critiques white feminist participation in the perpetuation of white supremacy, which continues to dehumanize Black Women. Yet womanist theology is organically related to Black male liberation theology and feminist theology in

it various expressions (including African women's, Mujerista, Jewish and Asian women's theology).<sup>87</sup>

Womanist Theological correctives are rooted in an understanding that any movement to end the negative impact of racial equality for racism, sexism and classism, should bring about a positive change. Womanist Theology does not come through only to a special few, but rather it reaches an entire community, using a holistic approach. In contrast, to the work of Black Theology that only deals with racism and Black men, and feminist theology that only deal with sexism and white women. Therefore, Williams herself also wanted to encourage Black Women in their faith, using her own personal experience as a Black Woman; meant that she could only do that through the story of Hagar. What other story would have been a great source in understanding the experiences of Black Women and connecting this story to reach women of today.

Stephanie M. Crumpton, ordained minister of United Church in Christ, in her book *Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Cultural Violence*: given the opportunity to interview five African American Women, spoke out for me the most:

Crumpton introduces a useful term "double-consciousness"<sup>88</sup>. Double-consciousness is defined as two different identities living in one body. Crumpton herself writes that Black Women have to develop a double-consciousness in order to participate in communities that we cherish while also maintaining an important awareness that something is awry in these relationships. She questions: How do they manage the conflict? Crumpton answers, "My

---

<sup>87</sup> Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), xvii.

<sup>88</sup> Double-consciousness is defined as a person with two different identities living in one body.



instinct tells me that Black Women are listening to and conferring authoritative status on subjugated and divergent voices that help them interrogate the double-binding nature of their relationship with the church, the African American community, and the wider cultural context. In other words, the Black Women has broken their silences about intimate violence: childhood sexual assault, molestation, incest, rape, and battering/partner violence.<sup>89</sup> The essence of Crumpton's argument is that Black Women broke their silence through stories. Stories that created an incredibly complex process. In other words, Crumpton believes their healing was complex chiefly because it took place within the context of conversations and cultural spaces (including the church) that not only normalized violence against women in general (and women of color particular) but also committed its own kind of violence.<sup>90</sup> This is how they managed the conflict of double-binding.

Crumpton argues that Black Women, being Black and female, are rejected by the church that is supposed to support them, nevertheless, the church continues to support oppression through internalized racism, sexism, and disembodied theologies that can only compound to the pain they already feel. In other words, Crumpton continues to argue though the church is lauded for its social legacy of communal freedom and justice, the Black Church was and is not quite such a safe haven for Black female identities and bodies as it is sometimes portrayed. (2)

Along those same lines, In the *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) W. E.B. Dubois described the presence of "*double-consciousness*" this way:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks

---

<sup>89</sup>Crumpton, Stephanie M. *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - An American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.<sup>91</sup>

Although this quote was written in 1903, it is still a very relevant concept in our society.

Black Women are still exploited through controlling images that play a role in Black Women's experiences of intimate and cultural violence. By extension, Crumpton asserts that this is a matter of concern for pastoral theology because the scripts embedded in these distorting images have powerful influence on how Black girls and women go about seeking care and support for healing. As a result, these scripts conjure in women fear and apprehension about how, if, when, and to whom they can disclose intimate violence. For example, first the fear is whether or not justice-seeking disclosure (the antithesis of Mammyesque self-sacrificing) will result in communal backlash for outing their abusers, especially if the person is male, a family member, or an important figure in the community. Secondly, the fear is whether or not proclaiming that she is a sexual victim (a clear antithesis of Jezebel's sexual wantonness) will reverse her circumstance, such that she becomes the scapegoat for both her abuser and the community that refuses to hold the abuser accountable.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Black Women that experiences sexual abuse struggles with the element of double-consciousness: this type of double-consciousness forced Black Women to remain silent. Consequently, silence became a coping mechanism for survival. Silence is the hidden figure in the lives of Black Women that eventually kills them if one does not eventually be heard.

---

<sup>91</sup> Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1903), 2.

<sup>92</sup> Crumpton, Stephanie M. *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 9.

Crumpton advocates that by Black Women telling their stories; two things can happen: first, they are concerned with how they are perceived by the community and secondly, they are concerned with the emotional consequences of recalling this traumatic event.<sup>93</sup> Just imagine the double-consciousness of looking at one's self through the eyes of others of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. Does one ever feel his twoness? An American, a Negro; a Black Woman; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. A tape of the world that is framed from the outside looking in constantly being played over and over again in the minds of Black Women.

Yes, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, striving to survive and to avoid the process of a slow death through remaining silent and keeping secrets. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner *Through the Eyes of Women* asserts that as women approach their latter years of life of being sexually abused they begin to “process” their lives, considering the events, achievements, losses, pains, and joys of life in light of their faith and their understanding of the meaning of life.<sup>94</sup> On one hand this is a positive process that can be done with relative ease and comfort and on the other hand, can become a major internal battleground. As a result, in the midst of this “processing,” many women deal with secrets kept for years and even for decades of their lives.

---

<sup>93</sup> Crumpton, Stephanie M. *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 9.

<sup>94</sup> Moessner, Jeanne Stevenson. *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 244.

Moessner continues to argue that these kept secrets create divided lives and preclude wholeness. Finally, pain and memories that are shut away mean that the woman's life is split rather than whole. Yes, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals, in one dark body, creates a divided life in one dark body. In other words, some women divide themselves from the pain and memories that the secrets are kept even from themselves. Below are the effects of keeping secrets:

- The secrets, divisions, denial, and façade prevent a movement toward spiritual well-being and wholeness.
- Divided lives are often diminished lives. The gifts of the women are not put to full use because of the attention that must go to maintaining the denial, keeping the secret, and sustaining the façade.
- Divided lives do not remain divided only internally, but the women often are divided, separated from other people-there are limits to the genuine intimacy they are able to share and experience.
- Keeping secrets means that the woman not just what happened in her life, it also means that she denies her *self*. Who she is includes the experience that preceded the secret keeping and is not exclusive of that part of her life. Wholeness requires acceptance of *self*. And this is not possible when a piece of one's life and *self* is relegated to nonexistence, whether that nonexistence is internal, external, or both.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Moessner, Jeanne Stevenson. *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care* (Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996), 244.

What is more important, in the lives of these women is that their spiritual life is lived in a cloak of secrecy that is stunted and crushed rather than full and rich. Consequently, rage that smolders throughout life and resentment that gradually emerges both take a severe toll on one's spiritual life.

Historically, the challenges faced by Black Women are two identities living in a double-conscious society. Struggling to be Black Women living in Black bodies seems quite abstract; however, once unpacked and discussed further, it is evident that Black Women are in the midst of finding themselves despite the social setbacks. However, the Black Church has failed to recognize that there is an identity crisis, especially for Black Women.

The same reality is expressed by Eboni Turman Marshall, Assistant Research Professor of Black Church Studies, Duke University Divinity School:

Along the same lines, Turman emphasizes in her book, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, The Black Church, And the Council of Chalcedon*, challenges me with many questions as it relates to the identity of Black Women in the Black Church. Turman elaborates on the *enfleshment*: how it affects the Black people, especially the bodies of Black Women, in the Black Church as it relates to the politics Council of Chalcedon. Turman illustrates three questions: Question #1: Recognizing the Black Church as an institution born out of rebellion against injustice perpetrated against Black flesh, *how* does Black Women's oppression persist under the guise of liberation in Black churches? Question #2: What does it mean for Black Women to acknowledge their isness as more than a reactionary residuum of

crisis, rather than “what happened to” them? Question #3: Is it even possible for Black Women to recognize themselves made in God’s image?<sup>96</sup>

In other words, why do men continue to oppress Black Women in the Black Church? More complicated, Turman illustrates this oppression through the Politics of the Doctrine of Incarnation: Christ being human and Christ being divine, Christ is not *either/or* and because of the Incarnation, the Christian communities failed to recognize Christ as the *both/and* ways of thinking, knowing, and being that Chalcedon’s confession mandates. In other words, who the church says it is (*Christianity Identity*) and what the church actually does (*Christian ethics*).

The Doctrine of Incarnation as defined at Chalcedon posits that the two natures of Christ coalesce in one person and one hypostasis.<sup>97</sup> As a result of this definition, Chalcedon asserted logic of incarnation that locates wholeness in the very God whose controversial mulattic composition that immediately sparked controversy, in fact sanctions human vindication (4).

Black Women are continually being portrayed in the images of Aunt Jemina, Sapphire, the Tragic Mulatto, the Black Matriarch, and Topsy, which oppresses the Black Women’s identity. The “normative gaze” of those in power, the white supremacy, continues to demoralize, dehumanize, and stratify certain kinds of bodies. Turman goes on to say:

These images has historically represented various manifestations of Black Women’s bodily pathology and fragmentation, Townes’s womanist ethics says “No!” to this white normative gaze and repositions these images to irradiate the soul-sick society from which they emerged; that is, to address the “really real” oppressive contexts of Black Women’s identity as property and commodity, uninterrogated coloredness, Black reparations in the

---

<sup>96</sup> See Appendix: Table 3: Question #19

<sup>97</sup> Turman, Eboni Marshall. *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, The Black Church, and The Council of Chalcedon*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 36.

United States and subtext to Christian triumphalism and empire, religious values, public policy, and women's moral autonomy, and the work of dismantling evil, respectively.<sup>98</sup>

The concepts of *en sarki* (in the flesh) and *kata sarka* (according to the flesh) can be identified with the definition of Chalcedonian. It is in these same concepts of what happens *to* Black Women's bodies, and what happens *in* Black Women bodies, that harmonizes the two natures of Christ. The oppression stage of Black Women was represented as *kata sarka* (according to the flesh), because of the color of their skin (racism). The Black Church represents *en sarki* (in the flesh) of what happens to the Black body of women (sexism). Turman's argument is based on the problem with enfleshment as it relates to Black Women's identity in the Black Church, and Black people in our communities. Turman's major question is recognizing the Black Church as an institution born out of rebellion against injustice perpetrated against Black flesh, *how* does Black Women's oppression persist under the guise of liberation in Black Churches?<sup>99</sup> More importantly, what can be done about it?

