I, Eleanor A. Bolar, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies.

It is entitled:
African American Clergy: Fostering Supportive Relationships with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Student’s name: Eleanor A. Bolar

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Miriam Raider-Roth, EdD
Committee member: Roger Collins, PhD
Committee member: Albert Watson, PhD
Committee member: Cheri Westmoreland, EdD
African American Clergy:
Fostering Supportive Relationships with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.)
In the Department of Educational Studies
College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services
2011
by
Eleanor A. Bolar
Bachelor of Science, Liberal Arts, University of Cincinnati, 2004
Master of Social Work, School of Social Work, University of Cincinnati, 2007
Committee Chair: Miriam B. Raider-Roth, Ed.D.
Abstract

This study investigates how ten African American clergy members fostered relationships with African American survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The research questions that guided my study investigated: 1) How do African American clergy understand the nature of their relationship with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA)? And 2) What are the types and purpose of services clergy offer survivors of CSA?

The study examined the views of clergy-participants regarding CSA and their relationship to congregant-survivors of CSA. It also examined in depth the views and behaviors of three clergy-participants who revealed to me during interviews that they were also CSA survivors, and the relationships of those three clergy-participants with congregant-survivors of CSA.

I applied grounded theory as the methodological approach for this qualitative study. The data collected revealed intrinsic categories, themes, and patterns. I observed that the clergy-survivors utilized coping methods such as prayer, and the outcome for each was that they each experienced empowerment.

The study also examines the influence of “cultural sways,” i.e. the influence of spiritual connections, on congregants who were CSA survivors.

The findings of the study revealed that the participating clergy experienced connection with CSA survivors. The themes that emerged include how clergy-participants helped congregants move beyond the pain of CSA; and how disconnection contributed to the isolation of survivors.

The study will inform future research on African American clergy and CSA survivors.
This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Elizabeth A. Gadson

&

To survivors of childhood sexual abuse
Acknowledgements

“Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare.”
(Psalm 40:5, NIV)

I thank God for his love, guidance, and promises. He strategically positioned individuals in my pathway to help accomplish his plan for my life.

Mother: My mother inspired me by her courage, intuitiveness, and determination.

Spouse and Children: I am thankful for my husband and best friend Jerone. He diligently filled in the gaps to make sure our home environment was peaceful. He never voiced one complaint concerning my demanding schedule, but provided genuine love, devotion, and support. I thank God for his patience, prayers, and love. My children have been beacons of light throughout the journey. Nicole is my daughter the visionary, Fondrea my breath of hope, and Jashua my inquisitive and charismatic son. My three children kept me focused on the words “write and graduate.” I am thankful for their love, support, prayers, and encouragement.

Family and Friends: Thank you to my siblings, family members, and sisters-in-law for their steadfast love and support. I extend my gratitude and appreciation for my family who inquired about my progress, offered words of encouragement, who prayed for the success of this journey. I thank God for my friend, Sharon Brown, who collaborated with me in prayer. Despite the demands of being a full-time graduate student, she was faithful and relentless in her pursuit to pray each morning. Thank you to my friends Jennifer Kelly, Kelly Cox, and Donna Jamar who offered their valuable time to comment on my comprehensive examination document. Thank you to my friend Lisa Lawson, who so willingly reviewed the first draft of the
dissertation. Thank you to Linda Lenzini, who is an outstanding, proficient, and supportive editor. Linda connected with me in a way that demonstrated her passion and superior editorial service. Thank you to my friends Philip Cathey, Cynthia Partridge, and Debra Wiley who attributed greatly to the peacefulness of my academic journey. Thank you to all members of my cohort who offered words of encouragement throughout the journey. I would also like to acknowledge the memory of my friend Mei Ying Minnich, who joined me in prayer, shared ideas, and provided supportive care. Thank you to fellow congregants, and other friends who inquired consistently and offered encouragement.

Advising Committee: To my chair, Dr. Miriam Raider-Roth, thank you for being such an awesome and sincere person. You have been more than an advisor; a mentor and friend. You are truly an excellent advisor! You brought a sense of trustworthiness to the committee meetings. Thank you so much for demonstrating great leadership, friendship, and genuineness. To my committee member, Dr. Roger Collins, thank you for being truly one of a kind and the cornerstone of the committee. Dr. Collins, you brought clarity, comfort, and peace to our meetings. Thank you for your friendship and strength of character. To my committee member, Dr. Albert Watson, thank you for being cheerful, inquisitive, and genuine. Dr. Watson, you brought a sense of empowerment to the committee, joyfulness, and a quiet peace. Thank you for your friendship and wisdom. To my committee member, Dr. Cheri Westmoreland, thank you for being a calm visionary and coach. Dr. Westmoreland, you brought to the committee a quiet strength and passion for the finish line. Thank you for your friendship and encouragement.
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
Chapter 2: Literature Review 7
Chapter 3: Research Methods 33
Chapter 4: Clergy: African American Clergy Letters to CSA Survivors 45
Chapter 5: “I Survived”: Clergy Survivors of CSA 58
Chapter 6: Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) in Spiritual Connections 77
Chapter 7: The Cultural Sway 90
Chapter 8: Connections 108
Chapter 9: Disconnections 129
Chapter 10: Discussion 143
References 158
Appendices 167
Appendix A: Letter of Support 167
Appendix B: Letter of Consent 169
Appendix C: Interview Questions 174
Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer 175
Appendix E: Email Notification 176
Appendix F: Telephone Script 177
Chapter 1

The purpose of this research study was to examine how African American clergy understand the nature of their relationship with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). In addition, this study examined the types and purpose of services clergy offered survivors of CSA. Researchers have considered “black churches as one of the few stable and coherent institutions to emerge from slavery. There is this symbiosis between the black family and the church which makes for mutual reinforcement and creates for most black families their initial or primary identity” (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1999, pps. 7, 402). Lincoln and Mamiya (1999) highlight the fact that African American families tend to connect with the church, and view it as an institution that offers consistency. Congregants see clergy as representatives of the church. Specifically, congregants rely on clergy for leadership and direction (Mitchem, 2007). This introductory chapter will describe the problem statement and research questions that guide this study. In addition, it discusses my positionality and a plan of the dissertation.

Problem Statement

While a vast field of research on CSA itself currently exists, few scholars have focused on understanding the nature of the relationships of African American clergy with adult survivors of CSA. Clergy may have the chance to get involved, since congregants may present to mental health professionals and clergy with trajectories that disclose a history of childhood sexual abuse. This study focuses on how the clergy-survivor relationship can be understood in a way that positively affects the experiences of African American CSA survivors. It is important as it relates to this study to consider survivors that connect to churches and their clergy and the
potential influence that clergy have by virtue of their position and access to empower, equip, educate, engage, and affect survivors. A study conducted by Pargament et al. (2004) confirms the significance of religion/spirituality for a group comprised of HIV positive African American women. They discussed “positive and negative religious coping” (p. 1201) in the following way:

Positive religious coping methods rest on a secure relationship with God, a belief in a larger, benevolent purpose to life, and a sense of connectedness with a religious community. Negative religious coping methods reflect a religious struggle that grows out of a more tenuous relationship with God, a more ominous view of life, and a sense of disconnectedness with a religious community (p. 1201).

The studies consistently revealed the positive impact of spirituality when individuals are experiencing distress (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In addition, research shows that:

Physical health is positively related to frequency of attendance at religious services, which may be related to better health leading to increased ability to attend services. Spiritual belief in a loving, higher power and a positive world-view are associated with better health… (Campbell, Yoon, and Johnstone, 2010, p. 3).

In view of the widespread empirical research on the role of religion and spirituality in individuals’ health outcomes, it is not surprising that individuals, who are suffering, such as CSA survivors, seek out clergy for spiritual support. The leader of the church is usually sought out and is pivotal to recovery of individuals who value spirituality and/or religiousness. Schafranske (1997) found that “religion appears to be a significant cultural institution, providing meaning, affiliation, and support for many individuals” (p. 150). The church is viewed by religious individuals as a place of safety. In view of safety networks, the church as a social institution
should be equipped to meet the criteria of “…a network of people who help you make it through the scary and bewildering changes involved in healing” (Davis, 1990 p. 35).

The clergy are oftentimes viewed as the medium that helps people connect to God. They have the potential to be the change agents for CSA survivors so that they can experience success and healing in a trusting, supportive, and safe environment. It is incumbent on clergy to make sure they understand the nature of their relationships with CSA survivors, while simultaneously properly preparing the church with the components that offer support and that can sustain a population of such individuals.

I seek to investigate how clergy in the Midwest understand the nature of their relationships with CSA survivors. Nuances of understanding can help to clarify and/or convey awareness to clergy worldwide of what CSA survivors need and desire. Clergy can then tailor their actions and provide services and curriculum to meet the needs of that population. Curriculum that is designed to disseminate tools of empowerment for CSA survivors and other supportive services sends a message from the clergy to the CSA community that the church is responsive to their needs and that clergy understand the call for tailored programs and services that may encourage healing and recovery for the CSA population. If survivors view the clergy’s response in a positive way, it results in a stronger connection between clergy and survivor. The survivors who have not come forward can be encouraged by this act of responsiveness, and begin to come forward rather than suffer alone. The affirmative interaction may help to eliminate shame and/or isolation factors that exist among the CSA population. Davis (1990) speaks to survivors concerning isolation and accepting support in the following way:
Many survivors are severely isolated. As a child you may have been prevented from making friends outside the family and as an adult you may still suffer from a lack of closeness with people. After a lifetime of betrayals and separation from others, it is hard to develop trusting relationships, but reaching out and asking for help is essential to healing. You already suffered the abuse alone. You don’t have to heal in the same lonely isolation (p. 35).

**Research Questions**

The research questions that guide this study are:

- How do African American clergy understand the nature of their relationship with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?
- What are the types and purpose of services clergy offer survivors of CSA?

**My Positionality**

My interest in CSA survivors begins with an inherent compassion for defenseless children and suffering adults. Over the years, I have read articles and books where survivors describe the horrific experiences of childhood sexual abuse. I also know from personal experience that the deeply rooted pain, suffering, and familial disconnection is immeasurably understood when the victim is someone you love. When CSA struck my family, the pain became personal. I hurt; therefore, the joint experience was between me and the victim. My hurt, surprise, and anger were beyond description; the violation deeply felt. Upon exposure of the abuse, the family’s disconnection was hurtful, isolating, and unjust. I can attest, however, that positive outcomes are possible. The family members that supported the victim joined hands to embrace, nurture, and help the victim. The disconnection, concurrently with supportive
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

connecting relationships, presented opportunities to move successfully through the stages of the healing process. Adams & Bukowsky’s (2007) findings correspond with my personal experience that for CSA survivors, supportive care is a central component to healing. As I embraced and experienced the hurt of the CSA survivor, my role became one of a compassionate listener, advocate for justice, encourager, and source of strength for the survivor and for other family members. My inquisitiveness and passion for inquiry regarding CSA survivors extends beyond reading and intellectual study because of my familial experience with this phenomenon. Additionally, the varying roles of social worker, academic, and clergy present the opportunity to further develop community resources, relationship-based treatment solutions, and research efforts to benefit the population of CSA survivors and others who suffer from trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health difficulties.

The plan of dissertation

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature and the theoretical frameworks that were the lenses for conducting this research study: Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), and Religion and Spirituality. Chapter 3 describes research methods employed for this study. Chapter 4 contains letters sent by members of the clergy to CSA survivors. Chapter 5 discusses the theme of “I survived,” and focuses on clergy who tell their CSA survival stories. In this chapter they describe how, out of their traumatic experiences, they came to understand the nature of their relationship with CSA survivors. The title of Chapter 6 is Relational Cultural Theory in Spiritual Connections. Chapter 7 is entitled “Cultural Sway.” The chapter discusses the sways, or cultural influences that clergy describe as occurring in their congregations. The sways are the main themes in the chapter, with various sub-themes. Chapter 8 presents the clergy’s perceptions of
the survivors through connections. Chapter 9 discusses the disconnections that occurred in the environment of the church. The final chapter, Chapter 10, presents the discussion, limitations, implications, validity, and recommendations of the study. Included in the final chapter are the visions of the clergy who were studied.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

The African American Church and Clergy

This literature review discusses the position of the African American church in African American culture. The chapter begins by discussing the role of the African American church and clergy, clergy who are perpetrators of CSA, clergy as ambassadors of God, the Black church as a safe space, difficulties encountered by survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and the theoretical frameworks that guide this study.

The African American church and clergy community possess the potential to affect the clergy-survivor relationship. The church is significant to African Americans who value spirituality. As recorded by Lincoln & Mamiya (1999), “At the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century the black churches are, on the whole, still healthy and vibrant institutions” (p. 382). In unfolding the role of the church, Lincoln & Mamiya (1999) offered a depiction of the Black Church as a “spiritual refuge with a social consciousness which has at some times and places been more pronounced than other” (p. 397). The following discussion by Lincoln (1978) sheds an understanding on the loss that occurred during slavery, which is critical to understanding the significance and influence of the Black Church for African Americans:

It is evident, then, that the manner in which Negroes were captured and enslaved and inducted into the plantation regime tended to loosen all social bonds among them and to destroy the traditional basis of social cohesion….The possibility of establishing some basis for social cohesion was further reduced because of the difficulty of communication
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

among the slaves. If by chance slaves who spoke the same African language were thrown together, it was the policy on the part of the masters to separate (pps. 11, 12). Lincoln (1978) found that although relationship was severed amongst the slaves, they were rediscovered through the bond of religion: “Christian religion provided a new basis of social cohesion for African Americans,” (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1999, p. 14) contributing to a renewed sense of togetherness. This sense of togetherness occurred in the church as discussed by Lincoln & Mamiya (1999), who found that African American churches have been a leading establishment in the community. Lincoln and Mamiya continue to explain that the churches serve a religious role that makes a difference:

Through its priestly functions, the Black Church has provided comfort, nurture, and care among an outcast people, “a refuge in a hostile white world,” as Frazier described it, where they could sing, shout, laugh, and cry among those who understood and shared the pain. The weekly worship service gave them the strength to go back to their jobs to survive another day, another week (p. 272).

In the devotional service, the people received the psychological strength to endure and carry on as discussed by Lincoln and Mamiya. Today, the Black Church “remains the institutional sector in the black community,” p. 382) and through clergy-congregant relationships, the Black Church can build on what has historically been pivotal to the African American community (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1999).

It is believed that high percentages of Americans believe in God, connect faith with wellness, and express the significance of an overall religious outlook (AAPC, 2005-2009,
African Americans have high levels of religious participation, including high levels of organizational (e.g., religious service attendance, membership), nonorganizational (e.g., frequency of prayer, reading religious materials, watching religious television broadcasts), and subjective religious involvement (e.g., attitudes about the importance of religion, self-rated religiosity (p. 3).

While CSA survivors have numerous difficulties, it is critical to point out that “religious involvement has been shown to be particularly beneficial for African Americans because it is associated with positive psychological outcomes, such as higher levels of well-being and lower rates of depression and depressive symptoms” (Taylor and Chatter, 2010, p. 3).

Considering the importance of the African American Church and the value that people place on God, a strong connection between clergy and survivors can potentially be life-changing, since one’s belief system is connected to positive health, physical, emotional, and mental outcomes.

Clergy Perpetrators of CSA

In considering the influence of spirituality for clergy and congregants, I thought it critical to discuss “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse” (Pargament, Murray-Swank & Mahoney, 2008, p. 398). It is significant to point out that individuals who have been victimized by clergy may feel overwhelmed. The experience can shatter hopes of a relationship with God, clergy, and the church.
Pargament et al. (2008) discussed “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA),” (p.398) and its “negative spiritual effect on individuals’ relationships with the church and God” (p. 398). While the focus of this research study is not on “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse,” (p. 398) to overlook the occurrence of these violations would be negligent (Pargament et al., 2008). A study by Pargament et al. (2008) talked about the issue of “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA),” (p. 398) and how “even though expressions of spirituality are generally tied to health and well-being, there are times when spirituality becomes a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution” (Pargament et al., 2008, p. 398). Such is the predicament when CSA survivors experience abuse at the hands of a clergy person: the trauma then has an effect on the spiritual area of their life.

Pargament et al. 2008 (p. 398) share the compelling comments of victims who experienced abuse by clergy:

After all, life traumas affect people spiritually as well as psychologically, socially, and physically. This is clearly the case when it comes to clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA). It is not hard to find anecdotal accounts of the powerful negative spiritual effects. One survivor commented, “I don’t think I’ll ever step foot in a church again . . . I lost my religion, faith, and ability to trust adults and institutions” (Matchan, 1992, p. 8). Another remarked, “God did not protect me either. Why would God not protect a helpless little boy? It was not fair. . . Instead of welcoming and embracing [Jesus] as I want to, I really would like to knock him down. I am mad at him and his Father” (Anonymous, 1990, p. 119).
It is clear that “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse,” (p. 398) may cause disconnection for survivors. However, the research reflects that spirituality is still a powerful component to assist in recovery in many domains (Pargament et al. 2008). Fallot & Heckman (2005) report on a group of women who, in addition to having other disorders, were victims of trauma. Spiritual coping made a difference in the lives of these women. The study participants were African American, Caucasian, and other races. Fallot & Heckman’s findings “support the importance of increased attention to spirituality for women trauma survivors with co-occurring disorders. For example, levels of religious coping, both positive and negative, are high in these samples when compared to those in women in the general population” (p. 224).

The need for clergy to speak out on the subject of “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse,” (Pargament et al., 2008, p. 398) is validated by the fact that “African Americans have high levels of religious participation, including high levels of organizational religious activities (e.g., religious service attendance, membership) (Taylor and Chatter, 2010, p. 3),” which makes the church attractive to them.

Providentially, spirituality is a key factor that opens the door of connection for clergy. The clergy’s opportunity to be the catalyst that initiates change is present because “where we find trauma, we often find spirituality.” (p. 398) and if spirituality is a factor in an individual’s life, then that individual may be connected to a clergyperson and church (Pargament et al. 2008). “Empirical studies have shown that many people seek support from their faith when they face crises in living, and from 50% to 85% of various groups find their spirituality helpful in the coping process” (Pargament et al., 2008, p. 398). While people seek out support from the church, it is a fact that some people have experienced a disconnection from clergy and churches.
For CSA survivors, making a connection to one’s church and spirituality could generate negative feelings. This is particularly true for the victims that experienced “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse (CPSA),” (p. 398) sexual abuse from high-ranking church officials, or from fellow congregants (Pargament et al. 2008).

While CSA does unfortunately occur within the church, amazingly, the church remains the social institution that African American people connect to and value. The strong communal relations in African American churches seemingly influence its “spirituality” (Battle, 2006, p. 1). Despite “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse” (p. 398) spirituality can be a force of reconnection or repair for people who value it (Pargament et al., 2008). The supportive care can “buffer the effects of CSA” (Adams & Bukowsky, 2007, p. 652). A study by Alim et al. (2008) that focused on African American populations found that:

The relationship between social support and mental health has been widely studied. An individual’s ability to draw on relationships with others as a resource in times of stress is a key component of social support, which has been found to be a buffer against the development of PTSD. In this sample, use of social support was associated with both resilience and recovery at the nearly significant level. Religious service attendance may also represent an important source of social support in this population (p. 1571).

**Clergy as Ambassadors of God**

The church as a social institution undeniably provides an environment in which CSA survivors can thrive. People who value spirituality may seek out clergy who represent God as earthly ambassadors. Pargament & Saunders (2007) found that “spirituality is generally understood as the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors an individual engages in search of a
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

relationship with the sacred” (p. 904). In general, clergy are viewed as compassionate, trustworthy, and honorable individuals who are earthly ambassadors of God. It is typical for people to have high moral expectations of clergy. Hill & Armstrong (1998) define the quality of integrity for clergy who engage in pastoral counseling:

The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or broken state; material wholeness; completeness; entirety. Faith must be established in the life of the pastoral counselor in at least four areas: in community, in the use of one's spiritual gifts, in the love of mercy and the doing of justice, and in communion with God (p. 1).

From this perspective, the individual searches to connect with their inner self while emulating the character of God. Thus, the quest for integrity is a “psychological and a spiritual journey, integrating all dimensions of human personality around the most fundamental dimension, that of being made in the image and likeness of God. An inward journey that results in a changed self” (Hill and Armstrong, 1998, pps.2-3).

While the ambassador role of the clergy is most dominant and prominent (Richards and Bergin, 2000), the integrity of the clergy is undoubtedly a quality that is revered. Even as the integrity of pastoral counselors is a well-understood and desired attribute, Hill and Armstrong (1998) expand upon the meaning as a standard of conduct, distinctively the clergy’s “spiritual and emotional quest for wholeness” (Hill and Armstrong, 1998, p. 105). What sets the clergy apart from other people of integrity is the dual desire to achieve integrity as an individual, while emulating the character of God.

There is an advantage for members of the clergy or pastoral care workers to make progression toward wholeness. Clergy who embark on this search for unification with God
would certainly characterize themselves as honorable amongst the clergy community. While the “quest for integrity” (Hill & Armstrong, 1998, p. 2) applies to all clergy, Lincoln & Mamiya (1999) offer an additional viewpoint, that of African American clergy’s “ability to attract people by their charisma, ability to preach and lead, and sometimes by their moral charisma of earnestness and hard work” (p. 117).

The church as described by Lincoln & Mamiya (1999) withstood the test of time during the period of migration. According to them, “there was no evidence of a great decline in church membership in urban areas. In fact, the majority of black migrants did not abandon their churches, but continued to seek refuge, help, fellowship, and collective community efforts in the confines of the only institution they had known” (p. 117).

**The Black Church as a Safe Space**

The Black Church historically and currently plays a major role in restoring and strengthening family ties within the African American community, as well as reinforcing the norms regulating behaviors (Wortham, 2009). The influence of the Black Church as a social institution attracts people due to its ability to provide a safe space for its members (Mitchem, 2007). Gaining insight into the clergy’s understanding of their relationships with members, who are suffering, such as CSA survivors, can help us understand how these safe spaces are created. The significance of the church is undeniable when I consider the benefits that are associated with relationships in general. The study by Kia-Keating, Sorsoli & Grossman (2010), found that men within their study were faced with difficulties related to “masculinity, intimacy, emotion, alienation, and anger” (p. 1). The methods of survival for these men consisted of “safe relationships, gaining a sense of belonging, setting boundaries, controlling anger, building trust,
developing intimacy, and achieving acceptance” (Kia-Keating et al., 2010, p. 1). The survivor’s methods that Kia-Keating et al. (2010) describes that works for males will also work for all survivors. Adams & Bukowski (2007) found that the “buffering” (p. 652) power that occurs in relationships has the ability to counteract the negativity associated with CSA. The creation of safe places can occur through bonding/connecting relationships. How clergy understand the nature of their relationship with survivors is critical to recognizing what is needed to cultivate the relationship. Cloud (2003) described the connection/bonding as:

The ability to establish an emotional attachment to another person. It’s the ability to relate to another on the deepest level. Through bonding people are able to “share their deepest thoughts, dreams, and feelings with each other with no fear that they will be rejected by the other person. Bonding is one of the most basic and foundational ideas in life and the universe. God created us with a hunger for relationship—for relationship with him and with our fellow people. At our very core we are relational beings (p. 46).

Positive outcomes are possible when clergy and survivors connect in relationship. The clergy must be aware of the respect that is bestowed on them by congregants-survivors. This awareness will hopefully help clergy members to understand that they possess the potential to extend the sanctity that originates and exists in the church building in order to create a haven for survivors. These safe places are created through connecting relationships, and the clergy members must understand the elements that must be present to stimulate and produce growth in relationships. Many survivors are accustomed to coping with their pain in isolation, while at the same time, not recognizing how the traumatic experience affects their lives (Davis, 1990).
Miller and Stiver (1997) offer reasons why victims are silent:

In a family in which incest occurs, the conspiracy of silence is essential to the continuation of the incestuous relationship. The perpetrator may cajole, threaten, terrorize, or victimize the child. While some family members may be unaware of what has been happening, others may know at least “something” but maintain the secrecy and denial in order to hold on to some connection with the abuser and with one another (p. 90).

In the environment described by Miller and Stiver, the victims’ safety was violated. It is crucial that victims of CSA feel safe. Constructing a safe place includes the physical building, but even beyond the physical sanctity of the building, clergy can develop appropriate curriculum and services that can generate hope for survivors. A place of safety should have well-informed and far-reaching components designed to produce positive change in lives of the CSA survivors. Ideally, such a spiritual way of coping would be housed in a church building and set into action by a clinician qualified to serve the population of CSA survivors.

**Difficulties Encountered by Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

It is important to discuss to the difficulties that CSA survivors have endured. The significance of this discussion lies in the fact that these difficulties are now entrenched as part of their life experience. In order to understand the population of CSA survivors beyond the abuse, it is essential to examine the outcomes related to the abuse. In addition, it is useful to investigate the mechanisms that aid in recovery. The following paragraphs discuss both the difficulties and the mechanisms that can aid in recovery.
The definitions of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) vary worldwide. The American Psychological Association (APA) reports that a “prevalent feature of any abuse is the authoritative role of an adult that allows him or her to persuade or force a child to engage in sexual activity. The sexual abuse of a child involves fondling a child’s genitals, masturbation, oral-genital contact, digital penetration, and vaginal and anal intercourse” (American Psychological Association). In addition, the APA reports that noncontact abuse, such as voyeurism and child pornography, is also included in the definition of CSA.

The abuse for African Americans boys as reported by Foston (2003) and the surrounding circumstances that create these statistics are astounding. Foston (2003) reported that “one out of six boys is abused before age 16, and the rates are dramatically higher in Black areas marred by systemic poverty, broken homes, high unemployment rates and sociological problems” (p. 1). Foston also recounts the feelings of such victims:

Scared, alone, and sometimes imprisoned by shame, these young boys often suffer in silence, choosing to avoid public awareness of their victimization. There are elements of shame and powerlessness associated with male children who are victims of sexual abuse,” says Judith Adams, principal to over 600 incarcerated students at Jefferson Alternative School, a juvenile detention center in Chicago. "Because African-American boys are in an environment that applauds 'macho-ism,' they feel powerless when they are violated and they feel as though they have failed themselves by allowing something like this to happen. So many young men who haven't been exposed to anything other than abuse think it is simply a part of life (p. 1).
Issues related to CSA can be multifaceted and implications for a healthy clergy-survivors relationship are a concern for this study. The individual who has experienced childhood sexual abuse may experience the effects for a long time “… depending on the duration, prevalence, sexual penetration, timing of disclosure, age of child at the time of abuse, the severity of the abuse, and the connection to the abuser. It is common for the effects of CSA to persist into adulthood” (American Psychological Association).

It is conceivable that African Americans in varying age groups who are CSA victims and/or survivors are members of a church. Danielson et al. (2010) recommends extensive involvement by individuals who are aware of the consequences surrounding CSA to help adolescents exposed to it. Clergy in African American churches may have access to many survivors and could be the conduit that produces change not only for adolescents, but also for all who have experienced the phenomena of CSA.

A study by Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor (1993) helps to explain some of the difficulties that CSA survivors experience:

A review of 45 studies clearly demonstrated that sexually abused children had more symptoms than nonabused children, with abuse accounting for 15-45% of the variance. Fears, posttraumatic stress disorder, behavior problems, sexualized behaviors, and poor self-esteem occurred most frequently among a long list of symptoms noted, but no one symptom characterized a majority of sexually abused children. Some symptoms were specific to certain ages, and approximately one third of victims had no symptoms. Penetration, the duration and frequency of the abuse, force, the relationship of the
perpetrator to the child, and maternal support affected the degree of symptomatology (p. 164).

Kelly, Wood, Gonzalez, MacDonald & Waterman (2002) conducted a study that revealed information about men who were sexually abused by their mothers and their recovery methods. The results conveyed that “seventeen men reported mother-son incest, and these men endorsed more trauma symptoms than did other sexually abused men, even after controlling for a history of multiple perpetrators and physical abuse” (p. 425). The age range was “18 to 57, with 77% Caucasian, 16% Latino, 3% Asian, 3% Native American, and 2% African American” (Kelly et al., 2002, p. 428). Barnes, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett (2009) conducted a longitudinal study that examined recurring abuse for females 18 and under who had experienced severe abuse (p. 412). The sample consisted of “54% Caucasian, 43% African American, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian American” (p. 414). The findings also revealed:

In contrast to a group who did not experience childhood sexual abuse, sexually abused females were almost twice as likely to have been sexually and physically (re)victimized. For females who were sexually abused in childhood, subsequent perpetrators were more likely to have been non-peers (i.e., at least 4 years older) and physical (re)victimizations were more likely to have resulted in injury. Hence, childhood sexual abuse appears to place females at substantial risk for experiencing subsequent victimizations that are relatively severe as compared to victimizations reported by females who did not experience childhood abuse (p. 417).

Briere (1984) as reported by Browne & Finkelhor (1986) found that “Fifty-one percent of the sexual abuse victims, versus 34% of nonabused clients, had a history of suicide attempts.
Thirty-one percent of victims, compared to 19% of nonabused clients, exhibited a desire to hurt themselves” (p. 69). The percentages are reflective of over one hundred individuals who were not identified by race or gender. In addition, researchers report concerns related to the “function of the immune system, sexual, gynecological, and reproductive concerns, as well as urinary and gastrointestinal problems; heart disease; cancer; liver disease; obesity; headaches; generalized pain; musculoskeletal complaints; and medically unexplained conditions” (Havig, 2008, p. 20).

Researchers, also identify post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as a common outcome for survivors of CSA. Danielson et al. (2010) found by conducting a replication study that other outcomes are a factor for survivors. With data from over two hundred youth survivors, including those with PTSD and those who did not have PTSD, the statistics revealed that “risky behavior (e.g., problematic alcohol and drug use, delinquent behavior) and depression were reported as or more frequently than PTSD” (p. 1).

Researchers Zink, Klesges, Stevens, & Decker (2009) report that over one hundred CSA participants had “abuse characters of self-reported trauma, somatization, and alcohol use” (p. 1). Somatization disorders fall under a group of disorders, called somatoform disorders. These groups of disorders are viewed as “psychogenic” (Barker, 2004, p. 412). The disorder exposes the serious psychological, emotional, and physical impact that CSA may have on individuals.

Amodeo, Griffin, Fassler, Clay & Ellis (2006) conducted a study of Black and White females in nuclear families, finding that there were “no significant racial differences in the nature, severity, or aftermath of CSA,” (p. 245). A study of over one hundred Black women who were CSA survivors, showed results that are similar to other community studies on adult revictimization, West, Williams & Siegel (2000) found that “thirty percent of the participants were revictimized”
(p. 55), and that if CSA survivors had experienced “physical force,” that form of abuse “predicted subsequent revictimization” (p. 55).
Recovery

Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor (1993) pointed out that some children experienced recovery due to supportive relationships. The difficulties survivors confront are wide-ranging. However, despite traumatic occurrences, people can achieve victory and go on with life (Bonanno, 2004).

As stated earlier, Black people have high enrollment and church attendance, and they believe that religion can help them with current problems (Gallup and Lindsay, 1999; Chatter, et al 2009). Building on this belief draws Black people to church, and clergy become the primary mediators for producing change. If clergy members become cognizant of what is needed, they can build on their connection with congregants by becoming equipped and knowledgeable about creating systematic plans that induce change, and create a healing environment. They can also enlist consultants to assist in this endeavor. Safe places are found in the church building, and they include an understanding of the needs of the people served. African American churches “still remain the central institutional sector in most black communities” (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1999, p. 382). Since African Americans are drawn to churches and CSA survivors benefit from spirituality and connections, clergy can further expand on this connection by incorporating a new vision of safe places that extend beyond a physical place. This would include curriculum that has as its core the concept and value found in connecting relationships and healing from trauma. In considering the variations that may exist in relationships, the lens for this research study takes into account of Relational Cultural Theory, specifically, connection and disconnection in relationships.
Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I will discuss my theoretical frameworks. The first is relational cultural theory (RCT), and its two components, connection and disconnection. The second framework is religion and spirituality.

Relational-cultural theory (RCT)

In the seventies, five women researchers—Judith Jordan, Alexandra Kaplan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene Stiver, and Janet Surrey—met weekly to “better understand their work and experience through their relationships with one another” (West, 2005, p. 1) and to reexamine developmental psychology and clinical practice, leading to the birth of the relational cultural theory (Miller, 1976, Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver & Surrey, 1991). The theory lends itself to interpret the individual’s psychological development as it relates to connections and disconnections (Miller and Stiver, 1997).

Connection and disconnection

The authors Jean Baker Miller and Irene Stiver describe connection as “an interaction between two or more people that is mutually empathic and mutually empowering. Disconnection is an encounter that works against mutual empathy and mutual empowerment…Relationship may be composed of connections and disconnections, usually a mixture of both” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 26).

In relationships that are “growth-promoting,” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 27) the individuals in the relationships jointly experience the “feelings and thoughts” (p. 27) of the other person. When this joint understanding occurs, it is what Miller & Stiver (1997) present as “mutual empathy” (p. 29).
Miller and Stiver (1997) further expound on the components of the type of relationships that embrace empathy, with empathy being a needed quality to help people grow in relationships. Empathy is the ability of individuals to experience or imagine oneself in another’s place and to understand others’ feelings, desires, ideas, and actions. Miller and Stiver (1997) report:

“Mutual empathy is the great unsung human gift. We are all born with the possibility of engaging in it. Out of it flow mutual empowerments. It is something very different from one-way empathy; it is a joining together based on the authentic thoughts and feelings of all the participants in a relationship. Mutual empathy leads to mutual empowerment. The best way to define mutual empowerment is to say it is composed of at least five components: Zest, action, knowledge, worth, and a desire for more connection” (pps. 29, 30).

Relational cultural theory can help create understanding for the potential for healing in the clergy-CSA survivor relationship. In general, the clergy are viewed as leaders and therefore, I see them as integral to helping CSA survivors heal in a safe environment. Clergy members have the potential to create “mutually empathic and mutually empowering” (p. 26) relationships in the lives of CSA survivors. There is an urgent call for the clergy to fully and successfully demonstrate empathy to CSA survivors as described by Miller and Stiver (1997). They must be connected in the relationship in a way that reflects each experience of the other’s “feelings and thoughts” (p. 29). The connection would reveal genuine concern that is entrenched with understanding, trust, vitality, and love. The potential exists for this type of relationship to occur between African American clergy and their congregants, given that African American clergy are
considered strong influences in the community. Lincoln & Mamiya (1999) who also stated that “the church is, after all, no more and no less than the black people who comprise it, and it mirrors the imagination, the interest, and the sense of urgency of the black community it serves and symbolizes” (p. 398). The people who make up the church continue to value the members of the clergy who embody the church. Therefore, clergy members can empower congregants and create change in the community of CSA survivors through their understanding of the needs of the population. Based on my research thus far, I have not seen other scholars connect RCT with the experience of clergy and survivors of CSA. My dissertation intends to make this link explicitly.