While reflecting here imaginatively reconstructing the lives of Black Women as Turman describes their suffering through body politics, and as being a Black Woman myself, I can identify or relate with the conflict of being in a Black Church. As a result, the Black Church refuses to accept true responsibility for their action while participating in this social sin. Turman emphasizes at length:

To put it bluntly, while embracing Chalcedon as the defining moment in Western Christianity, and therefore giving lip service to Christ as simultaneously fully human and fully divine, Christian communities, real churches, rarely embody and enact the *both/and* ways of thinking,

---

<sup>98</sup> Turman, Eboni Marshall. *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, The Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 149.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

knowing, and being that Chalcedon's confession mandates. In other words, there often exists a radical disjunction between who the church says it is (Christian identity) and what the church actually does (Christian ethics) precisely because of a primary (mis) conception of bodily integrity that ends with and, thus is severely distorted by the "either/or" moment of Jesus that precedes the mediating Chalcedonian Definition of Faith. Christian communities often find themselves unable to escape the circularity of human oppression because they are rooted in a narrative that *seemingly* suggests that the body that defies normative wholeness must be dehumanized and choreographed to adhere to a specific narrative, one that ascribes to a binary hierarchy of sorts that too often divinizes certain kind of flesh, while demonizing others.<sup>100</sup>

How does one dismantle this kind of social sin that affects our communities? The Black Church is playing double jeopardy in the lives of Black Women, and in order to solve this problem, the Black Church must remove the veil that is causing fragmentation in this identity crisis. The Black Church cannot continue to be blindsided to this problem of racism and sexism.

Ultimately, Turman addresses the bodies of Black Women like the broken body of Christ through solidarity. Turman argues that Christ is *homoousious* with Black Women as to his humanity; therefore, appeals to the bodies of Black Women as the starting point for the Black Church to craft its resistance to intracommunal body injustice.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> Turman, Eboni Marshall. *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, The Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 38.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.



*Homoousious*, in Christianity, the key term of the Christological doctrine formulated at the first ecumenical council, at Nicaea in 325, to affirm that God the Son and God the Father are of the same substance. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/homoousios>)

If Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine and the broken bodies of Black Women like the broken body of Christ are created in the image of Christ, it would be unethical for the Black Church to treat the Black Women's body any kind of way especially in the area of sexual abuse. According to the definition of *Homoousious*: Black Women and Jesus Christ are the same in substance and Black Women should ethically be treated the same. This is done through bringing wholeness to the Black communities. The Black Church has to change the way they preach, teach and the both/ways of thinking, knowing, and being that Chalcedon's confession mandates.

In other words, the Black Church cannot continue to practice one way and preach another way. If the Black Church is going to preach Jesus Christ, then the church is accountable for its message. If the church refuses to accept the responsibility of how the church treats the Black Women's body, then the church is committing unethical practices. The Black Church or any church must live up to what they are teaching and preaching. If the church continues to treat Black Women's bodies with no respect, then the church ignores the true gospel message of Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ and the Black body of Black Women is all one.

### **Womanist Theology Perspective on Black Liberation**

According to Theologian Jacqueline Grant, she argues that Womanist Theology not only proceeds from the particular context of the suffering and experiences of African American

women, but that context which brings together the issues of race, sex, and class, provides the broadest and most comprehensive base for liberation theology.<sup>102</sup>

Grant goes on to say that on one hand Womanist Theology agrees with the critique of white racism and the need for Black unity expressed in Black liberation theology, and on the other hand it agrees with the criticism of sexism and the need for the unity of women in feminist theology. What Grant is saying here is that Womanist Theology moves beyond both by providing its own critique of racism in feminist theology and of sexism in Black theology. It also adds the dimension of class since most Black women have been poor. As Grant has argued, “Black feminism grows out of Black Women’s tri-dimensional reality of race/sex/class. It holds that full human liberation cannot be achieved simply by the elimination of any one form of oppression”.<sup>103</sup>

On the contrary, feminist theology only focused on the middle-class women versus poor women. They were more of an individuality approach versus working with a community as a whole. Racism and Sexism they understood, but when it came to classism, classism was neglected by this movement. Black Women and people of color who live in low-income neighborhoods face many challenges. For example: According to the *U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics: Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010*:

---

<sup>102</sup> Lincoln C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 303.

<sup>103</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 303.

■ In 2005-2010, females who were age 34 or younger, who lived in lower income households, and who lived in rural areas experienced some of the highest rates of sexual violence.

Along the same line, Demetrius K. Williams, in his book, *An End To This Strife: The Politics of Gender in African American Churches* expressed that Womanist Theology was developed as a women's liberation struggle in the immediate wake of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements and in the context of the Black liberation struggle and the white feminist (women's liberation) movement. Since Black Women, having been victimized and overlooked by both movements, Black Women sought to articulate a theology that would embody their historical and present experience and their aspirations for wholeness.<sup>104</sup>

Williams goes on to say that learning their lesson from past shortcoming of the Black liberation and feminist movements, womanists seek to do their work out of the multidimensional reality of Black Women that includes race, class and sex, and other forms of oppression and dehumanization. Furthermore, this is an important perspective because, as one womanist states: "the Black community is not free of any of its economic conditions." As a result, it is hopeful and commendable that many Black theologians have responded positively to womanist. For example, James Cone has asserted that "Womanist Theology is the most creative development to emerge out of the Black theology movement." However, there is much more work to be done in the Black churches.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Williams K. Demetrius, *An End to This Strife" The Politics of Gender in African American Churches*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 133.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, Womanist Theology is focused on the entire community as a whole: race, sex, and class. “They share race suffering with Black men; with White women and other Third World women, they are victims of sexism; and with poor Blacks and Whites and Other Third World peoples, especially women, they are disproportionately poor.” In contrast, Black men who focus on Black theology only share suffering with other Black men based on racism, they too have failed on focusing on the entire community as a whole.

Along those same lines, white feminist movements throughout the United States is largely dominated by the concerns and organizations of middle-class women. The needs and struggles of African American women and women of color, many of whom are poor, are scarcely addressed by white feminists and Black feminist organizations. Most Black Women felt that white women are often too trapped by their socialization in the racism of American society to reach effectively beyond their own concerns.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The objective purpose of this research seeks to understand sexual abuse within the Black Church and to offer pastors and lay leaders guidance to assist congregations in breaking the cycle of sexual abuse and silence. This investigation will explore the issues of sexual abuse and its effect on the Black Church through a series of surveys. The collection of data will aid in the interpretation of the role of pastoral leadership, the impact of African American women, lay leadership, congregants, and the impact of silence.

In order to minimize the risk of exposure and ensure a reasonable comfort level for participants, all African American women in every participating congregation were asked to complete an anonymous survey. An initial survey package and Informed Consent Forms were

distributed to 50 to 75 African American women at a Women's Conference that is held every year. The surveys consisted of nineteen (19) open-ended questions. Twenty-seven women completed the paper-pencil surveys. The potential respondents were instructed to complete a survey only if they met the following criteria: self-identification as an African American woman, and 18+ years of age. The survey will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The surveys were conducted between September 2019 - November 2019. Their denominational affiliation was not specified on the survey among the inclusion criteria.

The surveys were conducted at Evangel Chapel Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the sanctuary of the church. The Church held a conference titled: "Lift Every Voice: Healing: God's Design for Women".

The Conference was geared towards Reflection/Discussion/Comments which included a Table Talk: "Exploring facts about women's issues: Sexual Abuse, Domestic Violence, Gun Violence; Sex Trafficking, Self-worth and Self-imaging." Upon the completion of the data analysis, all records of information will be destroyed. In light of the delicacy of the subject matter "Sexual Abuse and the Black Church" the participants were informed of their rights. For example, if participants find the memories to be overwhelming, a network of counselors and therapists will be made available to all participants. The participants will be given a list of providers currently available in the Philadelphia area.

In addition, an initial survey package and informed consent forms were mailed to three African American pastors of three churches to determine their understanding of their role in stemming the tide of sexual abuse of Black Women in the Black Church. The surveys included

14 open-ended questions that covered pastors past experience and training in dealing with sexual abuse. The surveys were conducted September 2019 - November 2019.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the pastor as it pertains to pastoral support for Black Women in the area of sexual abuse in the Black Church. I used the role concept to explore their understanding, experience, attitude and training level as a pastor.

The survey included questions on the following areas: The pastors were asked to provide demographics data on their congregations such as church denomination, size of membership, level of education, church income and their personal income. Next the survey included questions about the participant's denomination, previous training on sexual abuse, and experience communicating with abused individuals. For example, do you have a healthy congregation, what if any counseling tools you used to address sexual abuse; how does the church address leaders who demonstrates potential for sexual abuse, and what do you think would help the church better respond to sexual abuse? Together, these findings of collective surveys will at some point in the future provide a useful framework for developing a training manual which will serve as a tool to help pastors address their role, provide a network of support for Black women who are victims of sexual abuse and finally offer guidelines to move the Black church towards healing.

In completing this study, participants (African American pastors) were selected by reaching across denominational lines within all geographic regions of Philadelphia. The other participants (African American women) are members of the Black Churches whose pastors are also participating in this study.

Since the leadership in the Black Church has been historically male-dominated, the surveys targeted African American females. This study is intentionally focused on the Black Church as it is relevant to my personal experience and to the community in which I am called to minister. The questionnaire addressed to African American pastors was informative and helped me to gain an understanding of their perceived role in addressing the issues of sexual misconduct in the Black Church.

Because this topic is sensitive in nature and there is a possible risk participating in this survey which could cause emotional distress by asking the women to recall and disclose personal information, the survey will be anonymous and confidential and all data will be destroyed upon completion of the data analysis.

### **Survey Interview Questions for African American Women**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your familial status?
3. What is your income?
4. Do you have a church home?
5. Have you ever been sexually abused? If yes, what have been the emotional or psychological affects you have experienced as a result of this sexual abuse?
6. Do you feel comfortable to report sexual abuse to the pastor or laypeople?"
7. Is there a presence of pastoral leaders to competently address the issue of sexual abuse?
8. Have there ever arisen a need to discuss issues of sexual abuse?
9. Do you know of anyone who is in need of counseling but reluctant to talk to a pastor?
10. Do the church offer teaching or orientation on the issue of sexual abuse?