The theory of RCT argues for the value found in connections. Another significant component of RCT is its relation to resiliency. Focusing on RCT and resiliency, Hartling (2008) found that “taking an RCT perspective might ultimately lead to defining resilience as the ability to connect, reconnect, and resist disconnection in response to hardships, adversities, trauma, and alienating social/cultural practices” (p. 6). An essential component of resiliency resides and is tangible through the relational connection of clergy members and CSA survivors. From this perspective, clergy are positioned by virtue of their role to foster the defining factors that facilitate resiliency. The mitigating resilient factor that seemed to help people with the outcomes of CSA was supportive relationships (Adams & Bukowsky, 2007). The facilitation of this magnitude and design by the community of clergy will attract not only CSA survivors who connect to churches, but other survivors and trauma victims who desire to be involved in supportive/connecting relationships.
This study will examine the influence of clergy as it relates to connection and disconnection in relationships. In RCT, connection is “an interaction between two or more people who are mutually empathic and mutually empowering” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 26). The phrase “mutual empathy” (p. 29) is described as “feelings-thoughts or thoughts-feelings—that is, thoughts together with their accompanying emotions” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 27).

Connections from the relational-cultural perspective and spirituality are interpreted similarly: “Spirituality is generally understood as the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors an individual engages in search of a relationship with the sacred” (Pargament and Saunders, 2007, p. 904). Therefore, RCT in spiritual connection means that the relationship between God and God-seekers evokes a sharing of “feelings and thoughts” that connects them in relationship, and those relationships are “mutually empathic and mutually empowering” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 26).

By applying RCT in this way, I am making a new contribution to the field.

From a relational-cultural prospective, disconnection occurs “…whenever a relationship is not mutually empathic and mutually empowering, (which means we experience disconnections often). The degree of disconnection can vary from a very minor feeling of being out of touch to major trauma and violation” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 51). Individuals who are connected to God and the church may experience a disconnection from God when something occurs in their lives that is devastating, such as CSA. Pargament et al. (2008) discusses how “CPSA” (p. 398) effects the connection with “church and God” (Pargament et al., 2008, p. 398).

It is possible that individuals who experience this type of disconnection from God may offset some traumatic occurrences and achieve successful reconnections that are “growth-promoting” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 27). The components that are embedded in relational-
cultural theory have the ability to cause growth as individuals experience “…emotional and
cognitive (feeling-thinking) movement—it is action” (p. 27) in their relationships (Miller and
Stiver, 1997). The power entrenched in this concept of action rests in the individual’s ability to
have a significant relationship. This relational understanding permits them to “engage together”
(p. 27) in their “thoughts and feelings” (p. 27). The effect of this engagement leads to five
occurrences that are elements of RCT. Those components are: “mutual empowerment is zest,
action, knowledge, worth, greater sense of connection and desire for more connections” (Miller
and Stiver, 1997, pps. 30-33). There is growth in relationships when people connect. The
“feeling of increased vitality and energy that comes from the sense of connection is the most
basic feature of growth-fostering interactions” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 31). If, in the nature
of their understanding, clergy members connect with CSA survivors, what can arise is “mutual
empathy and mutual empowerment” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 29). The clergy and survivor
are thus “joined together based on the authentic thoughts and feelings” (p. 29). RCT works on
the premise that lively feelings lead to action. The clergy-survivor connection can be the impetus
that motivates clergy to facilitate the appropriate care and service needed by CSA survivors to
feel hopeful and empowered.
Religion and Spirituality

Many African Americans put great value on having a relationship with God and connecting to a church. Pargament & Saunders (2007) present a practical definition of spirituality:

Spirituality is generally understood as the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors an individual engages in search of a relationship with the sacred; religiousness is generally defined as those spiritual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are specifically related to a formally organized and identifiable religion. Because for most persons the sacred refers to a higher power, God, or transcendent reality, spirituality and religiousness are often synonymous expressions” (p. 904).

African Americans who connect to churches use the edicts that are contained in the Holy Bible to help guide their spirituality - “thoughts, feelings, and behaviors” (Pargament and Saunders, 2007, p. 904). Religiousness or being a church member provides a way to connect with others who share one’s faith, and to embrace religious practices that are common to the congregation. However, “because for most persons the sacred refers to a higher power, God, or transcendent reality” (Pargament and Saunders, 2007, p. 904), God is seen as an intangible being. For some people, the clergy is relied on as the mortal representative of God, who acts as a mediator to hear from God and arbitrate on behalf of the people. Thus, connecting to a church is an important part of sustaining that relationship with God, and being in fellowship with other people who believe in God. People who experience varying difficulties tend to rely on their spirituality or belief system, as well as their connection to others to provide the stability needed to cope with their difficulties. For instance, Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament (2009) report that
over 80% of individuals who were involved in their study utilized “spiritual coping methods” (p. 5) as he/she dealt with ending a marriage. Laubmeier, Zakowski & Bair (2004) found the “buffering” (p. 6) role that spirituality plays for cancer patients. In addition, those patients who had high levels of spirituality had less distress, lower symptom severity and a better quality of life regardless of how life-threatening they perceived their illness to be (Laubmeier et al., p. 6).

Siegel and Schrimshaw (2002) found that:

A common theme among participants was the use of religiosity or spirituality to gain a sense of control over their lives. While participants recognized that there was no cure for AIDS and that they would likely eventually die from the disease, their religious/spiritual beliefs or practices enabled them to do something—such as praying—to lessen their feelings of helplessness. While most participants related how religious or spiritual beliefs helped them cope privately, some talked about the benefits they realized from their social interactions with others through their religious activities (p. 95).

Important commonalities among these individuals who experienced difficulties and a life-threatening illness were their reliance on spirituality and participating in “social interactions with others through their religious activities” (Siegel and Schrimshaw, 2002, p. 95). Although the shock and known outcome related to the disease seemed bleak, spirituality served to increase confidence that allowed the individuals studied to feel a measure of authority over their lives. Praying to God was a significant component of help for the individuals, with the act of prayer helping the participants to feel hopeful.

Connor, Davidson & Lee (2003) found spirituality to serve as a coping method for individuals who experienced health problems and distress. Mohr, Gillieron, Borras, Brandt, &
Huguelet (2007) interviewed over 100 patients diagnosed with schizophrenia and found that “religion was central in the lives of 45% of patients” and that “60% used religion extensively to cope with their illness” (p. 1).

Individuals who value religion as they deal with negative health reports, trauma, problems, and life in general find that spirituality is a form of religious coping that attracts them to the churches. Chatters & Jackson (2009) are researchers who “examined differences in reports of spirituality among African Americans, Caribbean Blacks (Black Caribbean’s), and non-Hispanic Whites using data from the National Survey of American Life” (p. 317). In their discussion, they report that:

10 African Americans and Black Caribbeans indicated that spirituality was very important in their lives and four out of 10 of both groups characterized themselves as being very spiritual. High levels of spirituality are certainly consistent with both historical (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990) and contemporary research (Gallup & Johnson, 2003; Taylor et al., 2004) underscoring the special significance of religion and church life, especially among African Americans. Additionally, among Black Caribbeans the high rates of reported spirituality are consistent with prior ethnographic work on the importance of spirituality within this group (Gossai & Murrell, 2000; Zane, 1999). The analyses also revealed that, for both groups, sentiments regarding the importance of spirituality in one’s life were more strongly endorsed than self-ratings of spirituality (p. 334).

Spirituality is found to be a meaningful component to the life of African Americans and Caribbean Blacks as reported by Chatters, Taylor, Bullard & Jackson (2009). In addition,
healthcare professionals who provide service to African Americans recognize the significance that spirituality plays in the life of their patients who are diagnosed with Type II diabetes. Pelzer & Miles (2005) found that:

Spirituality is deeply embedded in their rich cultural heritage. For many African Americans, spirituality is intertwined into all aspects of life, including beliefs about health and illness. Therefore, it is imperative that nurses understand the relationship between African American spirituality, health, and self-management of illness to provide culturally competent care to African Americans (p. 230).

Spirituality is a significant strength for diabetes patients. The presence of spirituality among such patients also enlightens the community of healthcare professionals demonstrating that it is necessary to incorporate spirituality when servicing African Americans. There are numerous accounts where people who experience problems, whether related to trauma, health, or other domains, will draw on religion and spirituality to serve as a framework to assist in recovery.

The significant impact of religion and spirituality can positively influence individuals who have experienced a traumatic childhood or a negative health prognosis. Embedded in many people is a high regard for religion/spirituality and an innate trust of the clergy. This way of thinking presents a door of opportunity for clergy to respond to the needs of CSA survivors. Historically, the Black Church as a social institution arbitrated on behalf of black people (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1999), and today, the tradition carries on, with the Black church having the opportunity to mediate for its people, including CSA survivors. Therefore, I seek to
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

investigate the role that religion and spirituality play in how members of the clergy understand the nature of their relationship with the CSA survivor.
Chapter 3

Research Methods

This study implemented a qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research strategies are an appropriate means to obtain understanding and perceptions of participants (Berg, 1989). For this study, open-ended interviews were selected as the form of qualitative data selected. The interviews offered the opportunity to obtain verbatim information from people regarding their experience, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2002). The open-ended interview method of research served to complement my training and background in advanced social work practice. The emphasis during the interview process focused on allowing the participants to answer questions or decline to answer questions, ask questions, and to feel comfortable in an environment of their preference. In analyzing the data, the grounded theory approach was selected.

The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board’s approval for this research was received June 2010. The protocol approval number for this research study is 10052702. The recruitment process began June 2010, and ended October 2010.

Recruitment-Purposive and Snowball Sampling

The two nonprobability sampling strategies utilized were purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling selects “information-rich and illuminative” (p. 40) cases for in depth study (Patton, 2002). Cases that are “information-rich and illuminative” (p. 40) refer to those that provide a host of information regarding the subject matter. While “nonprobabality samples offer the benefits of not requiring a list of all possible elements in a full population and the ability to access otherwise highly sensitive or difficult-to-research study
African American clergy populations;” (Berg, 2009, p. 50) purposive samples were useful to “…ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study” (Berg, 2009, p. 51). Purposive sampling worked well to tailor the study to African American clergy. Berg (2009) discussed how snowball samples are particularly popular among researchers interested in studying various classes of deviance, sensitive topics, or difficult-to-reach populations” (p. 51).

The Snowball Sampling involved receiving referrals from other people. The snowball sampling is “an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 237) and proved to be instrumental for the population of clergy. The snowball sampling provided the means to acquire the participants for the research study.

While clergy in the Midwest were a difficult group to reach, the snowball sampling technique helped me access the recruits that could truly represent my investigation. I recruited male and/or female African American clergy from various denominations in the Midwest. Additionally, if the chief clergyman or woman was not available to participate, another clergyman or clergywoman of that respective congregation could represent the leader.

The ranges of participants that I had hoped to recruit were 10-15 clergymen or clergywomen. I received two lists of contacts for potential recruits. I obtained a list of local churches and clergy via email from a clergyman as means of providing referrals for this study. A friend also advocated on my behalf by contacting a researcher to request a list of clergy. The friend received the list and forwarded it to my email. Oral referrals were given by participants, other clergy, and individuals that supported my academic efforts and were aware that I was interviewing African American clergy. Specifically, moderate numbers of over 100 referrals
were received; however, the two lists contained some duplicates. I contacted over 100 clergy, and many declined to participate. Some of the specific reasons for denying participation were: In all the years of presiding over this congregation, I never encountered anyone with this problem; no one has ever come to me with this problem; we have groups and they are designed to help with issues like that; and I can’t participate (this was a common response that was given without a reason.) The final interviews that were confirmed and conducted were an undersized sampling, approximately 10 participants.

**Interview Process**

The methodological approach that guided the interview process was a relational methodology, “which requires attention to the words, gestures, facial expressions, and body language of the interviewee, as well as attentiveness to one’s own responses, associations, and emotions” (Raider-Roth, 2005, p. 181). The relational methodological approach compliments my background in social work, where observation of behavior is critical to a successful session. This method also allowed the opportunity to receive the audio version of the interview. Raider-Roth (2005) discussed how it was necessary to ask the participants to explain terms that they used, rather than “assume a shared understanding” of the term (p. 181).

The UC Institutional Review Board recommended that a site letter of support approving entry to their facility be obtained prior to interviewing. The contents of the support letter were explained to participants. They were asked to read the letter. It was explained that by signing they were affirming that permission to enter was granted (see Appendix A for a copy of the Letter of Support). Each participant signed the site letter of support.
The next form given to participants was the Consent form. The members of the clergy were asked to read the consent form carefully and ask questions about anything they did not understand. The participants were informed that participation in this research was their choice. They were free to discontinue at any time. There were no penalties if they decided to withdraw from the study. The participants signed the consent form.

The participants were informed prior to scheduling the appointment that the interview sessions might last from 1-2 hours. The participants were told that they could split the sessions and schedule two interviews. One participant opted to take advantage of the two-session option; however, the interview was conducted and concluded during the first session.

The interviews were held at destinations chosen by participants. Nine chose to interview at their respective churches. One participant chose to interview at another church where they held meetings and other activities/events. The open-ended interviews were in-depth, face-to-face, and audio-recorded. The interview protocol consisted of twenty-one questions (see Appendix C for a copy of the questions). The open-ended interviews gave the participants the chance to respond to questions in an unrestricted manner, yielding verbatim data.

The devices used to listen to the transcripts were Microsoft Windows Media Player and Olympus DSS Player Lite. One transcript required listening directly through the recorder. The transcription tapes were downloaded into a file and stored on the computer. Prior to completion of three transcripts, it was necessary to contact participants for clarity of words. Two participants were sent an email of the question that included his or her response, and the section/word in question. The third participant was queried by telephone. In all three instances, clarity was obtained from the participants. Patton (2002) affirmed the process of making contact with the
participant as a measure to bring clarity for data that is not clear. Further, stating that “guessing the meaning of a response is unacceptable; if there is no way of following up the comments with the respondent, then those areas of vagueness and uncertainty simply become missing data” (p. 384).

The email clarifications from the participants were saved and printed. The three revisions were documented in their respective transcripts. The transcripts were assigned a study name and a numeric identification was placed on the interview transcript of each participant. The final typed transcripts were stored on the computer as completed files. All transcripts were printed to retain a manual copy.

Patton (2002) discussed how “the raw data of interviews are the actual quotations spoken by interviewees. Nothing can substitute for these data: the actual things said by real people. That’s the prize sought by the qualitative inquirer” (p. 380). The experience gained from verbatim recording, listening, seeking out clarity, and typing the transcripts served to make achievable an internal reinforcement of the data collected, and thereby achieving the valuable “prize sought by the qualitative” (p. 380) researcher (Patton, 2002).

What I gained from the open-ended interview method was an exclusive one-on-one encounter with participating clergy. Patton (2002) phrased it well: “Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents’ depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions” (p. 21). The person-to-person interaction is truly exceptional!
Participants

The objective was to seek out clergy who presided over a church. The participants chosen for this study were African American clergy from the following state: Ohio. The numeric goal sought for participation was 10-15 participants. The study yielded 10 participants, seven males, and three females.

Lincoln & Mamiya (1990) in their study of Black churches discussed how Black Christians are in the following denominations: “The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church; African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z. Church; Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC); National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC)” (p. 1). Lincoln & Mamiya (1990) state that there are Black people in White denominations, but that they consider the “seven denominations mentioned above as making up the body of the Black Church, estimating that more than 80% of all Black Christians are in the seven denominations” (p. 1). The intent of my study was to interview Black clergy in the Midwestern area, regardless of his or her religious denomination.

My research effort confirmed what Lincoln & Mamiya (1990) had stated: That the populations of African American clergy were affiliated with a number of the denominations mentioned. Specifically, the participants represented clergy from non-denominational, Baptist, and Church of God in Christ, African American Episcopal, and non-denominational / Pentecostal. There were eight lead clergy, and two who held high-ranking offices and represented the lead clergy.
Table 1 represents a demographic illustration of the clergy that participated in this research study, followed by a brief profile of each participant, beginning with Church One.
Table 1.

Midwestern Congregations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Study Demographics</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Denominations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Denominational</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of God in Christ/Pentecostal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Denominational/Pentecostal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Episcopal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

Church One: Pastor McFadden (female) has presided in current role for 4 years. The denomination is non-denomination. Church One is a predominately African American congregation.

Church Two: Pastor Brooksmith (male) has presided in current role for 4 years. The denomination is non-denominational. Church Two is a predominately African American congregation.

Church Three: Pastor Workman (male) has presided in current role for 12 years. The denomination is Baptist. Church Three is a predominately African American congregation.

Church Four: Pastor Alexander (male) has presided in current role for 7.5 years. He is the founder. The denomination is non-denominational/Pentecostal. Church Four is a predominately African American congregation.

Church Five: Co-Pastor Jacobs (female) has presided in current role for 13.5 years. She and her husband are the founders. The denomination is non-denominational/Pentecostal. Church Five is a predominately African American congregation.

Church Six: Pastor Michelson (male) has presided in current role for 5 years. The denomination is Baptist. Church Six is a predominately African American congregation.

Church Seven: Pastor Wheeler (male) has presided in current role for 3 years. The denomination is African American Episcopal. Church Seven is a predominately African American congregation.

Church Eight: Pastor Hollandale (male) has presided in current role for 7.5 years. He is the founder. The denomination is Church of God in Christ/Pentecostal. Church Eight is a predominately African American congregation.
Church Nine: Pastor Schwartz (male) has presided in current role for 10 years. The denomination is non-denominational. Church Nine is an 80% African American congregation.

Church Ten: Pastor Hooverman (female) has presided in current role for 1 year. The denomination is non-denominational. Church Ten is a predominantly African American congregation.

Grounded Theory

The data collected revealed intrinsic categories, themes, and patterns. The choice of grounded theory as an analytic methodology helps me to appreciate the value that is inherent in data collection. The Microsoft Word and Zoomerang software were used to help categorize the data. After categorizing the data using Zoomerang software, I looked for patterns in the data. The goal for coding was to allow, “An emergent set of categories and their properties which fit, work and are relevant for integrating into a theory. To achieve this goal the analyst begins with open coding, which is coding the data in every way possible” (Glaser, 1978, p. 56). There was a constant emergence of data during the day/night as I would read and reread the data. I had notepads on hand to journal data as it emerged. “The grounded theory approach is a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (Glaser, 1992, p. 16). As more emergences of data occurred, I had an overabundance of categories. In the process I began to make some comparisons, and I could see similar patterns emerging that allowed me to combine categories. I reduced and renamed the categories. The guiding questions for open coding were: “What is this data a study of?” “What category does this incident indicate?” and “What is actually happening in the data?” (Glaser, 1978, p. 56). By asking these questions the focus was
on patterns and presented an excellent approach to achieve results. This process generated pages and pages of coded data.

I experienced the freshness of data, which is discovered when applying a methodology that is “meant to build theory rather than test theory” (Patton, 2002, p. 127). The open-ended interviews produced a large quantity of data for analyzing. Selection of this method proved helpful, given that “grounded theory strives to provide researchers with analytical tools for handling masses of raw data. It seeks to help qualitative analysts consider alternative meanings of phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 127). I understood that I could not prematurely conclude the meaning of my data, but as a qualitative analyst, I had to allow the emergence of themes to occur. To achieve this, I set aside a notepad in each room of my home. This process helped me to keep track of the themes as they emerged. The “grounded theorist must be careful not to force data with his or her own problem, and keep an open mind to the emergence of the subjects’ problem” (Glaser, 1992, p. 23). I was open and cautious since I wanted my research findings to be rooted in integrity. Grounded theory can disclose results quickly therefore the process requires thoroughness before reaching a conclusion (Glaser, 1992). The preparedness and actual journaling helped to note the emergence of data, as well as to have the findings that represent the qualities as described by Patton (2002):

It is important to maintain a balance between the qualities of objectivity and sensitivity when doing analysis. Objectivity enables the researcher to have confidence that his or her finds are a reasonable, impartial representation of a problem under investigation, whereas sensitivity enables creativity and the discovery of new theory from data (p. 128).
Rather than project what the themes will be, I followed the process rooted in grounded theory, which is to allow the themes to emerge freely. The data was collected, emerging themes identified, and documentation of the categories recorded manually and typed.

Maxwell (2005) stressed, and I agree, that “reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these to your data, and analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships are important types of data analyses” (p. 96). The collection of components as described by Maxwell (2005) helps the grounded theorist to have a positive experience during the data analysis process. In addition, it helps the theorist to connect with the data, resulting in a wealth of information.
Chapter 4

African American Clergy: Letters to CSA Survivors

This chapter includes ten letters that speak to survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Due to the worldwide cases of clergy who abuse parishioners, I thought it significant to offer clergy an opportunity to have a voice on the subject of “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse” (Pargament, Murray-Swank, Mahoney, 2008, p. 398). I asked participating clergy to respond to the following interview question: “If you could send a verbal message to survivors expressing how you understand the lived reality of CSA in the church what would you say?” (See question #12 in Appendix C).

The letters represent the verbatim messages of participating clergy. Figure 1 displays the names of the clergy and identifies their churches in numerical order. To protect the identity of participants, all names are fictitious. The letters begin with Church One, Pastor McFadden, proceed to Church Two, Pastor Brooksmith, and so forth. Pastor McFadden writes her letter, and she wants survivors to know that “God loves them.”
Figure 1. African American Clergy’s Letters to CSA Survivors: Church One through Church Ten
Dear Survivors:

It is not your fault and you are loved. You are still created in God’s image. I know now this one gets to be a little bit much. Hmm… to help them know that yes, God does love them, and he did not turn his back on them in that moment when it happened. Begin to try to help them understand the sovereignty of God. By that, I mean I am not trying…because I hate churchy language. We talk in such a church language. However, to help them understand that God does not rule by force. He let us have our free-will choice, and man is free to choose to love, to sin, we are free to choose, and God will never jump in and make us. Because he wants us, just like we want people in relationship with us, to choose to love us, and not be made to love us.

Therefore, he gave man free will because he wants us to choose to love him. But the bad side of that when sin is present, is that we choose some things that are contrary to how God created us and contrary to his character.

We choose to sin, we choose to kill man, we choose to bring harm to man, we choose to steal, we choose to walk in lack of integrity, we choose to violate someone sexually. The violation happens, and it is not because God was standing there watching and said I am going to let this happen. Because of this thing of him wanting man to choose to love, that person did not choose God. They did not choose God, and I know that is a difficult one. That takes a lot of conversation and a lot of time spent together. That is not the first thing that I would say to someone.

But, one of the things, and I bring that up because one of the things I believe is people come into their faith, and they begin to mature in their faith, and they have been victims of sexual abuse. Well, if God is this wonderful God and this loving God and you are describing
him as daddy, and protector, then where was he when I was being violated. Why didn’t he come in like a protective daddy and keep me from being violated? And you can’t get clique’ and churchy or avoid that issue. If we want people to get whole (by “whole” I refer to addressing the root cause; the areas that is responsible for the behavior), we have to meet them right where they are and to deal with that one head on. That is what I talk about when I deal with the sovereignty. That is really one of the things I would say – that we recognize those questions are possibly unanswered questions. We need to dialogue about it. If not, at some point, somewhere in their faith walk they are going to hit that place.

Sincerely, Pastor McFadden

Church Two

Dear Survivors:

Abuse in the church is devastating in itself, because you would think that the church is a safe place. If a person is sexually abused inside the building, especially, a building that I am responsible, I would say that I understand what has happened to you is devastating. I understand that it may cause you to wonder why God allowed this to happen, and especially, why God allowed this to happen to you within the walls of the church. We know that we have an enemy, who is the devil, and he does war against us to destroy us. And even though believers are saved, many are still coming out of things that God is trying to train and teach them through the word of God how to live in this new kingdom, and how to love each other and how to love God.

I would pray that you would not hold this to God, and hold this against the majority of the people of God, because not everyone is like that. The individual that abused you needs help.
They have professed to be a believer, but according to the word of God, believers are not supposed to have that kind of lifestyle. This individual either is young in their faith or has issues that has never been dealt with by God. I want to encourage you to first of all forgive them, don’t hold it to your heart as if you did something wrong.

However, recognize that God loves you, he cares for you, and he will see you through this. He will cause you to be able to share it with others, so that others can be helped. Just know that you can make it. I am a living witness, that you can survive sexual abuse. You can survive it! God will take care of you.

Sincerely, Pastor Brooksmith

Church Three

Dear Survivors:

You have to forgive or the Lord will not forgive you. You have to understand that the forgiveness is not for you; it is for the other person. You will never forget. I understand. However, it does not have to be a burden to you. You know it does not have to be a boulder that you carry in your knapsack. It does not have to weigh you down and keep you depressed about it. Life goes on.

What has happened to you is considered a negative. You know I think that is what Paul was saying. He says in one situation over there in Philippians. He said listen, whatever state I am in, I learned to be content. Hey, I had to deal with racism. I know that is not sex abuse, but still it can hurt, and it is shattering. However, I am not going to let that stop me. The best thing I can do is tell you to forgive, and just think, no matter how bad your situation is guess what, it could have been a lot worse. They raped you, but they did not kill you. They did not destroy
you. Therefore, you got a chance. So maybe this might be your avenue. I know God does not
give evil, I understand that. However, through that evil act of Satan there might be an
opportunity for you to work with somebody and save somebody’s life through that way, who
knows.

Sincerely, Pastor Workman

Church Four

Dear Survivors:

   I would say that hmm that is a loaded question. It is loaded because there are a couple of
things. One I would want people to know that God is love, and there are people in the
community of faith who are here to help. There are people who are compassionate and
understanding. I would also want them to know that their life does not have to be lived in regret,
in fear, or mental bondage. That you can get beyond that and that you can find some help in the
church.

   Finally, the message that I would want them to know is that all churches are not bad
churches. I say that because even earlier today I was reading about the situation in Rome, and
the Catholic Church. Nowadays when you hear churches, usually people have a very strong
opinion of the church. Because now you have Christians who are doing suicide bombings in one
part of the world, you have Christians who are going in villages and killing folks because they
are not teaching from what they believe that should be teaching. They are teaching from the
bible, so we are killing you, we are killing everybody. We just had that in Nigeria a few months
ago where they slaughtered people for being Christians. Those type of things.
The church at large, I think as we look at it, and it just depends on where you at in the world. You can have a view of the church, and hear that word and think everything associated with it, and everybody associated with it is evil, are no-good, nobody is trying to live right. You are just as susceptible to evil or that type of misuse or abuse in the church as you are anywhere else. I believe that God called the church to be a place of love, restoration, healing, deliverance, and freedom and liberty. One of the last things Jesus said when he was here, he said Luke 4:18, he said that he proclaim the year of the Lord’s release, the year of liberty. Therefore, I believe that we can live in that freedom, but I think it is real hard to hear the name of the word church nowadays for somebody that is part of our society and not feel like a lot of anger toward it. Because you hear so many things connected with the church, but I would send them the message with the same caution that it is no different when you hear the word family.

There are many evils perpetrated in families. What I was talking about earlier in families there are rapes, molestations, and things done in families. I know adults who are dealing with issues of what daddy did to them, and what they believe that mama allowed. They are as old as you and I, and older, still dealing with those issues. Those things are very deep seated. Therefore, you have the same thing in families.

We know that just like families branch off and you have good branches in families, well the church is the same way, you have good branches, and you have bad branches even within the church. Everybody in the church ain’t of the church. You know what I am saying. Many people come in religious. That is what we ought to do we go on Sunday. However, I believe in every house [church] there is a core of people that belong to God that loves people. That is there to minister. They know there is a need and they are going to try to meet the need. They are people
who are willing to walk with you, who are not just going to church. It is not just about going to a ministry to never be heard of again.

    Really, I think because we are small [his congregation] many times it is just more personal now, it is more intimate now. However, I think in the big churches you are still going to find a group of people who are there to help you. They are there. Their life is to serve. Their life is to help people like them. That is what I feel I would say just to deal with the church, just the church at large.

Sincerely, Pastor Alexander

    Church Five

Dear Survivors:

    Well the message that I say sometimes uh…unfortunately, I have been through that myself, and I will try to let you know that you are not by yourself. You know a lot of us have kind of gone through. We are able to get through it. That is the message I send. Be encouraged because I was able to make it. The thing that I would like to say is that when I was going through I had help. Sometimes, I had to get professional help, and it was okay. It was okay. It got me through. It is nothing to be ashamed of because sometimes, and I say sometimes we are in a place that we cannot hear spiritually. We still need help. I direct people to get professional help as well.

Sincerely, Pastor Jacobs
Dear Survivors:

Today’s church in order to be effective must not continue to put its head in the sand around these issues. The church has for too long been silent about the issues. We do not talk about [sexual orientation], we do not want to talk about abusive children, and we do not want to talk about those kinds of things. We have to begin to address those issues because they create just as much brokenness as homelessness, drugs, alcohol, and these other issues. The church has to be vocal. Evil flourishes because good men do nothing.

Sincerely, Pastor Michelson

Church Seven

Dear Survivors:

Wow. I guess the fact that it is real. That thousands of people are actually victims, the sad part is not all victims are actual survivors of it. You know many of them get into destructive behaviors that take…and their pain is as harsh as it can be a testimony. It can be a testimony of victory not just for themselves but also for others. However, I think the reality for us as a community that right now it is better than when I started counseling. As pastors, we just need to take the blinders off, and deal with the fact that this does happen, and we do need to have programs in our church that address the issue.

Sincerely, Pastor Wheeler
Church Eight

Dear Survivor:

Well from a spiritual aspect, I would say that they would have to embrace all the principles of God’s word. The authority of God’s word equips us for every situation. That is what I would point them to, because me as an ambassador of Christ, I live on those principles, every day. The principles help me to deal with every situation that I deal with on a consistent basis. Therefore, I would definitely point them directly back to the word of God, and to help them to embrace every principle that he has in the word of God.

Sincerely, Pastor Hollandale

Church Nine

Dear Survivor:

My letter would say that God and the Church are not interchangeable. They are not always synonymous. They are not the same. The Church is full of people who are sick. It is a hospital and it is imperfect people, who do imperfect things. God is a perfect God. He is a God of love. He is a God of care. He is a God of grace and mercy. We have to make sure that we do not confuse it. For hurt that occur in the church, that is not God’s plan. That has to do with man. Man not following what God has set in order. We all have a free will. I think that will be the basis of my letter to them. When you have, a free will people choose to do right or they choose to do wrong. Unfortunately, in the church as anywhere, regardless of what the consequences are or whom they hurt, there are individuals who are going to choose to do wrong. Even if it is against what God has put in motion as right. Unfortunately, they make a choice to do what is wrong.

Sincerely, Pastor Schwartz
Dear Survivor:

I would say that they still have to trust God, that man is still human. I am not making up an excuse, but man can fail you. God let us know in his word that he will not fail us. We still have to walk in forgiveness. We have to get to that place. I think that when clergy has sexually abused anyone they need to sit down; a sabbatical need to take place. I am being very open and honest with you, I feel that way, and I always have. I feel that there is no place for you, because you have some sickness yourself, so how can you continue to preach and teach to people when you are sick. Because what happens is, your sickness begins to rub off on them. Whatever is in your leadership, whatever is on your pastor, whatever is on clergy, flows down to its congregation. That is biblical. That happened with Moses. Therefore, my thing is sit them down. Because a little bit of sin will contaminate the whole house. I personally feel that way. I personally feel that it is time to sit down.

We do not just forgive the clergy, forgive the leadership, and pat them on the hand, and they stay in leadership. What are we saying to the people? That is not right, and God is going to hold us accountable. Therefore, I think that a pastor should step down. I think a pastor should openly step down. Do not say well, I am human. That is what our people in the congregation are saying, so how can you say that and stay in your position. No, it is time for you to step down. It is time for you to take a sabbatical. It is time for you to stay before the Lord. I do not mean for a week or two weeks, or whatever, or move you to another church. I think that would be unfair to the people if we send you to another church.
That is where I am, honestly. When people have been abused in the church, we cannot excuse that. We cannot say, well, pastor was having a bad day or clergy was having a bad day. No. I think that even if it takes years, they need some help. They need to go and get some clinical help. Because maybe they stepped into leadership before they were ever healed. Maybe they stepped into leadership with skeletons still in the closet. Maybe they stepped into leadership and their garbage had not been sat out. Because we looked at their titles, we looked at what they have achieved in the past, and we looked at what we thought they were. It was not fair to them that we put them in places and they were not prepared. Maybe the title of the degree said, yes, but addressing the whole person, would have said no. Therefore, there need to be a deeper discernment as far as leadership.

I was a member of a church for a number of years. Before I could become a leader in the church, I went through three years of leadership training. In order to teach a class in the church, we had to go through 3 years of teacher training. I thank God for it. Those three years also allowed the leader to see a little bit more into that person’s life, the wholeness of that individual. Therefore, I think that we do not take time. We are so caught up in the titles. We say doctor so and so, bishop so and so.

I believe that God is going to have me to work with them, so that they will be totally loosed. I believe that ultimately they are going to be the women that are going to evangelize the world. First, she has to be the loosed woman. Because she has been in bondage, she has been shackled, abused, misused, and rejected. That is what I believe that God is doing with women. He has called a lot of us to work with women. However, all of our jobs are different. However, if we are hung up on big/little u’s, and I’s we will miss it. We have to realize our gifting. What
has God called us to do in this? The women are on journeys; and some of the men want to come. Most of the women have been abused, sexually. Men must stop crossing boundaries, touching their shoulders, rubbing their necks, rubbing hands on their backs, touching their arms, and stroking them, stop it, stop it. You do not realize what harm you are doing. The women want to be women of God, and they will retreat to that hurt.

Sincerely, Pastor Hooverman

**Reflections**

In the letters, Pastors McFadden, Brooksmith, Alexander, and Schwartz want to direct the survivor’s attention to God’s love. Many times, when the offense occurs in churches, individuals feel disappointed with God and the church. Pastor Schwartz attempts to address this disappointment by saying, “God and the Church are not interchangeable.” Schwartz wants to make sure that survivors understand that the clergy-offender is not God.

Pastors Workman and Hooverman focus on forgiveness. Hooverman reflects on the clergy-offender. She communicates to survivors that a sexual offense by the clergy leader is not treated lightly, and she demands an extensive leave of absence and counseling for clergy who are sexual perpetrators.

Pastor Wheeler desires that churches become vocal regarding issues such as CSA. Pastor Michelson wants churches to confront CSA and other issues that are not spoken of in the church setting. Pastor Hollandale sends the message to survivors to focus on reading and applying biblical principles as an approach to healing.
Chapter 5

“I Survived”: Clergy Survivors of CSA

The theme that emerges from the data of the study is that three of the participants are survivors of CSA. This Chapter and Chapter 6 focus on how the three clergy-survivors’ experience of CSA shaped their survivor-to-survivor understanding. In addition, the themes reveal that the clergy’s understandings were integrally tied to the distress, healing, and empowerment that evolved from the trauma of sexual abuse that occurred in their lives. The past trauma of CSA influenced their thinking, emotions, behavior, and interactions with other CSA survivors (congregants and others.) Their stories provide a compelling picture of how past trauma affected the way they viewed the dilemmas of CSA survivors with whom they counseled.