11. Is the issue of sexual abuse addressed in any of the churches bylaws or church constitution? Bylaws - By Law
12. Church Support: What do you need from the church?
13. Have you perceived the church to be a helpful source? How, and why not?
14. What could the church have done better to be helpful to you?
15. Do you receive support from your family? Why and Why not?
16. What message are you getting from your church experienced? Example: preaching, Bible Study, liturgy, etc.
17. How important is the church in your life?
18. How important is God in your life?
19. What does it mean to you to be an African American woman in the life of the church?

### **Survey Interview Questions for the African American Pastors**

1. What is your definition of sexual abuse?
2. Does your church have a support group for victims who have been sexually abused? If no and why? If yes, describe the group and how it works, who leads it, whether there is a curriculum or program guide, how many people participate?
3. Does your church have sexual education classes in your congregation? If no, why? If yes, describe the group and how it works, who leads it, whether there is a curriculum or program guide, how many people participate?
4. Are you comfortable having conversation about sexual abuse? If no, why? If yes, when was the last time you had a conversation with someone from your congregation? How often do you have conversations concerning sexual abuse?
5. What is the annual church income?
6. What is the church denomination?
7. What is the size of membership of the church?



8. Do you have a healthy congregation? (i.e. growing spiritually)
9. What is your level of education?
10. What is your income?
11. Have you received any training on sexual abuse intervention in seminary?
12. What if any counseling tools have you used to address sexual abuse in your church?
13. How does the church address leaders who demonstrates potential for sexual abuse?
14. What do y1ou think would help you and the church better in responding to sexual abuse?

### **Quantitative Findings:**

Several trends developed in the African American Women's responses to the 19 open-ended questions. Out of these responses were intended to help determine whether or not Black Women receive the support that is needed by Black Pastors of Black Churches in regards to sexual abuse. These trends are reported in (Table 1, 2 and 3). The demographic characteristics of the African American Women are summarized in Table 1: Research has shown that identifying the demographic information of each African American Women: such as age, gender, marital status, and household income are important to this study.

As noted in Table 2, more than half (70%) of the African American Women were 55 or older. Eleven percent of the African Women were 45 and older, 7% were 35 and older, and 8% were under 25 at the time the survey was completed: It is clear, in addition to asking how old you are, I should have asked how old were you at the time of occurrence? For this study, age has a tremendous impact on females who were sexually abused.

*The results in Table 2:* Most of the African American Women (44%) tended to be in the median income range, which situated them as middle-class women making an income of (\$20,000 to \$40,000), 19% of the African American women were considered low-income

making (\$1.00 to \$20,000), 19% of the African American women were making (\$50,000 and over), 7% of the African American women were making (\$40,000 TO \$50,000), and 11% failed to report their income.

The income findings listed above are very important to this study. According to the Department of Justice Statistics, Females Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010, income affects the incidence and prevalence of abuse:

- Consistently across all three time periods, females living in household in the lowest income bracket (less than \$25,000 annually) experienced rape or sexual assault victimization at higher rates than females in higher income brackets. In 2005-2010, females in household earning less than \$25,000 per year experienced 3.5 rape or sexual assault victimizations per 1,000 families, compared to 1.9 per 1,000 in households earning \$25,000 and \$49,000 and 1.8 per 1,000 in household earning \$50,000 or more.

*The results in Table 2:* provided responses and percentages to all nineteen open-ended questions. For example: Thirty-three percent of the African American women were married, 26% (7) of the African American Women were widowed, 22% (6) of the African American women were divorced, and 19% (5) of the African American Women were single. The results in (Table 1) indicates that the majority of the African American Women were widowed (5) that were sexually abused. The majority of the African American Women were married (7) that were not sexually abused.

Ninety-seven percent of the African American Women were a member of a church and attended weekly Sunday Worship Services and 3% had no church affiliation.

*The results in Table 2:* Of the 27 AAW participants who responded to the survey, 11 reported being sexually abused (37% of the total sample). Eleven reported not being sexually abused (37% of the total sample) and five (26% of the total sample) chose not to answer this question. Although the participants were asked “Have you ever been sexually abused? If yes, what have been the emotional or psychological affects you have experienced as a result of this sexual abuse? In addition to asking have you been sexually abused, I should have asked, how do you define sexual abuse? As a result, the participants were never given the opportunity to define sexually abused. Sexual abuse comes in different categories of behaviors.

According to Albrecht:

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual abuse as: “Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” Sexual Abuse take many forms, including rape, date rape, nonconsensual intercourse, sexual abuse of children, forced marriage, denial of one’s right to use contraception, forced abortion, female genital mutilation, and obligatory inspections for virginity.”<sup>106</sup> (This is defined in sexual abuse section)

Furthermore, 37% of the African American women that were sexually abused did not indicate any emotional or psychological effects, and two-thirds did report affects. In other words, victims of sexual abuse have long term effects. Many victims tend to ignore the symptoms by keeping the incident a secret.

*The results in Table 2 and 3:* Thirty-seven percent of the African American Women indicated that there was no need to discuss issues of sexual abuse, 15% of the African American Women

---

<sup>106</sup> Albrecht, Elizabeth Soto. *Family Violence: Reclaiming a Theology of Nonviolence* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 12.

indicated that there was a need to discuss sexual abuse issues and 48% of the African American Women did not respond to the question. However, AAW#15 indicated “To make my daughter aware that sexual abuse is real, and to never be afraid to speak up and out if ever presented with it or something similar.” Another participant AAW#21 indicated “Because I have four daughters and I have a lot of friends.”

*The results in Table 2 and 3:* Eighty-one percent of the African American Women indicated that they were comfortable to report sexual abuse to pastors and lay leaders and 19% indicated that they were not comfortable to report sexual abuse to pastors and lay leaders. And (3) did not answer the question. Participant AAW#019 who did not feel comfortable indicated “I don’t know.”

Economic disparity played a role in determining whether women sought counseling services and medical attention. In African Americans, with the overall population, Black Women with low income are considered high risk. Prior research has indicated: Various explanations have been proposed for such ethnic discrepancies in use of, and satisfaction with, health and mental health services. Economic disparity has been a primary explanation, in that African Americans, in comparison with the overall American population and Caucasians in particular, tend to report lower incomes and have access to fewer economic and health resources (e.g. Kiefe et al., 2000; for a review, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> El-Khoury, Mai and Mary Ann Dutton. *Ethnic Difference in Battered Women’s Formal Help-Seeking Strategies: A* (Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Psychology Vol. 10, No. 4, 383-393), 385.

*Results in Table 2 and 3:* African American women are less likely to report sexual abuse to pastors or lay leaders of a Black Church. In contrast, the majority of the participants indicated their perception that there were no pastoral leadership competently able to address the issues of sexual abuse. One participant AAW#019 indicated “Don’t know.” Another participant AAW #023 indicated “the availability of church leaders has never been announced from the pulpit.” Fifty percent were male leaders and 50% were female leaders. This data analysis presents convincing evidence that there needs to be resources available for pastors and lay leaders. The African American women were less satisfied with their pastors training level and confidentiality.

In an instance where the African American women was abused, she indicated “that not being believed was an issue.” Another responded to the survey “that she didn’t like people touching her.” Another one indicated that “she had no one she could confide in so she kept it to herself.” Nevertheless, one indicated that the pastor had assigned her to minister to a member that was experiencing problems with her daughter.”

The AAW not being believed were given the opportunity to minister to a member that was experiencing a sexual abuse problem with her daughter. Age of this AAW was between 45 and 54. Income from \$20,000 to \$40,000. She also indicated that the church was a helpful source. Leadership of a male and a female pastor. What is not told is the age when the trauma occurred.

*The results in Table 2:* Forty-eight percent of the African American Women indicated that they did not know anyone who is in need of counseling: 11% of the African American Women indicated “Yes” about knowing anyone who is in need of counseling and 41% did not respond to the question.

*The results in Table 2:* Ninety-four percent of the (African American) women in this study indicated that the church does not offer teaching or orientation on sexual abuse, and 6% of the AAW indicated that the church does offer teaching or orientation on sexual abuse

As noted on Table 3, the majority of the participants did not provide specific answers as to needed support from the pastors of the Black Churches or they failed to elaborate on the specific matters that led them not to seek church support. However one participant AAW# 011 indicated “Every conversation.” Another participant AAW#017 indicated “Education.”; another participant AAW#018 indicated “Resources”; another participant AAW#020 indicated “Workshops”: participant AAW#023 indicated “Prayer for personal health problems.” participant AAW#024 indicated “To acknowledge sexually abused women may be in the congregation as well as the perpetrators of sexual abuse, provide at least literature to address the issue and counseling.”

*The Results from Table 3:* Participants received messages that deemed “Preaching, Bible Study, and Sunday school is being ministered at their churches. However, one participant AAW#022 that was sexually abused indicated: “Have to have a relationship with the father.”

## **Pastor’s Data and Methodology**

### **Research Question # 1: What is the definition of sexual abuse?**

#### **■ Participant #001:**

“Any sexual behavior projected against or upon another without consent.”

#### **■ Participant #002:**

“Any sexual advances or acts that places the aggressor in power over the potential victim.”

■ **Participant #003:**

“Complying someone to do something sexual as in touching, looking at, or doing something against their will.”

**Research Question 2: Does your church have a support group for victims who have been sexually abused? If no, and why?**

- All three pastors responded by saying “no” with the exception of Participant #003 who indicated “There is no present need”.

**Research Question 3: Does your church have sexual education in your congregation? If no, why?**

- All three pastors responded by saying “no” with the exception of Participant #002 who indicated “In the past classes were held for our younger members.”

**Research Question 4: Are you comfortable having conversations about sexual abuse? If no, why? If yes, when was the last time you had a conversation with someone from your congregation? How often do you have conversations concerning sexual abuse?**

- Participant #001: responded to the survey, “Last time -several years ago”.
- Participant #002: responded to the survey “I am comfortable - last conversation was about eighteen months ago”.
- Participant #003: responded to the survey, “In the last 2 - 3 years”.
- All the pastors overwhelmingly expressed the desired for further resources regarding sexual abuse.