The chapter begins with Pastor Brooksmith (male) who provided, at length, the intimate details surrounding his experience with CSA. The other pastors, Jacobs (female) and Alexander (male) follow, with equally compelling narratives.

Upon meeting Pastor Brooksmith, he immediately had the ability to captivate me with his exuberant personality. The adage “you never meet a stranger,” is spoken about people who have charismatic and cheerful personalities. Pastor Brooksmith can certainly be described as such. In his presence, I felt we were long-time friends. I attributed this to not only his personality, but also our shared innate compassion for CSA survivors. It was clear that his survival caused feeling of connectedness regarding the subject of CSA. Consequently, the atmosphere was lively, warm, and engaging as he shared his story.

Pastor Brooksmith related the struggles that he encountered because of his traumatic experience of CSA. He and his wife, who is also a CSA survivor, discussed CSA with their
adult children, inquiring if they had experienced sexual abuse during childhood. To their relief the children had not experienced any CSA victimization. The Brooksmiths were overly protective parents when their children were young - not trusting relatives or people in general. Consequently, in response to the fear of CSA occurring and the trauma of their experiences, they agreed that their children would stay close to home. The couple trusted that this restriction would offer a measure of protection for their children.

It is not usual for survivors of CSA to be distrustful of authority figures, adults, and people in general. Pastor Brooksmith suffered with low self-esteem, depression, and thoughts of suicide. Finkelhor (1990) discussed some of the long-term effects, which include “depression, self-destructive behavior, anxiety, feelings of isolation and stigma, poor self-esteem, difficulty in trusting others, a tendency toward revictimization, substance abuse, and sexual maladjustment” (p. 325). Studies continue to confirm that survivors experience struggles connected to their traumatic experience. Alim et al. (2008) found that survivors could recover:

Although trauma can increase the risk for a range of psychiatric disorders, studies have consistently shown that many people are able to adapt with minimal disruption to their lives and others are eventually able to recover their baseline level of functioning after a symptomatic period (p. 1566).

Pastor Brooksmith talks about CSA and the range of difficulties he experienced. He is now vocal about the trauma, and helps other CSA survivors. When asked question #11 (What are your strengths and weaknesses in regards to your relationship with CSA survivors), he credits the experience as the precursor that enabled him to have an in-depth understanding of the internal and external world of survivors: “Strength, out of my affliction, is the starting point of
my ministry. Because of what I experienced, God has used what hurt me to help others. I am transparent, since I have performed introspection throughout the years.”

Pastor Brooksmith says that he willingly shares his trauma, since he now understands that CSA was not his fault. Over time, he reflected on behavior, thoughts, problems, and overall method of functioning. Pastor Brooksmith talks about how he asked God critical questions to help him to understand himself. Namely, Brooksmith says he discovered through his conversational prayer with God that he did not do anything to cause the episodes of CSA in his life. Therefore, he conveys with confidence that the outcome of the distress was a precursor to his ministry. By ministry, Pastor Brooksmith refers to a service.

In Brooksmith’s prayer time, he says that God made it clear that he was created for a purpose, and childhood sexual abuse was not a part of the plan for his life. Therefore, when Brooksmith says that “out of his affliction is the starting point of his ministry” he refers to the service that he began, which offers a high-school career course that is taught in the community.

Pastor Brooksmith found his purpose during his conversational prayer with God. That purpose is to help others to become conscious through the pathway course that CSA was not their fate in life, and to set them on the career pathway to discover his/her true fate.

As Pastor Brooksmith revisited the experience, he described his desperation to accept that the offenses had occurred and move on. “Many do not know how to process it [childhood sexual abuse]. If it were not for the intervention of God in our lives and insight or discernment many of us would not be where we are today.”

Brooksmith admits that sometimes people are intrinsic to helping you figure out perplexing aspects of your life and/or personality. He again credits God for giving him
discernment. Pastor Brooksmith described “discernment as having the ability to stand apart from yourself and look at what has happened to you, and then process life.”

The sensitivity that he has now is the healing strength that empowers him to connect, understand, and have relationship with other survivors:

Being a survivor and being somewhat healthy helped me to understand some of the dynamics of sexual abuse, and some of the residual effects that I experienced. Out of my testimony, I am able to help other people. Because you shared what happened to you and how you survived it, and others are able to see that [survivorship] as hope for them. Prayerfully, they will survive it as well.

Pastor Brooksmith considers himself to be “somewhat healthy” from the lingering effects of CSA. Therefore, he conveys that he now has a clearer picture of how the outcomes of sexual abuse shaped his personality. Pastor Brooksmith related his testimony, which was sharing his traumatic experience with others. The term ‘testimony’ means sharing a religious or spiritual experience with others.

Pastor Brooksmith’s survival story offers hope to other survivors that they too could survive the trauma of CSA. In African American congregations, and nationally in churches, clergy men and women are held in high esteem. Barnes (2005) states that, “…research shows that African American pastors tend to have a greater degree of authority and influence over their congregants than their White counterparts, they are expected to have greater influence over the focus and activities of their churches” (p. 971). Therefore, a clergyman sharing the traumatic experience of CSA is a significant contribution to the CSA community. The open discussion of
the subject presents the opportunity for barriers associated with the stigma and silence of CSA in churches to be confronted.

Brooksmith’s narrative clearly voices that CSA is not the victim’s fault. This awareness by Brooksmith is imperative and can help other survivors to gain understanding regarding self-blame. Grossman, Sorsoli, Keating (2006) found that victims would blame themselves for the occurrence of CSA in his or her life:

Participants’ recollections of childhood revealed that early beliefs about the abuse often took the form of self-blame. Although these notions shifted over time into more sophisticated ways of making meaning of these difficult events (such as understanding the abuser or developing a philosophical stance), the later frameworks still suggested the existence of early self-blame (p. 440).

When asked if survivors have unique needs, Pastor Brooksmith related that his unique needs were the same as other survivors. He readily agreed that survivors do have unique needs. “Self-esteem is an issue; and there are others that they need help with that are the residual effects of the abuse, sexual, relationship, and emotional issues.” Pastor Brooksmith does not discuss any different experiences of CSA among his congregants; rather he blends his survivor experience with that of other survivors. He sees the effect of this type of trauma as a synonymous phenomenon, where people tend to have similar repercussions. Pastor Brooksmith discussed the questions that he had while trying to cope with the occurrence of CSA in his life. The course of action was to have a channel of communication with God to ask questions. Pastor Brooksmith confirmed what other researchers have found: “Spirituality offered a distinctive way of understanding and dealing with life’s most disturbing problems” (Pargament and Saunders,
The resounding message Pastor Brooksmith recounts is that God is the source that he relied on for help. Questioning God is an element of spiritual coping that can lead to acceptance and recovery. O'Leary (2009) found that:

Men who have been sexually abused in childhood are more likely to have clinical diagnoses, but coping strategies may play an important part in this outcome. Seeking active assistance appears to be an important coping strategy in reframing the experience, however, the timing of this help seeking is not critical (p. 472).

Pastor Brooksmith dealt with low self-esteem, depression, and suicide ideation; however, he did not share that he had any clinical diagnoses. However, the religious coping strategy of praying to God proved to be integral to recovery. Specifically, Brooksmith speaks about the journey to recovery that circumvented suicide through “hearing from God over a period of time. As I became more aware of having a purpose and a destiny, as I learned that God loved me and I should love myself, as I grew and came to understand that it was not my fault, it was helpful to my avoiding suicide.”

As mentioned earlier, a high percentage of CSA victims attempt suicide (Brown and Finkelhor, 1986). While suicide is a phenomenon that CSA survivors face, Brooksmith talks about overcoming this hurdle as he learned his fate, accepted God’s love, and became aware that he needed to love himself. In his conversations with God, Brooksmith gained an understanding that he was not responsible for CSA occurring in his life. It is evident that Brooksmith had a need to make meaning of the victimization. The need to make meaning is described by Grossman, Sorsoli & Kia-Keating (2006) who found that “one crucial dimension of survivors’ recovery is finding a way to “make sense” of what happened to them in the past, and to make
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

some kind of meaning of the place the abuse has in their current lives” (p. 434). Brooksmith’s ability to “make sense” (p. 434) of the victimization helps him to take the steps toward recovery (Grossman et al.).

A resilient strength of Brooksmith’s that benefits other survivors is his “transparency” in interactions and relationships. He talks about males, specifically, African American males who do not discuss issues like CSA: “Unfortunately, many people and especially males, and I being a black male, an African American male in our society, we are not the ones that do a lot of talking about what has happened.” Brooksmith’s admittance concerning males supports what Kia-Keating et al., 2010 (p. 667) found:

Male survivors, however, face particular challenges in resolving the conflicting experience of their CSA histories with the tenets of masculine socialization and expectations of relational intimacy (Kia-Keating, Grossman, Sorsoli, & Epstein, 2005). In fact, a relational “chasm” exists that many male survivors feel poorly equipped to bridge” (Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, & Grossman, 2008).

In addition, Brooksmith adds, “It is very rare to find an African American male who will share with you that they have had something like that happen.” Brooksmith feels that “men are just resistant to share their hurt and the deeper the hurt, the more the resistance.” The barriers that exist for men are described by Brooksmith as resistance; however, he continues to openly discuss his survival experience with other congregant-survivors.

Pastor Brooksmith feels free to share openly with others since “one of my strengths is that CSA is something that has happened to me, and not something that I brought on myself.” He found out through prayer with God that CSA occurred but he was not responsible for its
occurrence. By sharing his traumatic history, he confronts some of the “relational chasms” (Kia-Keating et al., p. 667). As he engages other men by telling his story, this openness may encourage other African American men who are CSA survivors to tell their story.

Pastor Brooksmith describes how he is cautious, but not avoidant when entering a relationship with people, since many times the past shapes how a person accepts people in their life. He pays attention to how he enters relationships, being careful to have his defenses down as he interacts with people. The self-blame and shame of Brooksmith were evident. He readily admits the difficulty that men have in opening up. He views shame as a factor that confronts other men as well. This element of shame that men experienced was mentioned earlier by Foston (2003). Browne & Finkelhor (1986) confirmed, “Guilt and shame are other frequently observed reactions to child sexual abuse, but few studies give clear percentages…” (p. 68).

While Brooksmith does not provide a result of how many men felt shame, what is significant is that he confirms, as an African American male, feeling shame: “Unfortunately, the shame, again, feeling like it is something that I did to cause it to happen, so, it is difficult.” Pastor Brooksmith discusses his relationship with a fellow clergyman, who is an African American male and CSA survivor. At times, Brooksmith recognizes his friend is dealing with “something that speaks of low self-esteem or speaks about what happened to him.” During those times, Brooksmith will strike up a conversation about what he observes occurring with his friend. They converse about CSA, and are able to talk from a clergyman’s and survivor-to-survivor perspective. Brooksmith describes the relationship as a “camaraderie that you do not have with everyone.” Because he is an extremely exuberant and charismatic leader, Brooksmith has the ability to easily engage with his friend as well as understand the issues that other survivors face.
He successfully surpassed the hurdle of not talking about CSA to becoming a “transparent” leader in his congregation. This openness positions Brooksmith to be a trendsetter not only in his congregation, but also in the community.

Brooksmith says that an outcome of his spiritual connection with God is a love language (mentioned later) that helps him to move beyond the “guilt and shame” that often distresses survivors. Pastor Brooksmith continues to share his conversation with God. In this narrative, he speaks of God as the Holy Spirit.

No one ever taught me how to survive sexual abuse, but God. CSA affects you on many levels, physical, emotional, social, and even spiritual, because you begin to wonder why God let it happen to you. Honestly, one day in prayer, I was asking the Holy Spirit why did these things happen.

Pastor Brooksmith discusses his conversational prayer time with God. “While in prayer, it was brought back to my remembrance what had happened to me.” He explained how he had unexplainable aspects of his personality which were difficult to understand. In prayer, he was able to obtain answers regarding the unanswered facets of his personality. “God began to show me in my prayer time who I was and what happened to me.” Pargament, Koenig & Perez (2000) found:

Measures of religious coping should be grounded theoretically in a functional view of religion and the roles it plays in coping. In the past, global indicators of religiousness (e.g., frequency of prayer, congregational attendance) have been used to measure religious coping (Bahr & Harvey, 1979; Sherkat & Reed, 1992). Although this method of assessment is efficient, it leaves important questions unanswered about the functional
roles of religion in coping. It is not enough to know that an individual prays, attends church, or watches religious television. Measures of religious coping should specify how the individual is making use of religion to understand and deal with stressors. Thinking functionally should lead to stronger predictions of outcomes, easier interpretation of significant and nonsignificant results, and advances in our understanding of the ways religion expresses itself in critical life situations (p. 521).

Pastor Brooksmith had a list of questions that he says people yearn to ask God, including some that he asked of God. In his attempt to understand himself, Brooksmith asked God critical questions and obtained answers: “Why didn’t you protect me? Why did my mama abuse me? Why did my daddy abuse me? Why was this person allowed to do that to me?” He did not share the answers, partly because they were not all his questions. Rather, he blended his questions with the questions that other survivors may need to ask of God. He was profoundly moved by God’s response that the abuse was not his fault. He began a quest to understand the dynamics of being a victim of CSA, which included how to survive it. He attributes survivorship to God. “I did not go to any counseling at that time. It was all spiritual. It was God. It was my relationship with the Lord. I believe that he will always reveal to you as he prepares your heart.” While many people seek out counseling, Brooksmith says that prayer time with God helps him to cope and understand the traumatic experience of CSA. “He drew me into a place where I could learn what had happened.” Brooksmith clearly makes use of religion as means of coping and gaining understanding as discussed by Pargament, et al. (2000).
Pastor Jacobs and I met at her home. She had forgotten that we were scheduled to meet. Nevertheless, her hospitality was first-rate. As she ushered me in the door, she apologized for failing to remember the interview. Her voice was extremely soft-spoken, and her gentle, peace-loving voice filled the room. Pastor Jacobs was recorder-shy. I offered to manually transcribe the interview, but she insisted on my audio taping the interview.

While Pastor Jacobs stressed that she struggled with low self-esteem, she said that she persisted in prayer to obtain answers from God. Specifically, she sought a peaceful resolution surrounding the issue of CSA, and affirmation that she could live in harmony with her traumatic history. She communicated that she had a grave need to achieve inner peace, and credits God as the conduit who provided it. Moreover, she told me that she believed that God instructs others on how to facilitate the help and direction needed to recover from the trauma of CSA. She underwent therapy from a community source, and the assistance aided in her recovery from CSA. “I had to listen to what he [God] was instructing me to do. At times, it was listening to what the counselor was saying.” Pastor Jacobs explained to me that God urged her to listen to the counselor’s directives. Many Christians feel like Pastor Jacobs: They believe God will give others the knowledge to facilitate the care they need to get well. For instance, rather than give credence solely to a physician, they will acknowledge God as the divine healer, who gives the physician the knowledge and skill to be successful.

Pastor Jacobs found comfort in attending church and praying to God. “I attended church regularly, I took classes at church, and I was constantly in prayer.” Pastor Jacobs conveys how she understood that ultimately, no one could really show her how to successfully overcome the
inner turmoil but God. Therefore, of her conversational prayers to God, she says, “I think because God is who he is and there was really nobody to show me, God himself had to do it. I really had to stay close to God.” Pargament, Magyar-Russell & Murray-Swank (2005) discussed how “…to the religiously minded, the sacred is not illusory. It is not a means to achieve psychological and social ends devoid of spiritual value. It is not merely one part of living. It is the core of life” (p. 668). Jacobs confirms that her pursuit of God, that is, staying close, was a spiritual pathway that helped her successfully cope with the trauma of CSA.

The scriptures were her visible solution for help when feeling turmoil in her soul concerning her experience of CSA. In addition, she stated that when she had uncertainties, she found value in reading the scriptures that are in the Holy Bible. In the Christian community, the Bible is viewed as the “codebook” (Graham, 1984, p. 23) that provides spiritual direction from God.

Pastor Jacobs confirms that scripture readings provided powerful solutions during her recovery period. She describes herself during those times as “feeling low or insecure.” Pastor Jacobs found solace in the scriptures. Jacobs told me about how, when those feelings surfaced, she connected with God by pulling out her “emergency kit,” which was her scriptures. She talked about how her Bible reading was a time to hear from God. “I read those scriptures, had quiet time and sought the Lord, and listened to the Lord.” Here she sees God as a conversationalist, and one that has the ability to help her in a time of emergency to not experience “feeling low or insecure.”
The feelings that Jacobs experienced were meditated in her time with God. Meditation as described by Jacobs is confirmed by research, such as that documented by Flannelly, Galek, Ellison, and Koenig, 2010 (p. 248):

Generally, research has found that people who believe God loves, caring, forgiving, and approving have higher self-esteem (Benson and Spilka 1973; Francis et al. 2001) positive mood (Levin 2002), and life satisfaction (Kirkpatrick and Shaver 1992). On the other hand, people who believe God has punished or abandoned them tend to have lower self-esteem (Pargament et al. 1998), negative mood, and lower quality of life (Pargament et al. 1998, 2004).

Jacobs stated in our interview that she seeks out supportive care from God to help with “feeling low or insecure.” In addition, reading the biblical passages help her during the emotional and self-doubting periods.

**Pastor Alexander**

The meeting with Pastor Alexander was one that will be cherished. He, like Pastor Brooksmith, had an exuberant and charismatic personality. Interviewing Pastor Alexander was like interviewing a good friend. He was friendly, warm, professional, sincere, compassionate, and notably genuine in his interactions. I could feel his love for people as he conversed about congregants, family, and CSA survivors. While we were interviewing at his local congregation, there were a small group of people praying in an adjacent room. Pastor Alexander explained what was transpiring in the room. The atmosphere was filled with their voices as they sought God out in prayer. The prayers of his congregants seem to have a calming effect on the two of
us. During the interview, occasionally the volume of their voices would increase, boosting the atmosphere in a positive way.

Pastor Alexander discussed how he struggled within himself. Initially, in his quest to understand himself, he did not know that he was a victim of CSA. He was experiencing emotional turmoil, and felt powerless because he did not understand why he was experiencing constant turbulence. He could not figure out the problem: “I had emotionally and psychologically blocked it [CSA] out.” The distressful feelings described by Alexander are common for survivors. Feinauer, Middleton, and Hilton (2003) “analyzed survey data from 983 respondents and found that distress symptoms were very closely associated with severity of childhood sexual abuse” (Bogar and Hulse-Killacky, 2006, p. 318). Although Pastor Alexander does not discuss the severity of his experience, he does reflect on an earlier period in his life, a time when the abuse was taking place. During that time, he did not understand that he was being abused. “At the time, I did not realize that it [CSA] was a negative experience. I did not realize that it was something that was wrong.” Because of Pastor Alexander’s mindset regarding the abusive act, he could not tie the abuse to his turbulent feelings. In addition, the memories were repressed and the visual images incomprehensible. “Therefore, it [CSA] did not manifest itself initially.” Since Pastor Alexander could not associate negative feelings with the exploitation, the ordeal of CSA did not surface, until “it came out later in my young adult life.” Pastor Alexander was trying to comprehend what was wrong. He had constant disagreements when dealing with others, and could not understand the reason. “I tried to find the source of some issues and conflicts.” At this point Pastor Alexander could not figure out why he encountered friction when dealing with people. However, the friction caused the depression to intensify.
Pastor Alexander became aware of the way he would think things through, and noticed “a pattern in the way I was processing things.” In hindsight, Pastor Alexander attributed his behavior to the childhood sexual abuse, noting, and “It [CSA] kept cropping up.” However, he did not realize that he was a victim until much later. The way in which he interacted was distressful: “It was literally how I was relating to people and how people were relating to me.”

Pastor Alexander felt as if he were wearing a disguise. He was contrasting his internal feelings of discord with his mirror image. The difference in image and feelings caused him to feel as if he were “wearing a mask.” While Pastor Alexander was self-absorbed in trying to comprehend his thought processes, the masked feelings, and the way he interacted with people, his depression worsened. The depression was diagnosed as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which is a “mood disorder, characterized by many symptoms of depression, that affects some individuals during the colder, darker months of the year” (Barker, 2003, p. 384). Subsequent to the diagnosis, Pastor Alexander noticed that the depression was “not only occurring through the fall and winter months, but occurred earlier and earlier.” This was atypical and caused some distress. Therefore, he began to seek out God in prayer, his pastor, family, and at the recommendation of family sought counseling in the community. At the advice of family, Pastor Alexander sought out a physician, who prescribed anti-depressants.

Pastor Alexander was doing what others around him were directing him to do. He prayed, but at that time the prayer “helped some, however, it was not an exclusive.” The prayer did not solely resolve the struggle with the masking, conflicts, depression, and feeling out of sorts. The depression continued to interfere with everyday life. He had a dilemma within his family unit, because “my family they thought prayer was enough, although that [prayer] was one part of it.”
Pastor Alexander grew up in the Pentecostal faith. The faith perspective of Pentecostalism includes a belief in divine healing.

Pastor Alexander shares his experience growing up under the Pentecostal faith. “I grew up in a Pentecostal church, and you see a lot of laying on of hands and people set free, but it was not my experience.” In the Pentecostal church “laying on of hands” refers to the practice of touching a person, and through your touch God causes healing to occur. Immediate healing was not an experience for Pastor Alexander. Pastor Alexander explained that his disconnection occurred with people. They were making him feel like he was exaggerating the depression. Moreover, those in his circle of influence gave him the impression that he was doing something wrong, since healing had not taken place for him.

Consequently, Pastor Alexander’s experience of pressure from fellow-congregants and family members regarding his seemingly unconquerable battle with depression caused him to search for counseling. Pastor Alexander sought out counseling in the community. “The group I went to did both” [secular and Christian counseling].” Pastor Alexander requested a counselor that was skilled in the Christian faith, and he felt that the “the counseling was very helpful.” He was initially treated by a psychologist, and later by a psychiatrist.

The Christian psychologist began to probe him regarding his approach to God in prayer. “I told him what I was praying about, what was going on.” The psychologist then referred him to a psychiatrist. Pastor Alexander and the psychiatrist counseled together on a weekly basis for at least three months.

Pastor Alexander talks about how there were times when he would have flashbacks related to the trauma. While he does not discuss having a diagnosis of PTSD, he mentions that he
was seeing images that were incomprehensible. There are PTSD-related flashes that occur for survivors of CSA as discussed by Briere & Runtz (1993):

   Especially prominent for sexual abuse survivors are PTSD-related flashbacks—sudden, intrusive sensory memories, often including visual, auditory, olfactory, and/or tactile sensations reminiscent of the sexual assault. Triggers of flashbacks include sexual stimuli or interactions, abusive behavior by other adults, disclosure of one’s abuse experiences… (p. 313).

   During the course of working with the psychiatrist, the images became comprehensible memories. Pastor Alexander talked with me about the images, saying, “It began to come out.” He describes the episodes of CSA as being “buried, I had blocked it out.” It is common for CSA survivors and others who have had a traumatic occurrence to experience repression. Pastor Alexander described the repressed memory: “The incident was deep, I had blocked it out.” He characterizes the recall of the memory and the depression, saying, “That was probably when the rubber met the road.” In this statement, he is describing the intensity of the depression and the recollection of the traumatic events.

   In retrospect, Pastor Alexander realizes that he had indistinguishable images that were episodes of the abuse, but he could not make the association between them: “I had flashes in my mind, but I could not put them together.” The psychiatrist was instrumental in helping Pastor Alexander to recall the trauma. “As we talked through it, I began to see actual things, and remembered the reality, and actually everything.” As Pastor Alexander recalled the trauma, his prayer life dramatically changed. “I was actually able to change my prayer. I could have a specific dialogue in my prayer time with God.” Pastor Alexander understood that he was
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

sexually abused, and could approach God in prayer with explicit requests surrounding his behaviors and the depression that was associated with the trauma.

Pastor Alexander describes the outcome of his prayer time with God: “It was through that dialogue that I actually came to a point that I could let it go.” He shares how the awareness through counseling helps his memory to surface. His prayer time with God was liberating and positively effective and he talks about that prayer time as he experiences a peace concerning CSA: “I could feel the freedom coming.” Early on he described feeling “masked,” and said prayer helped to eradicate this masked feeling, causing him to feel normalcy in his life. He credits his prayer time with God as helping him. “I could actually release it. I felt released from the grip that it had on my life.” Pastor Alexander conveys how the knowledge of the trauma through psychiatric care was influential in helping him to talk specifically to God about CSA. He offers details about his connection with God in prayer: “I was praying and prayed about this [CSA] and I heard God say are you ready, are you ready to be delivered. I said, yes. He [God] said he was just waiting on me. When I told God I was ready, that is when I felt the freedom, the breakthrough, the weight removed.”

Pastor Alexander talked to me about how in his prayer time with God he experienced liberation. He further discussed how the heaviness that accompanies depression was eradicated to the degree that “I came off the depression medications, and I did not look back.” He talks about how he recovered successfully and the effects of the trauma no longer persisted to cause interruption in his life.

In discussing the progression of events, Pastor Alexander accepted the process as a necessary event in his life. “I realized that I had to go through. For me it was a process,
everything played a part in it.” That is, “prayer, faith, medicine, and counseling” worked together to help him to recover.

As participating clergy men or women told their survival stories, each provided a vivid picture of religious coping, and the need to gain understanding. Each demonstrated that they were successful survivors. Pargament et al. (2000) confirmed that “religion serves a variety of purposes in day-to-day living and in crisis” (p. 521). This is evident as Brooksmith relied on only God for help, and that Jacobs and Alexander engaged in therapeutic services that enabled them to receive valuable therapy to aid in recovery. The three clergy demonstrated a faith in God connecting with each in prayer, a trust that God could positively alter his or her circumstances, and received an empowering experience. The outcome of the empowerment enabled each clergy-survivor to make a difference in the life of other CSA survivors.
Chapter 6

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) in Spiritual Connections

This chapter presents components of Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) occurring in spiritual connections for three clergy-survivors of CSA. The chapter begins with a discussion on “mutual empathy” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 29). It continues with the explanation of the key elements of mutual empowerment. There are components of “mutual empathy” (p. 29) that occurs in prayer time for the three clergy. As mentioned earlier, Pargament et al. found “measures of religious coping should specify how the individual is making use of religion to understand and deal with stressors (p. 521). The clergy talk about their spiritual connections through the religious coping method of prayer. They search for understanding and help concerning the stressors related to CSA. Although “measures of religious coping should assess the wide range of religious coping activities” (p. 525) this chapter discusses the religious coping method of prayer (Pargament et al.). The participants report on their prayers and elements of the relational cultural theory occurs for the participants.

Pargament, Magyar-Russell & Swank, 2005 (p. 667) define religion as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (Pargament, 1997, p. 32). In addition, Pargament et al. (2005) explains, “It is assumed here that people seek whatever they hold to be of value or significance in life” (Pargament, 1997, p. 667). While there are other pathways for RCT to emerge in spiritual connections, the focus of this chapter is on how the aspects of RCT emerge as the three clergy actively pursue the sacred through the pathway of prayer.

Pargament et al. offers an earlier definition of religion. In addition, they found that “this definition of religion also rests on the assumption that people are proactive and goal-directed
beings (see Ford, 1987), *searching* for significance” (p. 668). I found that as the clergy “searched for significance,” the occurrences of RCT in spiritual connection represent what occurs for them in this search (Pargament et al., p. 668). Pargament et al. (2005) found that the “searching is a dynamic process that involves discovering significance, conserving or holding on to significance once it has been found, and transforming significance when it becomes necessary” (Pargament, 1997; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002).

I begin with the definition of mutual empathy as described by Miller and Stiver. (1997).

**Mutual Empathy**

Mutual empathy is the great unsung human gift. We are all born with the possibility of engaging in it. Out of it flows mutual empowerment. It is something very different from one-way empathy; it is a joining together based on the authentic thoughts and feelings of all the participants in a relationship (p. 29).

Miller and Stiver (1997) eloquently explained that when “mutual empathy” (p. 29) is experienced the result is “mutual empowerment” (p. 30). Individuals who value spirituality as a measure of religious coping believe that God is “joining together based on the authentic thoughts and feelings of all the participants in a relationship,” which is “mutual empathy,” as described by relational cultural theorists (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 29).

**Mutual Empathy for Clergy-Survivors**

The clergy seek out understanding and help to cope with the stressors related to CSA. They discuss the communication that takes place with God in prayer. Here observe the occurrence of “mutual empathy,” (p. 29) beginning with Pastor Brooksmith, followed by pastors Jacobs and Alexander.
Pastor Brooksmith talks about connecting to God through the pathway of prayer. “He drew me into a place where I could learn what had happened.” While in prayer, Brooksmith shares that he could hear from God and discovered what had occurred in his past. At the onset of his prayer to God, Brooksmith did not understand that his atypical behavior was related to the trauma of CSA.

Brooksmith’s remarks reveal that a conversation is taking place: “God begin to show me in my prayer time.” Brooksmith is referring to God explaining and giving him a visual of what had occurred, stating, “He reminded me that I had been abused twice.”

In Brooksmith’s narrative he shares his “feelings and thoughts” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 29) with God in prayer. God’s “feelings and thoughts” (p. 29) are responsive to Brooksmith’s. Brooksmith shares that the trauma was “revealed” by God. God demonstrated empathy in that he understood that Brooksmith had a desire to identify with his own unusual behavior. Brooksmith talks from a perspective that says God understood him, since he receives the answers to his prayers. This demonstrates that the two connect, responds, and understand the “feelings and thoughts” (p. 29) of one another. Brooksmith depicts God as empathic by stating that God “showed,” him “who I was and what happened to me.” Pastor Brooksmith was empowered during this time with God, and the outcome is a high-school career course that Brooksmith was led to teach in the community. Brooksmith engages in connections with other CSA survivors.
Pastor Jacobs

Pastor Jacobs needed to experience peace, considering her traumatic experience of CSA. Jacobs recognized that she could pray to God. Jacobs sought out God for peace. Pastor Jacobs recognized that prayer was a channel of communication to talk to God. The two shared “feelings and thoughts,” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 29) which is evidenced by the affirmative response she received from God. Jacobs acquires an inner peace in regard to the feelings associated with the trauma of CSA. Pastor Jacobs talks about how to connect with God in prayer:

He already knows the situation; all he wants is for us to come to him with a real heart okay… a sincere heart and he will do it. You can lie out on the floor all day long, beg, and cry, okay, but when you are sincere in your heart, he’s really there…

Jacobs describes God as responsive to individuals who are earnest in their approach. She continues by confirming God’s response to her “God’ll answer and he’ll change things and that I can talk about ‘cause I know it’s true.” She continues, “Well I guess because I’m so old…when I started doing…seeking the Lord uh for my peace…when I was like 15…you know and uh really trying to find a way to have peace within myself…” Jacobs is talking about her experience of CSA and the need to acquire peace concerning it.

Jacobs confirms God as understanding and as identifying with her “feelings and thoughts” (p. 29): “I think because God is who he is and there was really nobody to show me…God himself had to do it and so uh…I try to encourage people to let God help them too because nobody’s special. If he did it for me; he can do it for them but we have to seek him and be sincere about trying to hear from him.” According to Jacobs, the trauma of CSA no longer influences her peace, she now considers herself a peaceful person. Jacobs is empowered to
engage in relationships with other CSA survivors. Specifically, she works with young mothers who are victims of CSA.

**Pastor Alexander**

Pastor Alexander talks about how he was unsure of the approach to God in prayer. Through the help of a psychiatrist, he recalls his traumatic experience. The help he receives in therapy results in his acquiring a specific God-given petition. Like Pastor Brooksmith, who communicates with God, Pastor Alexander converses with God in prayer. Alexander feels that God understood his needs. This is apparent from Alexander’s remarks: “I heard God say are you ready, are you ready to be delivered?” As God demonstrates this understanding of “thoughts and feelings,” (p.29) Alexander responds affirmatively to God, “I said, yes” (Miller and Stiver, 1997).

The conversations between Pastor Alexander and God demonstrate that “mutual empathy” was taking place in the relationship, and that they shared the “thoughts and feelings” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 29) of one another. This is substantiated by Alexander’s comment about God, “He said he was just waiting on me.” God and Pastor Alexander connected in prayer. Pastor Alexander talks about how, through his prayers, he acquired freedom from the effects of CSA and freedom from hopelessness. According to Alexander, God identifies with his needs and responds. The outcome for Pastor Alexander was the end of the SAD diagnosis and medications, and self-liberation. Pastor Alexander states “and I never looked back.” Alexander is empowered, and readily engages in other connections with CSA survivors. Additionally, he readily engages because he is recommended as a source of help for survivors.
Miller and Stiver (1997) discuss how when “mutual empathy” (p. 29) is transpiring, “each person can receive and then respond to the feelings and thoughts of the other, each is able to enlarge both her own feelings and thoughts and the feelings and thoughts of the other person” (p. 29). The noteworthy occurrence for all three clergy as they engaged in mutual empathic relationships with God is that in those connections with God, each had experiences of empowerment. Pastor Brooksmith made it emphatically clear that he did not blame God, even though he undoubtedly needed to ask God some questions. Brooksmith talks about how, while in prayer to God, God revealed his traumatic past to him. Brooksmith discusses how he needed to understand things about himself. Brooksmith is empowered to begin a ministry. Pastor Jacobs sought God in prayer for peace, and received an inner peace with her CSA. She was empowered to counsel other CSA survivors. Pastor Alexander was unsure of the reason for seeking God in prayer. Later, through counseling, he learned to tailor specific prayers to God. The outcome was liberation from the effects of CSA. Pastor Alexander was empowered to counsel others, and there was an end to anti-depressants for him.

From a relational cultural perspective, the clergy experienced “mutual empowerment” (p. 30) in their spiritual connection (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30). Mutual empowerment is composed of at least five components: “Zest, Action, Knowledge, Sense of Worth, Greater Sense of Connection, and Desire for More Connections” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, pps. 30-34). The feeling of zest occurs when individuals and God share a real meaningful relationship. The individual sincerely feels connected to God in the relationship. The action in this connection refers to any occurrences in the relationship, Knowledge refers to the way an individual sees that they are more developed and/or renewed. Sense of Worth is a feeling of shared appreciation of
one another. This appreciation is truly valued as making a significant difference in the life of that individual and the spiritually connected individual feels that God made a difference in his or her life. The fifth component of empowerment is that the connection with God is greater than before and the outcome is that the individual seeks out connections with others (Miller and Stiver, 1997, pps. 30-34).

Clergy Empowerment

Empowerments for the clergy are discussed in the following order, “zest, action, knowledge, sense of worth and greater sense of connection and a desire for more connection” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 26-33).

Zest

Pastor Brooksmith had “totally blocked it [CSA] out of my mind. I never even remembered that it happened until this particular time in prayer.” Brooksmith and God were “emotionally joined” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 31) in prayer. That is, God and Brooksmith were connected in the relationship. God understood Brooksmith’s psychological need and thus, “he began to show me in my prayer time who I was and what happened to me.” Brooksmith sought God out for understanding and peace concerning his behavior. Brooksmith did not know what to pray for. He did not remember the CSA event or events that had traumatized him. God demonstrates his connection to Brooksmith by listening and talking to him, and actively responding to his request. Brooksmith and God share a meaningful relationship. Brooksmith boasts, “God taught me how to survive sexual abuse.”