**Research Question #5: What is the annual church income?**

- Participant #001: \$50,000 and over.
- Participant #002: \$25,000 to \$50,000.
- Participant #003: \$15,000 to \$25,000

**Research Question #6: What is the church denomination?**

- Participant#001: Baptist
- Participant#002: Nondenominational
- Participant#003: Nondenominational

**Research Question #7: What is the size of membership of the church?**

- Participant #001: 600 or more
- Participant #002: 1 to 99
- Participant #003: 1 to 99

**Research Question#8: Do you have a healthy congregation? (I.e. growing spiritually)**

- All participants indicated “Yes”.

**Research Question #9: What is your level of education?**

- Participant #001: Graduate or professional degree.
- Participant #002: Graduate or professional degree.
- Participant #003: High School graduate (includes equivalency)

**Research Question #13: How does the church address leaders who demonstrates potential for sexual abuse?**

- Participant #001: clarified “Increased training and list of Christian counseling resources.”



■ Participant #002: clarified “Additional training for the church universal.”

■ Participant #003: clarified “The importance of training and conferences: another pastor clarified the need to increase training and list of counseling resources: and the third pastor clarified “additional training for the church universal.”

#### **Chapter Four: Analysis**

I began this major project with one question: Are pastors of Black Churches providing the support needed by Black Women regarding sexual abuse? My intention is to address issues of sexual abuse within the Black Church and to offer pastors and lay leaders guidance to assist congregants in breaking the cycle of sexual abuse and silence.

According to the quantitative analysis of interviewing 30 African American Women which included three pastors, there is much work to be done. Although the supportive functions of the Black Church are well documented, I argue that the role of the pastor is very limited as it relates to sexual abuse. With that being said, most of the participants (37%) tend not to discuss with pastors any personal issue that impacts their families, such as sexual abuse issues, 15% indicated that there was a need to discuss issues of sexual abuse, and 48% failed to respond to the question. Furthermore, the level of comfort in speaking with the pastor and lay people was very limited due to trust issues and confidentiality. One of the participants (AAW#026) indicated that she was told “Keep it to yourself and get over it.” Another participant (AAW#24) indicated that the “church is in denial regarding the issue of sexual abuse.” Although the church members are supportive in fellowship with each other, there is no reflection that the pastor was trained in the area of sexual abuse to support these women.

In addressing the question of “what could the church have done better?” The responses were extremely low. However, participant AAW#002 indicated that “It was not in the church.” and

participant AAW#025 expressed disappointment in her survey by indicating “that the church did not want to know her story.” Both of these participants were victims of sexual abuse. Although the abuse did not take place in the church, the church should be a place where women can turn for help.

Along those same lines, in addressing the question “Have you ever arisen a need to discuss issues of sexual abuse? Researchers have considered several explanations for Black Women not discussing sexual abuse to the church or lay people. Stephanie Crumpton in her book, *Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Culture Violence* argues that the church is a primary contributor of psychological and moral messages that influence African American women’s sense of humanity. Further, according to Black psychologist Nancy Boyd Franklin, the church is one of the first places a good number of Black Women will turn for help with intimate violence. Another plausible explanation is that although the Black Church is lauded for its social legacy of communal freedom and justice, the Black Church is not quite such a safe haven for Black female identities and bodies as it is sometimes portrayed. Crumpton’s theory of the Black Church is extremely useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of sexual abuse and the Black Church. Crumpton goes on to say that although the statistics are large in numbers, these numbers nonetheless fall short of capturing the full picture of violence against women in America because many choose not to report the violence, mostly out of fear.<sup>108</sup>

Most convincingly, data presented here indicate that ninety-four percent of the African American women in this study believe that that the church does not offer teaching or orientation on sexual abuse while only 6% of the AAW indicated that the church does offer teaching or

---

<sup>108</sup> Crumpton, Stephanie M. *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 2.

orientation on sexual abuse. Those numbers provide critical validation for continuing this work and making resources available to fill the gap.

## **Limitations**

In light of this research this study revealed a number of limitations. First limitation, the sample size of the pastors was limited. In planning this study in completing surveys for pastors, the participants in this study were three African American female Pastors selected from a larger sample of 10 pastors. The strength in identifying the sampling of three pastors were selected by reaching across denominational lines within all regions of Philadelphia. As a result of the sample size, I was unable to get a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the pastor as it relates to the Black Church. In my view, because the topic was sensitive, I believe the experiences and perspectives of pastors for this topic should be explored with more depth to ensure appropriate responses by church leaders and congregations. Along the same note, the low response may also reflect the unwillingness to engage in questions concerning sexual abuse.

Second limitation, it would have been helpful to know why Black Women turn to other resources other than the Black Church, such as the community at large for support. Third limitation, it would have been helpful to ask the right questions: For example: It is important to ask women how they wish to be asked about sexual abuse and what would help them to disclose abuse. Also, what words and behaviors should not be used when asking about sexual abuse?

For example, a previous research indicated that personal uneasiness in talking with ministers, and feelings of shame about their behavior colored many of their participants' willingness to seek support from their ministers. Also, their findings suggested that ministers' use of shame and guilt-based interventions may negatively affect congregant willingness to seek support. For the congregants, shame and guilt may have potentially constructive functions. Indeed, these emotions when generated from within may signal a

readiness to engage in reflection, dialogue, or self-transformation. It was argued that ministers must be able to constructively work with these emotions to engage people to greater levels of reflection. As a result, when ministers behave in ways that are intended to induce shame and guilt, they may silence their congregant rather than invite them into conversation.<sup>109</sup>

Given the historical mistrust between clergy and lay leaders, especially women, an ongoing engagement and partnership will be necessary to establish trust and build better relationships.

Previous research indicates that their study led to consider factors that may deter religious adherents from pursuing ministerial support. First, the participant's evaluative and subjective beliefs about the ministers' character (e.g. Honesty, integrity, hypocrisy), competence, and availability influenced participant's decisions whether or not to seek ministerial support. Based on this assessment of ministers' level of competence, participants considered whether ministers had received formal training in particular kinds of support (e.g., psychological financial counseling). Second, the minister's level of comfort with and his or her attitudes toward certain issues (e.g., sexuality) informed congregants' willingness to seek the support of these leaders.<sup>110</sup>

Given all the facts and data provided during the course of this major project, where do we go from here? We addressed the problem of sexual abuse and misconduct as well as the inferior roles of Black Women have been subjected to in the Black Church, but how do we change this dynamic going forward? It has been stated that this way of operating in the Black Church has not only been ineffective in responding to sexual abuse of its members but a detriment to the healing process. We have to reinforce higher moral standards that not only confront the abuse and the abusers but that also assign accountability. Accountability provides an opportunity for an apology. Not to say that an apology does not mean you did something wrong, it acknowledges the wrong doing.

---

<sup>109</sup> Mathis, Jacqueline S. N'jiri Mitchell. 2007. *Uses of Ministerial Support by Africans: A Focus Group Study*. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* Vo. 772: p. 256

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

How do we help Black Women to be heard in a deeper way? That is to study the history of the Black Church as a powerful resource for understanding who we are as Black people and why we reproduce certain behaviors that can be contributing factors. Most important, the relationship between the Black Church, the Black Pastor and the Black Woman needs a broader conversation.

Quite honestly, this study did not result in a definitive answer to my question. First to even get pastors to support this study in completing a survey was difficult. It is crucial for me in this learning environment to be in a place of openness so that respect can flourish, if only the pastors would have had a conversation with me. Instead of taking a firm stance on this issue, pastors made excuses. One pastor stated “I am just ignorant to the fact.” I must admit, by him being truthful, made a difference in our conversation.

However, I want to point out that there still remains to be found a solution to this problem. What I am saying here, rather than blaming pastors, it would be far more productive to understand the reasons why the response level to support Black Women has been so constrained. Anecdotally, I can state that many pastors recognized that they are not trained as professional counselors, nor trained in assisting sexual abuse victims. Secondly, there is lack of funding in most Black Baptist Churches, and thirdly, there is a lack of commitment. While there is no evidence that Black pastors advocated for the support of Black Women as it relates to sexual abuse, there is evidence that pastors refuse to acknowledge that sexual abuse is happening to Black Women in their congregations. The attitude concerning sexual abuse is expressed in their character and their conversation.

Prior research in Roles of Pastor in Health Disparities Research has indicated that pastors' ability to engage as partners in research is constrained by other obligations. Time to engage in research was limited due to church responsibilities, which was further constrained if a pastor was bi-vocational (i.e. held another job in addition to church pastor). Even more important, limitations extended beyond time to authority, if their assignment as pastor was a recent, short-term or temporary assignment.<sup>111</sup>

Prior research indicated that another key barrier to participation in research can be road overload for bi-vocational pastors, whose time commitments may present difficulty in participation in outside initiatives. (Colber-Smith and Goldman 2010). Although the pastors of Black Churches have multiple roles, my findings indicate that further research is recommended based on the current position that is held in the Black Church.<sup>112</sup>

There were three congregations in this study with a total of 800 members all together. These three congregations represented a very low percentage of Philadelphia. The number of the pastor felt a need for training, workshops, and conferences.

## **Chapter Five: Summary**

### **Implications of future research and recommendations:**

Since there is a limited sample of women and limited response from pastors this study has indicated that there is a need to interview Black pastors. In other words, the inclusion of the

---

<sup>111</sup> Corbie-Smith G, Goldmon M, Isler MR, Washington C, Ammerman A, Green M, Bunton A. *Partnerships in Health Disparities Research and the Roles of Pastors of Black Churches: Potential Conflict, Synergy, and Expectations*. J Natl Med Assoc. 2010 Sep; 102 (9):823-31. doi: 10.1016/s0027-9684(15)30680-5. PMID: 20922927;

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

overall data could be questioned: since the response rate and overall number of participants was low. Future studies are encouraged to explore with more depth sexual abuse cases. Pastors should be selected from a multiple of African American denominations to establish the scope of the problem. Also, since there is a difference between Baptist Churches and other denominations, where each local Baptist church is independent, researchers should visit denominational and local church websites and local churches to learn about the nuances of the church under study.

As Lincoln and Mamiya asserts, because Baptist “denominations” are so loosely knit and local churches largely autonomous, an examination of the denominations alone is misleading insofar as a survey of Baptist activity is concerned. The pastors of very large churches, in particular, are able to build substantial power bases in their own right and thereby effect significant change in their local communities, as well as nationally. Because Baptist ministers are essentially free of accountability to a denominational hierarchy, they have often been less vulnerable to civil and economic suppression, a factor of significance in their traditional involvement in political activity and community advocacy.<sup>113</sup>

The results of this study on a broader scale with a more varied study would have been more helpful. For example, many cultural considerations play a significant impact on true statistics. As an example, Black Women survivors shield the protection of the Black men and the lack of self-care are real dynamics for Black Women.

Along the same lines, it would have been helpful to interview a younger group, especially Black Women between the ages of 18 to 35. Example, according the Department of Justice

---

<sup>113</sup> Lincoln C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 43.

Statistics: The rate of sexual violence against females declined with age. In 2005-10, sexual violence was committed against female's ages 12 to 34 at a rate of 1.5 victimizations per 1,000 compared to a rate of 1.5 ages 35 to 64. Also, more than one third of women who report being raped before 18 years also experience rape as an adult. In contrast, 81% of the AAW that were surveyed were 55 and older.

In spite of Black Pastors having multiple roles in the Black Church, I recommend that pastors and lay people have training to improve educational and increase awareness on sexual abuse. I recommend that church staff be trained on Team Building. I recommend that the church align or network with agencies within the community: For example: WOAR: Philadelphia Center against Sexual Violence: PCAR (Pennsylvania Coalition against Rape, Philadelphia Public Assistance Offices, Philadelphia Police Departments (39<sup>th</sup> District); Philadelphia School District; Philadelphia Health Department, and Philadelphia Universities. In addition, the team must align with participating residents, Civic Associations, Social Workers, and Churches. This will allow more time to cultivate holistic relationships for the community at large. The long term outcome would be to establish a Strategic Plan for the entire community.

It would seem that what emerges from this major project is sexual equality.

### **Significance of the Project**

There are several reasons why this topic is significant. First, by researching the historical framework of the Black Church and the Black Woman. Beginning with the "invisible institution" and ending with Womanist Theology it is like connecting the dots of who I was and



who I can become. I was able to examine some of the author's questions for understanding the history of Black people in a different light.

Second, by researching the data analysis gave me a broader scope for future research. For instance, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistic, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994-2010), In 2010, females nationwide experienced about 270,000 rape or sexual assault victimizations, compared to about 556,000 in 1995. African American Women between the ages of 18 to 24 are especially high risk for sexual abuse; For every Black Women who reports rape, at least 15 Black Women do not report: One in four Black girls will be sexually abused before the of 18; Thirty-five percent of Black Women of Black Women report being subjected to coercive sexual contact by the age of 18.

- Seventeen percent of Black Women experienced sexual violence other than rape by an intimate partner during their lifetime.
- More than 20 percent of Black Women are raped during their lifetimes - a higher share than among women overall.
- Black Women were two and a half times more likely to be murdered by men than their white counterparts. And, more than 9 in 10 Black female victims knew their killers.
- Black Women also experience significantly higher rates of psychological abuse - including humiliation, insults, name-calling and coercive control - than do women over all.

There are short and long term effects of sexual abuse that stem from childhood and never treated or recognize. For example: While some studies have examined the effects of (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and shame, these effects are not talked about in the Black Church. Research reveals several negative effects of shame in childhood abuse:

## Missing Gaps:

Although 37% of the African American Women were sexually abused, they did not disclose the nature and scope of the abuse allowed me to know that the topic of sexual abuse remains silent. What is most important: 37% of the African American Women who were not sexually abused raises the question of whether or not they were sexually abused. For example, in addition to asking: Have you been sexually abused, I should have asked - how do you define sexual abuse? In other words, the 26% who failed to answer the question, remained less clear if they were sexually abused or not because the question was never answered. However, the effect of sexual abuse is not a silent issue. The emotional and psychological damage is long term for some, and a death sentence for others. There are many Black Women in the Black Church leaving their silence at the altar, waiting for an answer. This can be another major project within itself. Despite the Black Church being the heart of the Black community, it has failed its Black Women in its response to support them.

Lynne Steven's work *Screening for Sexual Violence: Gaps in Research and Recommendation for Change* tells us a great deal about Sexual Violence. Can this work be generalized to helping pastors support Black Women as it relates to Sexual Abuse and the Black Church? Steven asserts that we need to develop step-by-step program models that can be used in the implementation of successful screening programs. For example, researchers, advocates, and practitioners need to work together to develop the most effective components of screening and referral programs. But above all, we need to assist girls and women in letting go of the shame and silence and isolation about their experiences of sexual violence. In short, one of the ways to do this is to no longer weigh them with the burden of finding a person to tell or a place to get

help. We need to offer comprehensive screening, referrals, and resources at the health care facilities where women already go. Screening should not be something that is only offered at certain sites or to certain women, but needs to be a clear part of all women's health care.<sup>114</sup>

Studies of Black Women living in low-income communities indicated that they are considered at high risk of being sexually abused, this research has proven to be true. It is not clear, however, that this conclusion applies to the Black Women in this study because of the limited number of participants. However, the major cause of poverty is unemployment, broken families, lack of education, no support from families, and loss of jobs in the community. In order to make this point, we need to have a conversation openly and honest about the effects of sexual abuse in our communities: Even more important, pastors need to understand that sexual abuse does not only affect the individual, sexual abuse impacts an entire community. For instance, according to PCAR (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape): How are poverty and sexual violence related?<sup>115</sup>

The Connection between Poverty and Sexual Violence Research shows an undeniable, complex, and often cyclical connection between poverty and sexual violence. People living in poverty and lacking economic power and resources are at greater risk for sexual violence. Persons with a household income under \$7,500 are twice as likely as the general population to be sexual assault victims (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996). For thousands of women, a lack of economic resources has devastating consequences on their abilities to alter their environments or

---

<sup>114</sup> Lynne Stevens, *Screening for Sexual Violence: Gaps in Research and Recommendations for Change*. (December 2007) VAWnet: The National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women. [www.vanet.org](http://www.vanet.org)

<sup>115</sup> PCAR. The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. [www.pcar.org](http://www.pcar.org).

to live in safety, particularly if they have dependent children (Browne, Salomon, Bassuk, Dawson, & Huntington, 2004).<sup>116</sup>

- Sexual violence can increase the likelihood that the victim will become homeless, develop mental or physical illnesses, use/abuse substances, and be put in situations where their own emotional well-being becomes secondary to basic survival. Multiple victimizations put women at greater risk for developing harmful coping mechanisms, which can in turn contribute to their risk of becoming poor. Bassuk, Melnick, and Browne (1998) state that traumatic experiences such as sexual violence Poverty and Sexual Violence.<sup>117</sup>
- Sexual Violence can Undermine Employment “If someone decides to go through the legal process, they’re going to miss work. Pennsylvania is an employment-at-will state. Every time they miss work, they risk losing their jobs. If they’re only making minimum wage to begin with, they can’t afford to miss a day of work. If you get fired and try to find another job, the first question 14 Poverty and Sexual Violence: Building Prevention and Intervention Responses is ‘why did you leave your last job.’ If you tell them you were raped, they might not want to risk hiring you because of the stigma—‘she’s gonna cause trouble’ type of mentality.”<sup>118</sup>
- Marginalized Housing and Homelessness Amplify Risk for Sexual Abuse Victim:

“One survivor was sexually assaulted by her brothers over and over again. She couldn’t find housing where they couldn’t get to her. The apartments are owned by slumlords. You’re lucky if you have working locks on your doors. There

---

<sup>116</sup> Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) [www.pcar.org](http://www.pcar.org) p. 9

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 18

aren't any safe shelters for sexual violence victims around. She had nowhere to go."<sup>119</sup>

As a result, while not everyone living in poverty is homeless, many are a breath away from losing shelter and security. Additionally, some victims/survivors-including, teens, battered women, people with disabilities, elders, immigrants and others-are dependent on their perpetrators<sup>120</sup> for basic needs, including the roof over their heads. Escaping violence may mean losing one's shelter.

### **Conclusion:**

People must come to understand that sexual abuse is not about sex, it is about power. And power is taken from Black Women when society fails to believe them or listen to their story. Sometimes, the church can be judgmental. The lack of demonstrated care and concern may have been at times unintended, but still, that needs to change. In short, a belief that all Black Women "asked to be raped because of their seductive behavior is a myth." That is why it is important to name it for what it is "a pessimistic behavior" that was developed from the outcome of being sexually abused. Women do not choose to be permissive and Black Women were not born like that.

Personally, I discovered that this journey was not about me. I have learned some things about myself that I never knew. I found out that whatever age the trauma occurred in my life, is where I became stuck. I never knew I was experiencing arrested development. All I knew was that

---

<sup>119</sup> Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) [www.pcar.org](http://www.pcar.org) p.14

<sup>120</sup> Eugene, Toinette M. and James Newton Poling. *Balm for Gilead: Pastoral Care for African American Families Experiencing Abuse* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 70. A perpetrator can be anyone who has the power to abuse another and the protection to avoid accountability. No economic, ethnic, gender, or class group is free from the possibility of abuse.

there was “something wrong with me.” I learned that no matter what age, race, sex, or class: sexual abuse affects an entire community.

Part of my purpose for this study was to engage in conversations with scholars and Womanist Theologians to bring about solutions to a problem that existed for centuries. Having conversations through the literature review has broadened my horizon in transformative ways. In other words, I learned new ideas and concepts that previously were not part of my academic vocabulary. For example, intersectionality, double-consciousness, sexuality, shame, obliviousness, arrested development, intrapsychic development, and oppression.

The inspiration and title for this major project was born out of my own personal experience. As a Black Woman, I lived with the pain of being sexually abused for 43 years of my life struggling with my call with God, not knowing who I am and where I was going. Going into this major project assuming that I was extremely knowledgeable and well verse on the topic of sexual abuse, proved me otherwise.

Given the time of essence to complete this research the question still remains whether attention to social and racial issues by Black Churches engenders support for African American women in the area of sexual abuse.