Pastor Jacobs wanted to find peace from the pain of her CSA trauma. She did not struggle with repressed memory. Jacobs and God were “emotionally joined” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p.
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

31) in prayer. God and Jacobs connect in the relationship through prayer. Jacobs does not talk about her emotional state to me, only that she needed to acquire inner peace. Jacobs seeks God out, and is explicit in her prayer request for peace. Jacobs believes that God demonstrates his connection to her by listening, talking, and actively responding to her request. Jacobs and God share a real, meaningful relationship. Jacobs’s states with enthusiasm, “I think because God is who he is and there was really nobody to show me, God himself had to do it…I was constantly in prayer.”

Pastor Alexander sought God out in prayer. He was ready to be liberated from the effects of CSA. Alexander believes that he and God were “emotionally joined” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 31) in prayer. Alexander initially did not know how to approach God about what was troubling him in his interactions with other people. He had no recollection of the trauma. Through counseling, he was able to remember what had happened during his childhood. Consequently, he states, “I could have a specific dialogue in my prayer time with God.” Alexander shares, “It was through that dialogue that I actually came to a point that I could let it go. I could actually release it; I felt released from the grip that it had on my life.” Through the religious coping method of prayer, Alexander acquires freedom from the traumatic outcomes related to CSA. The traumatic events resurfaced in counseling, and the knowledge of those helped Alexander to evoke explicit prayers. Alexander believes that God demonstrates his connection to him by listening, talking, and actively responding to his request. Alexander and God were connected. Alexander and God share a real, meaningful relationship. Alexander is elated as he states, “I could begin to feel the freedom coming.”
Each clergy interviewed experienced zest while in connection with God. The feeling of zest occurred as they shared a real, meaningful relationship with God. What made it meaningful was that each clergy expected and trusted God to listen, talk, and take action. The clergy-survivors were rejuvenated. “The feelings of increased vitality and energy that comes from the sense of connection” (p. 31) with God “is the most basic feature of growth-fostering interactions” (p. 31) in spiritual connections “and leads directly to the next” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 31).

**Action**

Each clergy feels that God listens, talks, and takes action to answer the prayers. In this meaningful relationship, God and the clergy each have “an important impact on the other” (p. 31). The clergy trust and rely on God, and God affects the relationship through his responses.

**Knowledge**

Pastor Brooksmith states that God revealed to him what had happened, saying, and “…it was God.” While in spiritual connection with God, Brooksmith attests, his clearer picture of himself was a result of “my relationship with the Lord. He drew me into a place where I could learn what had happened. I believe that he will always reveal to you as he prepares your heart.” Pastor Jacobs credits God for changing things in her life, explaining that “God will answer” prayers. While in prayer, Jacobs feels that she receives an affirmative response from God. Pastor Jacobs’s states, “God himself had to do it,” meaning that God allows her to come to peace with the trauma of CSA.

Pastor Alexander says that God engaged him in a conversation to get him ready for the outcome of prayer: “I heard God say, ‘Are you ready, are you ready to be delivered?’” Alexander
responded, “I said, ‘Yes’,” and God told Alexander, “He was just waiting on me. When I told
God I was ready, that is when I felt the freedom, the breakthrough, the weight removed.”

The feelings that the three clergy experience in prayer helps them develop a clear picture
of how CSA had affected their lives and what they could do to be at peace.

**Worth**

Pastor Brooksmith observed through his experience of prayer that God was concerned
about him and conveyed that concern throughout his disclosure of the abuse he suffered. Pastor
Jacobs’s sense of worth was developed as she recognized that God cared in such a way that the
turbulence she had experienced turned to peacefulness. The sense of worth developed through
prayer by Pastor Alexander led him to observe that God was concerned and conveyed his
concern by asking him a question regarding his readiness to find peace.

A sense of worth was developed in their spiritual connections with God for all three
clergy in the study. Each felt “worthwhile” (p. 32) in his or her interaction with God as God
“recognized and acknowledged” their experiences and answered their prayers. (Miller and
Stiver, 1997). The worthiness the clergy in the study experienced as they shared “feelings and
thoughts” (p. 32) with God in prayer made them feel that God had made a difference in their
lives (Miller and Stiver, 1997).

**Greater Sense of Connection and Desire for More Connections**

As a consequence of their expanded connection with God through prayer, the clergy in
the study seek out connections with other people (Miller and Stiver, 1997). The outcome of the
“empowerment” (p. 30) experience gave each of them a greater faith and connection with God
and God is valued by them as one who answers prayers. Brooksmith, Jacobs, and Alexander
continue presently to connect with other survivors to help them through the traumatic experience of CSA.

Below in Figure 2, the three squares with arrows between them represent the basic process of what occurs in prayer for the clergy. Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) in Spiritual Connections is demonstrated as the clergy engage in prayer with God. Each experiences “mutual empathy” (p. 29) and connects in “feelings and thoughts” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 29). The third square represents the outcome of the spiritual connection that is “mutual empowerment” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30).

The outer circles contain the key elements that spring forth from “mutual empowerment” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30), while the center circle represents the premise of what is occurring in the outer circles. In other words, RCT in Spiritual Connections is occurring and provides “mutual empathy,” (p. 29) and the outcome of the empathic relationship is “mutual empowerment” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30).
Figure 2: Relational Cultural Theory in Spiritual Connections:

Empowerment of Clergy Survivors

Brooksmith, Jacobs, and Alexander
Spiritually Connected in Prayer with God

Mutually Empathic Relationship with God

Mutual Empowerment

Knowledge

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) in Spiritual Connections Clergy-Survivors and God

Action

Sense of Worth

Greater Sense of Connection and Desire for More Connections

Zest
The key elements of “mutual empowerment” (p. 30) are “zest, action, knowledge, sense of worth, and greater sense of connection, and desire for more connection” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30-33). It is these elements that were experienced by the clergy in the study as they sought healing from the trauma of CSA and reached out to help others.
Chapter 7

The Cultural Sway

The chapter explains the influence of religious practices from the perspective of the clergy in their congregations. The religious practices that emerge during the services reflect a term that I have constructed as “The Cultural Sway.” I constructed the term “Cultural Sway,” to represent the influences and the outcomes that the clergy describes when their congregants/survivors come together congregationally, participating in various religious activities in the church. This chapter grows out of the clergy responses to research question # 18: Describe how and in what way religious practices (prayer, songs, scriptures, and other) are related to the culture in this church, and how have they helped congregants who are CSA survivors. The chapter is presented in order by main themes; they are prayer, scriptures, and sermons. Each chapter ends with a reflection that presents the sub-themes, which are healing, rejuvenators, and interaction with God. The sub-themes emerged as congregants prayed, applied scriptures, and listened to sermons.

While, the clergy did not offer services directly tailored to CSA survivors. The clergy portrayed how each understood his or her relationship with CSA survivors. The congregants are predominately African American in the respective churches. The cultural sways that occur in the congregations have a positive effect on individuals. The clergy present a glimpse of the occurrences of the cultural sways on some CSA survivors/congregants. The chapter begins with the cultural sway of prayer.
Prayer

**Pastor McFadden**

Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar & Hahn (2004) report that “in a number of empirical studies, researchers have shown significant links between measures of health and global religious indices, such as prayer, church attendance and self-rated religiousness and spirituality” (see Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Pargament, 1997 for reviews; p. 714). Pastor McFadden discusses prayer as a measure of coping and receiving help for her congregant-survivors. Pastor McFadden comments that her understanding of her relationship with CSA survivors is nurtured through the spiritual connection of prayer. She and other clergy in the study viewed prayer as the foundation of the church. In addition, she believes that prayer serves as a preface to other components of services for clergy. She feels that prayer is “just the culture of what they do.” In other words, she considers prayer a fundamental foundation in her congregation. The congregants seek out the leaders in McFadden’s congregation, who, she reports, work to intercede with God on their behalf: “Because people know that [we pray for them], I believe that helps.” McFadden describes a trustworthiness on the part of congregants that is demonstrated during prayer gatherings, when they submit prayer petitions to their pastors. McFadden feels that this type of intercession helps clergy build trusting relationships with congregant-survivors. The congregants trust that their leaders will pray to God on their behalf, commenting, “They know that we are praying.” As McFadden discusses how she and fellow clergy intercede for their congregants, Brooksmith teaches congregants what occurs when they pray to God.
Pastor Brooksmith

Brooksmith describes prayer as a time that congregants intermingle with the sacred and are able to achieve healing. He instructs his congregants on how to reach God through prayer. He assures congregants that God “will respond.” Pastor Brooksmith, a CSA survivor, in an earlier account describes his personal experience with prayer. Because he is a CSA survivor, he speaks with confidence to survivors and others in his congregation: “God will reveal what you need to help you out of bondage. If you want to know, he will make it clear to you. When you get in prayer before God, talk to him, ask him, and he said, tell him your needs, and he will reveal it to you.”

The word bondage as used by Brooksmith refers to repression or oppression that can cause major problems for people in general. Brooksmith reminds congregant-survivors that it is through these conversational prayers that they can interact with God and acquire healing, clarity, and answers regarding a petition. Brooksmith offers a depiction of what happens when congregants pray. He helps his congregants to have the same triumphal experience in his or her interaction with God. By stating, “I am a living witness,” Brooksmith hopes to reassure survivors that they can move beyond the trauma of CSA. Brooksmith promotes and conducts prayer services because he feels that prayer to God is a passageway to achieve healing from trauma.

Brooksmith and Alexander, both CSA survivors, share similar views about prayer. Brooksmith describes what can be achieved in prayer; Alexander sums up prayer as a method of subsistence.
Pastor Alexander

Prayer is a mode of life for Alexander. He confirms that prayer provides the way to God. It is clear from Alexander’s earlier account that prayer is significant for him, since after learning that CSA was in his past, “I was actually able to change my prayer. I could have a specific dialogue in my prayer time with God.” Since Pastor Alexander was healed from the outcomes associated with CSA, he now encourages survivors and others to pray to God for healing, based on his views and the value he places on prayer.

Alexander encourages and sanctions prayer as a significant means in which his congregants can attain healing. Congregants and others value the atmosphere of his congregation. The congregants have experienced healing, and he relates, “We have a lot of people to come forth and really be able to seek personal breakthroughs in those settings.” Oftentimes, in religious settings, the word “breakthrough” is used to refer to healing and victory. Alexander feels that prayer is the means to converse with God and is crucial. Therefore, for him and his congregants, it is an indispensable part of life.

Pastor Jacobs

Pastor Jacobs, like Brooksmith and Alexander, is a CSA survivor. She speaks with passion as she talks about childhood sexual abuse. She and the other clergy value prayer. They also set aside time to allow congregants to present petitions to God in prayer. Specifically, Pastor Jacobs talks about the value of allocating time for prayer: “People have specific prayer requests, we have prayer sessions, and we will pray for those particular things. Prayer has helped.” Jacobs feels that prayer is a helpful way to cope with CSA and other life events. She states that she is a “living witness” of what God can do when you pray. Jacobs observed God’s healing power
personally, and therefore, connects congregants to God during prayer time. God is able to “help” when you pray. That is, God responds to the prayers of the congregants.

**Pastor Schwartz**

While Jacobs carves out time for congregants to voice their petitions to God, Pastor Schwartz shares the perceived outcome of congregational prayer time. Schwartz witnesses to the power of prayer for congregant-survivors. According to him, survivors and congregants in general experience closeness as a result of prayer times, and their “minds were together to focus on the same thing.” That is, the congregants share the experience of prayer.

Pastor Schwartz offers a description of what occurs when congregants are praying. “The inner man, let us build the inner person, so as you build the inner person, you find out that you have the power to overcome, not only that [CSA], but other things.” Pastor Schwartz confirms that the congregant-survivors experience a “power to overcome” while in prayer. He feels that congregants should get involved in a “ministry,” which refers here to a role or service. He would like to see congregants involved in various roles, such as a greeter, usher, choir, prayer, worship ministry, and/or other services/roles that are particular to his congregation, “rather than just come for healing.”

While other clergy in the study are also passionate about prayer, Pastor Schwartz’s passion is reflected in the frequency of prayer in his congregation. The congregational prayer is available Monday through Friday, three times per day. The prayer hour begins at 6:00 a.m. daily. Pastor Schwartz mentions that a significant number of congregants gather together to commence the day with prayer, which from his perspective produces an encounter with God.
Again, Schwartz emphasizes the importance of congregant-survivors’ involvement in a Service: “You don’t need to just come and be healed, we want you to be active, and we want you to work.” He discusses what he found to be significant:

We found out that people who work in the ministry are happier people. If they are not working, and are just sitting around soaking things up, they are not productive. When stuff festers, that is not healthy for our congregation. Because it is much easier for you to find something wrong, if all you are doing is sitting.

Pastor Schwartz finds that if congregants get involved that they “have less chance of being a complainer or to criticize.” The adage “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop” is used by Schwartz to refer to his congregants who achieve healing while in prayer, but decide to sit in observation mode during the services.

Schwartz affirms his belief that prayer changes “the inner man” and people receive healing. Pastor Hooverman, too, encourages survivors and congregants to embrace prayer, since she feels that it is the power over life’s circumstances.

**Pastor Hooverman**

Hooverman demonstrates that prayer can alter life. Despite what individuals are dealing with, if they pray to God, she relates, she feels that they can change their condition. She describes the importance of having a prayer life:

What people need to know is that before anything can be changed in life, they have got to gain a prayer life. They have got to get in contact with God. Establish a relationship, a prayer life with Jesus. They need someone other than mankind to depend on. They must know if they believe God, he is faithful to grant what they need.
Pastor Hooverman encourages CSA survivors to not just believe her words, but to seek out God in prayer. She feels that God answers prayers. She describes the method of prayer whereby the congregant-survivors “touch and agree,” which is when they pray together for a specific need, God is in the midst, and the individuals who are praying believe that God will answer.

Pastor Hooverman talks about the spiritual experience that occurs for people when they “touch and agree” in prayer: “There is power when two or three are gathered together, and touch and agree.” The word “power” used by Hooverman refers to healing as defined by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions:*

> In the religious perspective, disease and dis-ease are never far removed from each other. Since an aim of religions is to offer the means through which health in body, mind, and spirit may be attained (unless countervailing causes supervene, such as *karma*, the will of God, invasion by *demons*, etc.). Thus *Augustine* observed succinctly that ‘all diseases of Christians are to be ascribed to demons’; and the contest with demons is familiar in the descriptions of the healing of particular disorders in the ministry of Jesus, which was to him (and others) a demonstration that the *dunamis* (power or dynamic) of God is active in the world.

The definition above offers a religious perspective that helps make clear Hooverman’s assessment of what is occurring for survivors. They experience “power,” and healing occurs when at least two people gather for prayer to God. Although Pastor Hooverman in her account does not make any type of ascription to demons, the perspective offered above reflects a belief
system that is prevalent in a number of churches that believe in the divine healing that Hooverman describes.

Pastor Hooverman, like Brooksmith models to survivors how to get in touch with God in prayer, and she feels that survivors are able to have relationship with God, and receive “power.” Pastor Hooverman is a proponent of prayer, and believes “If they need him [God], and if they go anywhere, guess what, they can call on him” in prayer. Hooverman feels that survivors learn to trust God through the pathway of prayer.

**Reflections: Sub-themes of healing and interaction with God**

The clergy in the study discuss the varying occurrences of the cultural sway of prayer. They feel their congregant-survivors experiences healing and interaction with God while participating in the sways. They convey the message that prayer serves as a major medium in which congregants interact with God. Jacobs, a CSA survivor, attests that when the congregants participate congregationally in prayer, “Prayer helps.” In the various congregations, the pastors believe that the congregant-survivors experience healing while in prayer. This is evident in Pastor Schwartz’s statement on prayer and its ability to affect the atmosphere and his congregants. Schwartz believes that the interaction with God in prayer has a life-changing effect on congregant-survivors. Prayer described by Schwartz as healing in the “inner man.” In other words, it is an internal change that reflects outwardly.

While CSA is known for its negative psychological effect on individuals, the clergy feel that prayer produces a healing phenomenon for congregants. They specifically believe that prayers impacted their congregants in such a way that they were helped regarding their issues relating to CSA. Gillum & Griffith (2009) confirms that “Responding to events perceived as
stressful such as illness by engaging in prayer or requesting the prayers of others is also consistent with the life stress paradigm” (Nollen et al. 2005; p. 284). In addition, the clergy feel the congregants are able to have interactions with God during prayer. The feelings of the clergy are affirmed by Gillum & Griffith (2009) who discuss “the theory of prayer as connectivity in service of cognitive structure postulates inward (self-examination), outward (human–human), and upward (human–divine) dimensions” (Ladd and Spilka 2006; p. 284). The clergy believe that the congregants had positive experiences that affected them inwardly and in their relationships with God.

In the next section, the clergy in the study explain the value of biblical scriptures, which is the second cultural sway of the main themes.

**Scriptures**

**Pastor McFadden**

McFadden describes the scriptures as the rulebook for her and congregants. She points out that as a pastor, she does not use the scriptures negatively. “Not because the scriptures are a rulebook to be beaten over the head. We try to teach congregant-survivors the word [Holy Bible] is God’s love letters, promises, and roadmap. Our Father wrote the love letters, which are our inheritance.” Pastor McFadden defines how she believes the Bible helps congregants: “I believe the word of God helps survivors to see, okay, that [sexual abuse] may have happened, but that is not what God intended for me. I will focus on what he intended for me.”