Thus, for Black Women in America, the Black Church is usually the most viable access to the Black community. However, the struggle over Black Women in leadership positions and in the pulpit is not only a biblical issue but a deeply rooted problem in the Black Church as the patriarchy of Black men. Pastor needs to redefine their positions as leaders which includes Black Women in leadership in the Black Church. Equally important – there must be a change in the

organization structure of the Black Church which includes the church bylaws and following the Church Polity.<sup>121</sup>

What has transpired is becoming part of the Doctor of Ministry Program. This program contributed every aspect of my life to continue in ministry in reaching the most inner parts of the world. Almost two decades later I am pursuing my doctoral degree. Part of the answer to my question is that churches: like all other institutions – are encompassed by sinful human beings. Sexual abuse not only affects Black Woman, it affects an entire community, not just the victim, but the perpetrator as well. My question, how do we help Black Women to be heard? Through the telling of their stories.

### **The Story of the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42):**

When I think about the Black Church, the Black pastor, and the Black Woman: Did Jesus minister to women during his life and ministry? Did Jesus forsake them or abandon them because they were poor and uneducated. Were women considered weak because they were women? The gospel of John 4:1-42” “Jesus talks with a Samaritan Woman.” Although she had five husbands and the one she was with, was not her husband. Jesus was concerned about her spiritual, emotional and physical condition. First of all, Jesus had a conversation with the woman at the well, which was unethical at that time to speak to a woman. This woman was not only a Samaritan who was rejected by the Jews because of her race (racism), she was rejected for simply being a woman (sexism). The woman did not have a name. Although all of the logistics

---

<sup>121</sup> Maring Norman H. and Winthrop S. Hudson. *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*. Second Revised Edition: defines the meaning of Polity. The Word Polity is something, of a term of art in church circles, with a hazy meaning to those just newly encountering it. It reminds us of “politics,” which is a clue, but further explanation may be of help. In a broad sense, polity means “church organization.” It is the way we in the church order ourselves and our resources to be and do what God is calling us to. (1).

allowed her to be an outcast, Jesus broke through barriers of gender and cultural ethics to speak with her. Jesus treated this Samaritan woman of the Bible with high respect.

### **The story of The Bent-Over Woman (Luke 13:10-17):**

The effects of sexual abuse are devastating. The cost of the effects of sexual abuse in our society are astounding. I want to bring you to a story in the Bible about a Bent over Woman. A woman who went to the synagogues only to be ridiculed by the synagogue ruler.

10. On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues. 11. And a woman was there who has been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” 13. Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. 14. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” 15. The Lord answered him, You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give water? 16. Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” 17. When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.<sup>122</sup>

Luke emphasized that her condition has lasted eighteen years long. Incidentally, we will briefly note, she was crippled by a spirit and bent over for eighteen years, she was a Jewish woman, and she was considered unclean. In this story I would like to use the analogy of being sexually abused. This woman’s bent-over condition could be an image of a woman suffering from depression, oppression, shame and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). For Black Women who suffers from sexual abuse has long term affects and they remain silent and keep secrets for many years causing a crippling affect in their lives, causing them to be bent over.

---

<sup>122</sup> Lk: 13:10-17



Luke goes on to say that when Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Here comes the indignant Pastor with the church's doctrine or polity, rules that were created by the church, to avoid this woman being healed. How many times in the Black Church, rules override the congregation based on scripture?

Both stories are significant to this major project. At the center of these two stories are the framework of intersectionality, (sexism, racism, and classism). Even in the Bible there are stories that explain how gender and race complicates the life of a woman. How do we examine the systems of oppression (sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism)? To answer the question, we do that by studying the word of God. Intersectionality readings of the Biblical texts challenge the Black Church to delve deeper into the stories of the women in the Bible, where the struggles of women in that era are inflected by the context of hierarchy power in which Black Women live today.

In examining the economic disparity has been a primary concern for this major project in seeking counseling services and medical attention. In African Americans, with the overall population, Black Women with low income are considered high risk. Prior research has indicated: Various explanations have been proposed for such ethnic discrepancies in use of, and satisfaction with, health and mental health services. Economic disparity has been a primary explanation, in that African Americans, in comparison with the overall American population and Caucasians in particular, tend to report lower incomes and have access to fewer economic and

health resources (e.g., Kiefe et al., 2000; for a review, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).<sup>123</sup>

Lawless argues that the story each woman tells for me (and for herself) is a story that crafts a “self” that evolves from her earliest memories to this present moment. The telling provides a kind of recollecting of the parts of her “self,” making sense of the past, a reconstruction of what seem to be disparate parts of their being into the construction that is now the “I” of her voiced narrative.<sup>124</sup>

One of the major gaps in this major project is the Black Church not having a Pastoral Care Ministry. How can we minister to women who are broken without the proper support that is needed by the Church? How do we empower women who are sexually abused? We empower them with stories such as: The Samaritan Woman and the Well Woman - both women were seen through the eyes of Jesus and he broke barriers to reach them. As Pastors, lay leaders, we must do the same. The stories become an “I” - I am a Woman.

## **Epilogue**

### **Ar’n’t I A Woman?**

History is supposed to give people a sense of identity, a feeling for who they were, who they are, and how far they have come. It should act as a springboard for the future. One hopes that it will do this for Black women, who have been given more myth than history. The myths have put

---

<sup>123</sup> El-Khoury, Mai and Mary Ann Dutton. *Ethnic Difference in Battered Women’s Formal Help-Seeking Strategies: A* (Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Psychology Vol. 10, No. 4, 383-393), 385.

<sup>124</sup> Lawless, Elaine J. *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 6.

Black women in a position where they must, as Sojourner Truth did in 1858, prove their womanhood. Despite all that she has come through and accomplished, the American Black woman is still waiting for an affirmative answer to the plaintive question asked over a century ago: “Ar’n’t I a woman?”

Deborah Gray White - Ar’n’t I am Woman -

Female Slaves in the Plantation South - 1999

**“It is Not Your Fault At All”**

Forty Seven years ago, a great African American little Black girl was stripped and raped of her esteem. But this moment led to a great beacon of light of hope that changed the trajectory of this little Black girl’s life by creating a space for the telling of her story and offering the message that “It’s Not Your Fault At All.”

I hear all of you saying, why did this happen to me, why did my mother, my father, or my brother allowed this to happen: Why, Why, Why. It happened but “It’s Not Your Fault At All.” But there is something that I must say to all my Black Women of God who stand on the warm threshold which leads to the seed of forgiveness! While you are in the process of finding your right position with God who has brought you through that wilderness experience to the Promised Land.

“Now is the Time” to do your part and prepare yourself with all your might which requires hard work from you. You must recognize the voice of His call and move to your next destination because “It’s Not Your Fault At All.”

Let us Black Women and women of color who have been physically and emotionally abused to seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by not drinking from the cup of unforgiveness, rejection, shame and bitterness, which leads to a starving soul that only the blood of God can fill! We must not allow our creative image of God to be depressed by our physical image of who we think we are simply because of what happened ten or fifteen years ago, or perhaps one month ago. What happened to you has nothing to do of who God says you are.

“Now is the Time” to drink the living water from the well so that you can never thirst again. And I already know you have had husbands and you aren’t even married to the man you are now living with now – because it is simply “Not Your Fault At All.” (John 4:17-18)

But believe me, dear woman, “The Time is now and it is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on the mountain or in Jerusalem. For the time is coming and indeed it’s here right now – when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way, and the Father is looking for you! Do you hear me- The Father is looking for you so that he can transform your life! (John 4:4-23)

I hear you, I hear you, but are you listening – you must stop allowing Satan to blindside your future because God knows the plan he has for you, they are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and hope and I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and I will bring you home again to your own land. So are you listening? (Jeremiah 29:11).

I hear you, but are you hearing me: You must come out of the straitjacket and stop allowing the enemy to bind you to your past. You must come out of that prison mentality because “It’s Not Your Fault At All.” You must come out of that victim mentality and know that you are victorious because the evidence is here, ask me why, because you are still here today!

You can never be satisfied as long as your Black body is heavy with the spirit of heaviness and you cannot pursue your joy in your calling – as long as you hear the voices of your past telling you – you will never be nothing and you will never be accepted by no one. But you must tell those voices of your past that you have already been accepted by the beloved before God even made the world you were thought of. God loved you and chose you in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. For you are God’s masterpiece and you are made complete in Him (Ephesians 2:10)

You cannot continue to “Fake It Till You Make It”. You must remove the mask of your past and be called into action because God is calling you to the next stage of your life. You may be wondering how you get there. Your strength is in your struggle and your power is in your pain. You must allow the power of the Holy Spirit to prepare you for your destiny.

What is most important, it would be fatal for you to overlook the urgency of this moment of your life and with hope to blow off the steam because you will not be content without an awakening in your life.

No, do not return to business as usual, but travel along the King’s highway because you cannot walk this journey alone. You must trust in the Lord with all your heart and not depend on your own understanding so that He can direct your path of guidance and protection (Proverbs

3:5-6). Again and again, Women we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force because nothing can separate us from the love of God! (Romans 8:31-39)

It would be fatal for the Black Church and the cultural traditions of this world to suppress your gifts and talents by now allowing you to be who God called you to be.

As you sit here today still languished in the inner parts of your body, soul, and spirit. You must know and feel that “It’s Not Your Fault At All.” We must live in the N.O.W. moment (Nurturing Other Women) to help them reach the pinnacle of their life. How do we do that?

Now Faith is the confidence that we hope for will actually happen, it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. (Hebrew 11:1) So stop crying and wipe away those tears because weeping may endure for the night but Joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

Now is the time to stop feeling sorry for yourself.

Because “It is Not Your Fault At All.”

Now is the time to tell your story so that God can get the glory!

Because “It’s Not Your Fault At All.”

Now is the time to kill the weeds and the snakes of your past!

Because “It’s Not Your Fault At All.”

Go back and take back what Satan has stolen and do not wallow in the valley of despair and I say to you today, My Sisters, that even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, “It is still Not Your Fault At All” because you are deeply rooted and grounded in the Lord.

It Is Not Your Fault At All at the age of 10, 14, 18, 20, and even 48 years old. Healing begins by “Telling Your Story.” Now is the time to tell your story – open up that mouth and let your voice be heard. Do you hear me? Now is the time to allow God who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault (Jude 1:24).

Because It Is Not Your Fault At All

It is Not Your Fault At All

You must believe, “It Is Not Your Fault At All”

You see that little Black Girl was me!

The Gospel of John 4:7 – Jesus had a conversation with the woman at the well.

Written by Pastor Linda Moore

## Bibliography

- Albrecht, Elizabeth Soto: *Family Violence: Reclaiming a Theology of Nonviolence*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008.
- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2010.
- Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York: Random House, Inc.1970.
- Barnes, Sandra L.2006. *Whosoever Will Let Her Come: Social Activism and Gender Inclusively in the Black Church?* *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45:3. 371-387.
- Bell, Janet Dewart. *Lighting the Fires of Freedom: African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: The New Press, 2018.
- Chelsea Hale and Meghan Matt, *The Intersection of Race and Rape Viewed through the Prism of a Modern-Day Emmett Till*, American Bar Association, (July 16, 2019) [www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees).
- Cone, James H. *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church: Where have we been and where are we going?* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984.
- Corbie-Smith G, Goldmon M, Isler MR, Washington C, Ammerman A, Green M, Bunton A. *Partnerships in Health Disparities Research and the Roles of Pastors of Black Churches: Potential Conflict, Synergy, and Expectations*. *J Natl Med Assoc*. 2010 Sept; 102(9):823-31. doi: 10.1016/s0027-9684(15)30680-5. PMID: 20922927; PMCID: PMC3056456.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle' Williams. "*Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color*"[www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Mapping-tje-margins](http://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Mapping-tje-margins) DOI: 10.2307/1229309 Corpus ID: 24661098.
- Kimberle Crenshaw "The Urgency of Intersectionality" YouTube Video, TEDWomen 2016, 18:40, [www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency](http://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency).
- Crumpton, Stephanie M. *A Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Cultural Violence*. Black Religion/Womanist Talk/Social Justice. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll N.Y. Orbis Books, 1999.
- Du Bois W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1903.



- Eugene, Toinette M. and James Newton Poling. *Balm for Gilead: Pastoral Care for African American Families Experiencing Abuse*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Feiring, Candice, and Lynn S. Taska. "The Persistence of Shame Following Sexual Abuse: A Longitudinal Look at Risk and Recovery." *Child Maltreatment* 10, no. 4 (November 2005): 337–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559505276686>.
- Fortune, Marie M. *Keeping The Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*. New York: HarperOne and HarperCollins Publishers, 1987.
- Fortune, Marie M. *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983.
- Fulkerson, Mary McClintock. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Harrington, Ellen F. Janis J. Crowther and Jillian C Shipherd. *Trauma, Binge Eating, and the "Strong Black Women"* Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 2010 Vo. 78
- Heggen, Carolyn Holderread. *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993.
- Heifetz, Ronald, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky. *The Practices of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing your Organization and the World*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Jordan, Lynda Marie. *Domestic Violence in the African American Community: The Role of the Black Church*. Religious healing in Boston (15-24). MA. (2002) pluralism.org.
- Kornfeld, Margaret. *Cultivating Wholeness: A Guide to Care and Counseling in Faith Communities*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2012.
- Kroeger, Catherine Clark & Nason-Clark, Nancy. *No Place for Abuse: Biblical & Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010.
- Lawless, Elaine J. *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative*. Columbus, Missouri, 2001.
- Lewis, Jacqueline. *The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multi-Racial and Multi-Cultural Congregations*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008.

- Lincoln C. Erie, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.
- Mattis, Jacqueline S. N’jeri Mitchell. 2007. *Uses of Ministerial Support by African Americans: A Focus Group Study*. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* Vol. 77 no.2: 249-258.
- McKenzie Vashti M. *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* – Revised and Updated. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1996, 2011.
- McGuire, Danielle L. *At The Dark End Of The Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance-a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*. New York: Vintage Books, 2010.
- Mitchell, Beverly E. “*The Vocation of Fannie Lou Hamer, Civil Rights Activist.*” *American Baptist Quarterly*, 23, no. 2 (June 2004): 179-93.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=isdar&AN=ATLA0001561627&siw=ehost-live>
- Moessner, Jeanne Stevenson. *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1996.
- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women & Patriarchy*. Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1995.
- Pellauer, Mary D., Barbara Chester and Jane Boyajian. *Sexual Assault And Abuse: A Handbook for Clergy and Religious Professionals*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987.
- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) [www.pcar.org](http://www.pcar.org).
- Pew Research Center: Religious Landscape Study. Gender composition by religious group  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/gender-composition> accessed May 20, 2019
- Pinn, Anne H. and Anthony B. Pinn. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.
- Rainn Organization. <https://www.rainn.org> accessed May 20, 2019
- Stevens, L. (December 2007) *Screening for Sexual Violence: Gaps in Research and Recommendations for Change*. Harrisburg, PA: VAW net, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence/Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Accessed June 4, 2019 [www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org).

- Turman, Eboni Marshall. *Toward A Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.
- UJIMA: The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community Statistics on Black Women and Sexual Assault (October 2018) (<https://ujimacommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ujima-Womens>)
- United States. *Bureau of Justice Statistics. National Crime Victimization Survey*, Concatenated File, [United States], 1992-2016. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2019-10-31. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36834.v3>
- United States. *Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics. National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994-2010 Special Report. Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010* by Michael Planty, Ph.D., and Lynn Langton, Ph.D. Statisticians. Christopher Krebs, Ph.D., Marcus Berzofsky, Dr. P.H., and Hope Smiley-McDonald, Ph.D., RTI International March 2013/Revised 5/31/2016 [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvsv9410.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvsv9410.pdf).
- Ware, Frederick L. *African American Theology: An Introduction*. Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.
- Warnock, Raphael G. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety & Public Witness. Religion, Race and Ethnicity*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Weems, Renita J. *Just A Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible*. San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988.
- West Carolyn M. and Kalimah Johnson. *Sexual Violence in the Lives of African American Women*. [vawnet.org/.../files/2016-09/AR\\_SVAAWomenRevised.pdf](http://vawnet.org/.../files/2016-09/AR_SVAAWomenRevised.pdf) accessed May 15, 2019.
- White, Deborah Gray. *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. Revised Edition. New York. W.W. Norton & Company, 1985.
- Wiggins, Daphne C. *Righteous Content: Black Women's Perspective of Church and Faith. Religious, Race, and Ethnicity*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Williams Demetrius K. *An End to This Strife: The Politics of Gender in African American Churches*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

**Table 1****Summary of Quantitative Data from African American Women Survey**

<b>African American Woman</b>	<b>Sexually Abused</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Familial Status</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Comfortable to report Sexual abuse</b>
AAW#003	Yes	45 to 54	Divorce	\$20,000 to \$40,000	Yes
AAW#006	Yes	55 or older	Widower	\$20,000 to \$40,000	No
AAW#007	Yes	55 or older	Widower	\$20,000 to \$40,000	Yes
AAW#010	Yes	55 or older	Widower	\$50,000 and over	Yes
AAW#017	Yes	55 or older	Divorce	\$50,000 and over	Yes
AAW#020	Yes	55 or older	Widower	\$1 to \$20,000	Yes
AAW#022	Yes	35 to 44	Married	\$40,000 to \$50,000	N/A
AAW#023	Yes	55 or older	Divorce	\$20,000 to \$40,000	No
AAW#024	Yes	55 or older	Married	N/A	No

AAW#025	Yes	55 or older	Widower	\$50,000 and over	No
AAW#026	Yes	Under 25	Single	\$20,000 to \$40,000	No
AAW#001	No	55 or older	Widower	\$20,000 to \$40,000	Yes
AAW#004	No	55 or older	Single	\$50,000 and over	Yes
AAW#005	No	55 or older	Single	\$50,000 and over	Yes
AAW#008	No	45 to 54	Married	\$20,000 to \$40,000	Yes
AAW#009	No	55 or older	Divorce	\$20,000 to \$40,000	Yes
AAW#011	No	55 or older	Single	\$1 to \$20,000	Yes
AAW#012	No	55 or older	Married	\$1 to \$20,000	Yes
AAW#013	No	45 to 54	Married	\$20,000 to \$40,000	Yes
AAW#014	No	55 or older	Divorce	\$1 to \$20,000	Yes

AAW#015	No	55 or older	Married	\$40,000 to \$50,000	N/A
AAW#016	No	55 or older	Divorce	\$20,000 to \$40,000	Yes
AAW#021	No	55 or older	Widower	\$1 to \$20,000	Yes
AAW#027	No	55 or older	Single	\$20,000 to \$40,000	N/A
AAW#002	N/A	Under 25	Married	N/A	N/A
AAW#018	N/A	35 to 44	Married	\$50,000 and over	Yes
AAW#019	N/A	55 or older	Married	N/A	Don't Know

**Table 2**

**Summary of Quantitative Findings from African American Women Survey**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
Q1: How old are you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● More than half (74%) of the African American Women were 55 and older.</li><li>● 11% of the African American Women were 45 and older.</li><li>● 7% of the African American Women were 35 and older.</li><li>● 8% of the African American Women were under 25.</li></ul> <p>► (The missing gap is the actual age of occurrence).</p>
Q2: What is your familial status?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● 33% (9) of the African American Women were married.</li><li>● 26% (7) of the African American Women were widowed.</li><li>● 22% (6) of the African American women were divorced.</li><li>● 19% (5) of the African American Women were single.</li></ul>

<p>Q3: What is your income?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●19% of the African American Women were low income (\$1.00 - \$20,000) -</li> <li>●44% of the African American Women tended to be a median income, which situated them as middle class women (\$20,000 - \$40,000).</li> <li>●7% of the African American Women income (\$40,000 - \$50,000):</li> <li>●19% of the African American Women \$50,000 and over.</li> <li>●11% of the African American Women failed to disclose their income.</li> </ul>
<p>Q4: Do you have a church home?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●97% of the African American Women attended Sunday Worship Services.</li> <li>● 3% of the African American Women had no church affiliation.</li> </ul>
<p>Q5: Have you ever been sexually abused? If yes, what have been the emotional or psychological affects you have experienced as a result of this sexual abuse?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 37% of the African American Women that were sexually abused did not indicate further of any emotional or psychological effects which plays a tremendous impact on the survey and it affects this study.</li> <li>● 37% of the African American Women were not sexually abused.</li> <li>● 26% of the African American Women did not disclose any information.</li> </ul>



<p>Q6: Do you feel comfortable to report sexual abuse to the pastor or laypeople?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 81% of the African American Women indicated that they were comfortable to report sexual to pastors and lay leaders (including 5 that were sexually abused).</li> <li>● 19% of the African American Women indicated that they were not comfortable to report sexual abuse to the pastor or laypeople.</li> </ul>
<p>Q7: Is there a presence of pastoral leaders to competently address the issues of sexual abuse?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 50% were male leaders.</li> <li>● 50% were female leaders.</li> </ul> <p>The data analysis presents convincing evidence that there needs to be resources available for pastors and lay leaders.</p>
<p>Q8: Have there ever arisen a need to discuss issues of sexual abuse?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 37% of the African American Women indicated that there was no need to discuss issues of sexual abuse.</li> <li>● 15% of the African American Women indicated that there was a need to discuss issues of sexual abuse.</li> <li>● 48% of the African American Women did not respond to the question.</li> </ul>

<p>Q9: Do you know of anyone who is in need of counseling but reluctant to talk to a pastor?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●48% of the African American Women indicated “No” of knowing anyone who is in need of counseling but reluctant to talk to a pastor.</li> <li>●11% of the African American Women indicated “Yes” of knowing anyone who is in need of counseling.</li> <li>●41% of the African American Women did not respond to the question.</li> </ul>
<p>Q10: Does the church offer teaching orientation on the issue of sexual abuse?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●94% of the African American Women in this study indicated that the church does not offer teaching or orientation on sexual abuse.</li> <li>● 6% of the African American Women indicated that the church does offer teaching or orientation on sexual abuse.</li> </ul>
<p>Q11: Is the issue of sexual abuse addressed in any of the churches bylaws or church constitution?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●70% (19) of the African American Women indicated “No.”</li> <li>● 16% (4) of the African American Women indicated “Yes.”</li> <li>● 7% (2) of the African American Women indicated “Don’t know” and “Not sure.”</li> <li>● 7% (2) of the African American Women did not respond to the question.</li> </ul>

Q13: Have you perceived the church to be a helpful source? How and why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 87% of the African American Women indicated that the church has not been a helpful source.</li> <li>● 13% of the African American Women responded as the church being a helpful source. (See Table 3)</li> </ul>
Q14: What could the church have done better to be helpful to you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 30% of the African American Women indicated “answers” to the question.</li> <li>● 70% of the African American Women did not respond to the question.</li> </ul> <p>► See Table 3</p>
Q15: Do you receive support from your family? Why and why not?	► See Table 3
Q16: What message are you getting from your church experience? Example, preaching, Bible Study, liturgy, etc.	► See Table 3
Q17: How important is the church in your life?	► See Table 3
Q18: How important is God in your life?	► See Table 3
Q19: What does it mean to you to be an African American Woman in the life of the Church?	► See Table 3

**Table 3**

**Question #12: What could the church have done better to be helpful to you?**

AAW#009: Not Sexually Abused.	“Prayer, Love and fellowship.”
AAW#011: Not Sexually Abused.	“Every Conversation.”
AAW#017: Sexually Abused.	“Education”
AAW#018: Did not answer the question.	“Resources”
AAW#020: Sexually Abused.	“Workshops”
AAW#023: Sexually Abused.	“Prayer for personal health.”
AAW#024: Sexually Abused.	“To acknowledge sexually abused women may be in the congregation as well as perpetrators of sexual abuse: provide at least literature to address the issue”.

**Question #13: Have you perceived the church to be a helpful source? How and why not?**

AAW#002: Sexually Abused.	“No wasn’t in the church.”
AAW#003: Sexually Abused.	“Yes, counseling.”
AAW#009: Not Sexually Abused.	“Yes, like a family”.
AAW#011: Not Sexually Abused.	“No one wants to address the issue”.

AAW#012: Not Sexually Abused.	“Information is needed for the church to give to the members”.
AAW#013: Not Sexually Abused.	“Yes, there should be someone you can go to no matter and be safe with that person, pastor, individual ministry”.
AAW#017: Sexually Abused.	“Yes, when asked”.
AAW#018: Did not answer the question.	“Yes”
AAW#020: Sexually Abused.	“Yes, doing counseling.”
AAW#022: Sexually Abused.	“Yes”
AAW#023: Sexually Abused.	“Only one minister has contacted me about why I haven’t been to church every Sunday.”
AAW#024: Sexually Abused.	“No, they are in denial regarding the issue.”
AAW#026: Sexually Abused	“No, Don’t want to know my story.”

**Question#14: What could the church have done better to be helpful to you?**

AAW#002: Did not answer the question.	“No, wasn’t in the church.”
AAW#003: Sexually Abused.	“Follow-up.”
AAW#005: Not Sexually Abused.	“Be kinder and understanding.”

AAW#008: Not Sexually Abused.	“Fortunately, I haven’t had a need.”
AAW#009: Not Sexually Abused.	“Nothing I think of.”
AAW#017: Sexually Abused.	“Education”.
AAW#020: Sexually Abused.	“More workshops for teenagers.”
AAW#025: Sexually Abused.	“No, don’t want to know my story.”

**Question #16: What message are you getting from your church experience? Examples, Preaching, Bible Study, Liturgy, etc.**

AAW#002: Did not answer the question.	“Good.”
AAW#003: Sexually Abused.	“Preaching”
AAW#008: Not Sexually Abused.	“Bible Study and Sunday School.”
AAW#009: Not Sexually Abused.	“Growth in Christian Living.”
AAW#011: Not Sexually Abused.	“I teach it.”
AAW#013: Not Sexually Abused.	“The pastor gives sermons every Sunday.”
AAW#017: Sexually Abused.	“Healing”
AAW#018: Did not answer the question.	“Preaching, Bible Study, and various ministries.”

AAW#019: Did not answer the question.	“My church does a lot in the area of sexual abuse classes, mentorship, support and one on one counseling.”
AAW#020: Sexually Abused.	“Preaching”
AAW#022: Sexually Abused.	“Have to have a relationship with the father.”
AAW#024: Sexually Abused.	“None”
AAW#026: Sexually Abused.	“Keep it to yourself and get over it.”

**Question #17: How important is the church in your life?**

AAW#002: Did not answer the question.	“All”
AAW#003: Sexually Abused.	“Very”
AAW#005: Not Sexually Abused.	“Everything.”
AAW#006: Sexually Abused.	“To fellowship with my sisters and brothers mean a lot of support.”
AAW#008: Not Sexually Abused.	“Very Important, I would hope if I or my children need help, they would be there.”
AAW#009: Not Sexually Abused.	“It completes my well rounded life – I am so blessed.”
AAW#011: Not Sexually Abused.	“Very Important.”

AAW#012: Not Sexually Abused.	“Very Important.”
AAW#013: Not Sexually Abused.	“The Church is very important in my life.”
AAW#014: Not Sexually Abused.	“Very”
AAW#017: Sexually Abused.	“100 percent”

**Question #19: What does it mean to be an African American Woman in the life of the church?**

AAW#003: Sexually Abused.	“I bring culture and a very different perspective to the service.”
AAW#006: Sexually Abused.	“I have young Black men that I am raising, so therefore, I have to show them that an African American Mom, I must show that God comes first and He is all powerful and without Him I am nothing!”
AAW#007: Sexually Abused.	Did not answer the question.
AAW#010: Sexually Abused.	Did not answer the question.
AAW#017: Sexually Abused.	“Barriers, Healing, and Strength.”
AAW#020: Sexually Abused.	Did not answer the question.
AAW#022: Sexually Abused.	“I am part of the wonderful body of Christ!”



AAW#023: Sexually Abused.	<p>“I was raised in the “old” Church of God. Years ago women remained in the background in a supportive role. They could sing in the choir but could not preach from the pulpit. Women could cook and sell dinners for church fundraising. I have now seen how the church has evolved letting women take a more dominant role. Women can now sit with Church leaders on the podium. Women can now be the speaker for Sunday morning service. Women can lead the altar call.”</p>
AAW#024: Sexually Abused.	<p>“Not sure what is meant by this question.”</p>
AAW#025: Sexually Abused.	<p>“I am supportive of the work of the church as it supplies teaching and preaching based on the Word of God as presented by the Bible.”</p>
AAW#026: Sexually Abused.	<p>“I see myself in the younger kids at the church and I hope I can learn something from the older ladies in my church.”</p>
AAW#001: Not Sexually Abused.	<p>Did not answer the question.</p>
AAW#004: Not Sexually Abused.	<p>Did not answer the question.</p>
AAW#005: Not Sexually Abused.	<p>“I find African American Women are not easy to get along with.”</p>
AAW#008: Not Sexually Abused.	<p>“To show my girl how it should be.”</p>

AAW#009: Not Sexually Abused.	“Because I was raised in the same church from birth, it has always been the center of my life. I have always been very close to the membership. Yes I love my church – no it’s not like it used to be due to so many of my members/friends/family having passed. But we have each other. Very supportive – like I said – I am truly blessed.”
AAW#011: Not Sexually Abused.	“I love it.”
AAW#012: Not Sexually Abused.	“To share with each other our issues.”
AAW#013: Not Sexually Abused.	“It means to me I am wonderful and made whole.”
AAW#014: Not Sexually Abused.	“Mean a lot.”
AAW#015: Not Sexually Abused.	Did not answer the question.
AAW#016: Not Sexually Abused.	Did not answer the question.
AAW#002: Did not answer the question.	“Don’t Understand.”
AAW#018: Did not answer the question.	“I believe women are the backbone of the church.”
AAW#019: Did not answer the question.	Did not answer the question.

## Appendix

1. Table 1: Summary of Quantitative Data from African American Women Survey.
2. Table 2: Summary of Quantitative Data from African American Women Survey.
3. Table 3: Summary of Quantitative Data from African American Women Survey.

#### 4. Sexual Abuse Manual for Pastors and Lay people.