When McFadden refers to the word of God, she is referencing the Holy Bible. McFadden believes that, as her congregant-survivors read the Bible, in so doing, they are able to change their perception regarding CSA. She talks about how congregants can use the Bible as a
roadmap to find out their destinies. In addition, McFadden feels that through the scriptures, the congregants are able to learn about God’s “promises” for his or her life.

McFadden identifies with her congregants and feels that they are helped when they use the Bible as a rulebook. Pastor Brooksmith, the next speaker, views the Bible as a remedy or therapy guide.

**Pastor Brooksmith**

Brooksmith recognizes the difficulty of leaping from trauma to healing. He recommends the scriptures as a biblical remedy. He conveys that if survivors read, believe, and incorporate scriptures into their daily life as tools of religious coping, they will experience healing:

> If you follow the word [Bible], God will deliver you. He [God] will always bring you to a place of freedom because in the word there is freedom, not bondage. God’s promises are for our good, and his promises are yes and amen to the glory of God. My job is to make sure that people hear that, I pray that it falls on good ground.

Brooksmith and the next speaker, Workman values the scriptural remedies inherent in the Bible.

**Pastor Workman**

Workman is emphatic as he quotes the scriptures, since he observes them as a resourceful tool to survivors. Pastor Workman takes excerpts from the Bible to emphasize the power that he believes is found in the scriptures. Workman encourages survivors to get help from God by reading the Bible. Workman gives his congregant-survivors passages from the Holy Bible, Psalms of David, Book 24, verses7-10:
I tell them [CSA survivors] about the scriptures in Psalms 24:7-10. It says, ‘Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of Glory.

Workman is telling the survivors to look up to God: “…life up your heads,” that is pray to God. When they pray, he believes, the heavenly doors open, and there is an opportunity to connect with God. Pastor Workman relates the kind of conversation that he has with his congregants:

I know you have problems. We all have problems. Jesus told us we were going to have those [problems]. But, if you are a child of the King [God], you must life up your head. The psalmist over in Psalm 121, he was troubled and he did not know what to do but he said I will lift up my eyes to the hills from where my help comes. That is what we have to do.

Pastor Workman describes how his congregants have the scriptures to guide their way out of problems. Workman encourages CSA survivors to read and believe the scriptures, and “have faith and trust in God.” He wants the congregants to “seek the Bible for the answers to their troubles.”

Given that Pastor Workman relies on the Bible himself, he believes in applying the scriptures to the issues of life. He feels that his congregant attains help from the scriptures. Therefore, again, he says that the “the Bible had the answers.” The scriptures that he passes on
to CSA congregant-survivors are Proverbs 3:5-6, “trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding, in all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy path.” Pastor Workman is arguing the message of Proverbs as a coping tool for congregants-survivors. He continues: “When they [CSA survivors] do that [acknowledge God…] we show our complete faith in God. He will lift us up. He will lift us up out of those disgusting situations. That is spiritual.”

Pastor Workman embraces the scriptures when instructing survivors in his congregation. He recognizes that “These things [sexual abuse] are going to happen, so we accept them, and using the Bible, we lift ourselves up out of that situation [the trauma].” He believes that his congregants demonstrate the influence of applying the scriptures to their life circumstances.

**Pastor Hooverman**

Pastor Hooverman differs in the way she presents the scriptures to survivors. Hooverman gives survivors practical allegories, which she views as handy recovery truths. The analogies and metaphors are given to help congregants to process the scriptures in a useful way. Hooverman believes that “scriptures are always important.” She utilizes scriptures as “poems, invocations [prayers] or devotionals” to help people get through difficulties.

Pastor Hooverman helps survivors experience self-discovery. They discover “who am I.” She observes that many times it helps survivors to reflect back on their biblical principles, which are their “core values and belief system.” This is her method of helping them to begin the process of discovering themselves. In this way, she helps CSA survivors deal with “distorted thinking,” and to discover “who they really are.” Hooverman says of survivors, “They want to become
someone new. We always say if you do not like what you see, guess what? Through God, you can change it.

She equips the survivors with supportive scriptures and teaches them a football stratagem:

There is a scripture, I Corinthians 5:17, which says ‘old things have passed away, and behold all things, all things have become new.’ The newness is what a person begins to walk in. The people feel that God is pouring into them. God is the master planner. He is the quarterback. He calls the plays. God calls the plays in their life. He has a greater plan.

Pastor Hooverman likens the healing process to football. The quarterback is God, and the survivors are players. As in football, the quarterback calls the plays based on the team’s defense or the game. The team’s defense, in the scenario described by Pastor Hooverman, is the Bible, or “scriptures,” and as the quarterback, God intercepts players’ petition through use of scriptures and he “plays ball,” or answers their prayers. Pastor Hooverman bellows the sayings of survivors, much like a team pep talk: “We are survivors. We will become all of what we can be in the Kingdom. There is no stopping us. We are going to make a touchdown.”

Pastor Hooverman successfully helps her congregants to comprehend and integrate the scriptures into their lives in a positive and understandable way. Pastor Jacobs either writes scriptures out for her congregants or they will write them out.

**Pastor Jacobs**

Jacobs again stresses the importance of giving survivors and others the scriptures as a type of crisis intervention, to aid in the time of distress. “I give them different scriptures according to what is going on in their life.”
Pastor Jacobs pulls out scriptures to aid in recovery, and she calls them “promise scriptures.” She calls them her “emergency kit.” As a CSA survivor, the scriptures were helpful for her, and she uses them to help congregant-survivors.

**Reflections: Sub-themes of healing and rejuvenators**

The clergy discussed the cultural sway of scriptures in their congregations. The scriptures were used as sources of healing and as rejuvenators. They believe that congregants are rejuvenated when using the scriptures to help with the various circumstances of life. The word rejuvenator means to “make (someone or something) look or feel better” (http://www.Oxford Dictionary of English). The clergy studied believe that the rejuvenators (scriptures) help the congregants to feel better. The congregant-survivors were positively affected by the sways of healing and the rejuvenators. Pargament et al. (2000) states that “When asked how they cope with their most stressful situations, many people make mention of religion. Among some groups, particularly the elderly, minorities, and individuals facing life-threatening crises, religion is cited more frequently than any other resource for coping” (e.g., Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Conway, 1985–1986; p. 520). The clergy encourage congregant-survivors to make use of the scriptures. They view the rejuvenators (scriptures) as life tools that connect survivors to God, and in that connection they feel that healing occurs.

**Sermons**

The clergy’s sermons are a main cultural sway. In their narratives, the clergy describe the main result of the sermons as healing. The clergy serve as role models, with congregants relying on them for leadership and direction (Mitchem, 2007). The sermons are one way that the clergy
feel that they provide leadership and direction. This segment combines narratives of five clergy as they discuss sermons in their congregations.

**Pastors McFadden, Jacobs, Alexander, Wheeler, and Hooverman**

Pastor McFadden discusses the power of sermons that tend to help people feel connected to God. She believes that love is the strength and basis of sermons, which help to remind survivors of God’s word and promises. McFadden recognizes that sermons have the swaying power of connecting congregants to God. Jacobs describes how the sermons in her congregations do not specifically talk about CSA: “Usually our sermons don’t bring up that subject *per se* but about everything that might be around it, to help pull them into what God wants them to do.” Pastor Jacobs blends the language of her sermons in such a way that the sermons can affect the listeners in a positive way. She describes the presentation style of her sermons as having the ability to help “cut through your hurt,” and teach congregant-survivors “how to be winners, and not victims.” The sways of sermons are specifically designed to help congregants to be victorious as it relates to any type of victimization.

The clergy discuss the swaying power of sermons in their congregations. Specifically, Pastor Alexander captivates his congregants and allows the time together with the people to be an opportunity to promote healing and recovery. This is evident, since people come away stating, “No one has ever told me that.” It is clear that Pastor Alexander is a trendsetter in his community, helping people to experience healing through the swaying of his sermons.

Like Pastor Alexander, Pastor Wheeler feels that his congregants experience the healing influence of sermons. Wheeler mentions that following a sermon, people would come to him and say, “Pastor, you were talking about sexual abuse.” There were times when they would
approach a member of his staff to comment on the message that seemingly was survivor-focused. Essentially the congregant-survivors were voicing to Wheeler how the sermons that were related to the issues of life and CSA were helping them. Specifically, he discusses how a group of female survivors confessed to him that they were survivors.

Pastor Wheeler feels that his congregants value his use of sermons and he observes the swaying effect on a group of congregants who were CSA survivors. Pastor Jacob’s approach differs from Wheeler’s, whose sermon sways speak directly to the issue of CSA and the survivor’s experience of healing. While Jacobs preached sermons were not related specifically to CSA, they were a viable sway, helping survivors and others learn lessons from them. She believes that her sermons “may discuss how to cut through your hurt, how to be winners, and not victims.” The sermons were viewed by Jacobs as having the swaying power to steer her congregants toward victorious living.

Hooverman’s sermons’ swaying power helped congregants who were hurting: “People are hurting and they are in pain. It is how they interpret the word from God that helps them to get better.” While using the Bible in sermons may at times be difficult to understand, she uses analogies to help her congregants to better understand the sermons. She comments that people are encouraged by the sermons and other practices that occur in her congregation: “They realize that God can change them.” She believes that the swaying of the sermons are meaningful and life-altering. In addition, she argues that “They [congregant-survivors] appreciate the sermons that help, encourage, and cause healing and change in their life.” Pastor Hooverman in, expressing her pleasure of the positive feedback to her sermons, resoundingly says: “Hey, everyone becomes new.” As the sway of sermons occurs in Hooverman’s congregation, she feels
that the congregants take on more of God’s characteristics. The sway of healing also emerges out of the sermons. The congregants-survivors experience the value of cultural sways in their congregations.

Reflections: Sub-themes of healing and interaction with God

The clergy demonstrate how sermons sway in the congregation, as discourses that provide a forum to communicate with congregants concerning specific topics. The sway of sermons emerged as a main theme, leading to healing and interaction with God.

In African American churches, the sermons are integrated with biblical passages that are generally related to the topic of discussion. The clergy, in their respective congregations, provide the congregational settings for the sways to occur. They believe that the sways can lead to healing and interaction with God for congregant-survivors. Pargament, McCarthy, Shah, Ano, Tarakeshwar, Wacholtz et al. (2004) found religious coping to be effective:

In cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, the use of religious coping has been associated with a variety of indicators of mental health (i.e., depression, positive affect, life satisfaction), after controlling for the effects of sociodemographic variables, global religious measures (e.g., frequency of prayer and church attendance, and self-rated importance of religion), and nonreligious coping measures (p. 1202).

The clergy in the study regard prayer, scriptures, and sermons as positive sways and measures of religious coping. Pargament et al. (2004) confirms that “positive religious coping methods rest on a secure relationship with God, a belief in a larger, benevolent purpose to life, and a sense of connectedness with a religious community... (p. 1201).
Although this chapter focuses on the perspective of the clergy studied regarding religious coping, rather than that of their congregants, as mentioned earlier, “Empirical studies have shown that many people seek support from their faith when they face crises in living, and from 50% to 85% of various groups find their spirituality helpful in the coping process.” (Pargament et al., 2008, p. 398).
Chapter 8

Connections

Connections are fundamental to CSA survivors and the populace in general. Specifically for CSA survivors, connection to trusting individuals in safe environments may help to sustain relationships that “buffer the effects of CSA” (Adams & Bukowsky, 2007, p. 652).

Relational Cultural Theory in spiritual connection means that the relationship between God and God-seekers evokes a sharing of “feelings and thoughts” that connects them in relationship, and those relationships are “mutually empathic and mutually empowering” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 26).

This section demonstrates how the members of the clergy studied understood the nature of their relationships with CSA survivors. The main themes discussed in this chapter are: Moving beyond the pain of CSA, gender safeguards and barriers, love relationships, and relational activities. The chapter begins with clergy accounts of their experiences in helping CSA survivors move beyond the pain of CSA.

Moving Beyond the Pain of CSA

Pastor Hooverman

In her interactions, Hooverman is careful to not show sympathy, because “some folks are turned off by sympathy.” She seems to feel that people do not want others to feel sorry for them: “They have enough pity parties on their own.” In Hooverman’s assessment of CSA survivors, they are distressed about CSA, and the consequence may be that they will sulk about it. Therefore, she reinforces this concept of refusal to show sympathy, and works with CSA survivors to help them move beyond the pain of CSA.
Hooverman conveys a story of twin CSA survivors who had difficulty moving beyond the pain of CSA. While every survivor story and method of recovery differs, the twins’ case was difficult, and required intense counseling. Hooverman has worked closely with survivors who have had severe CSA experiences. Her work with the twin survivors and others clearly points to the value of clergy who foster supportive relationships with CSA survivors. Hooverman seeks out and successfully connects with the CSA survivors, and thus is able to help them take steps forward.

In her story, Hooverman relates that as she works with the family of the twins, she learns that the severity of the repeated episodes of the abuse was damaging to all family members. At the point of the interview for this study, the twins had been in therapy with Hooverman for a lengthy period. Clearly, Hooverman had made progress. The twins were not exhibiting suicidal behavior, and she felt they were progressing beyond the pain and moving toward acceptance. The process of recovery can be long-term for survivors, and it is remarkable and commendable that Hooverman was able to work closely enough with the family to help the twins move toward recovery.

During her work with the survivors, she discusses specifically how the twins engaged in “pity parties.” She continues by sharing how she would help them to move beyond feelings of disappointment: “I tell them, if you are having a pity party do not send me an invitation, but if you want to have an empowerment party I’ll be there.” She says that it is only when survivors seek empowerment that she accepts an invite. She wants survivors to celebrate their progression toward recovery, rather than harbor feelings that cause them to feel sorry for themselves. She believes that this type of re-directing for survivors promotes successful healing.
In working with survivors, to move them beyond the pain associated with CSA, Pastor Hooverman believes in making use of music therapy. She uses this therapeutic mode when counseling both introverts and extroverts. She will wait until she is familiar with the personality prior to playing music. In her relationships with survivors, she feels as she learns their personality style, she is then able to find what type of therapy will work. Here Hooverman demonstrates that she connects in a way that is “growth-promoting” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 27). Hooverman shares the “feelings and thoughts” (p. 26) of the twin female survivors and others, and “when this joint understanding occurs, it is what Miller & Stiver (1997) presented as “mutual empathy” (p. 29). She demonstrates this understanding by connecting with survivors.

Hooverman takes the time to understand the personality of the survivor, and finds that “introverts draw their energies from their inner world. You have to find the mechanism to get them to open up.” Hooverman is able to work with introverted survivors, since they are generally thinkers, and tend to prefer to be alone. She feels that by selecting the right music that she inspires the introverted survivor to relax. She feels that the same approach works and is used to engage the extroverts who have had horrific CSA experiences. She finds that extroverts would often engage in relationships just as introverts do, and states, “Also, sometimes an extrovert who has been badly, badly used, misused, and abused, will not talk. They only talk to people that they really know.” Therefore, Hooverman found that she is successful in her relationships with CSA survivors as she makes use of music therapy to reach them.

For Hooverman, it is important to share the feelings of the survivors. She says that she will “roll up my sleeves, and get in the pig pen with you.” By describing that she will “get in the
pig pen,” Hooverman is describing what it means to have “mutual empathy” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 26). She demonstrates that she is “joining together based on the authentic thoughts and feelings of all the participants in a relationship” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 29). Jumping in with them in the “pig pen” is connection. She demonstrates that she is able to make connection based on the sharing of “thoughts and feelings” (p. 29) of the survivors (Miller and Stiver, 1997).

Hooverman helps survivors not to focus on their pasts, but to look toward the future. She believes that each survivor has a work that God has purpose in them to achieve. She diligently works with survivors to center their focus on many factors that promote recovery. Hooverman feels that the survivors engage in self-discovery: “I am learning that it is not about who you are, it is about who you are becoming, who you really are.” She continues by telling survivors, “Wherever you have been, it is okay, shake it off, get healed,” and encourages them, saying, “God has a work for all of us, it does not matter if you have been abused, sexually, whether you have been fondled, or whether it has been incest.”

Pastor Hooverman feels that in her many associations with victims of CSA, the key to healing is to focus on representing God in your relationships with survivors, pointing them to God as the true source of empowerment. While “mutual empathy leads to empowerment,” (29) the opportunity to witness the elements of “empowerment” (p. 29) occurring for the twins and other survivors is present. It is clear from Hooverman’s account that she engages in “mutually empathic” (p. 26) relationships with the survivors (Miller and Stiver, 1997) and that the outcome is “empowerment” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 29).

In the counseling Hooverman conducts as an African American clergywoman, she fosters supportive relationship with survivors.
Gender Safeguards

Pastor Wheeler

Wheeler finds that the “biggest issue that comes up [in counseling CSA survivors] is trust.” He finds that females who are CSA survivors initially seek a close relationship with him as their pastor. He says, “The females are male-dependent because of CSA. They develop unhealthy relationships with males.” Because of this, Wheeler says, the focus in his congregation is on healthy relationships for the survivor. Pastor Wheeler talks about the females in his congregation who tend to enter unhealthy relationships with males. If he sees this type of relationship developing, he intervenes. Wheeler says that he will pull the survivor aside to engage in conversation about the issue. “I say, you just need to trust me as your pastor that you need to be a little slower with what you are doing. Continue to go to your groups and go to your therapy and work on you for awhile.” Wheeler engages in such a way to persuade the female survivors to not engage in these unhealthy relationships. He is aware that they are participating in CSA-related counseling. Furthermore, he feels that they are entering the unsafe relationships prematurely, and are not yet healed from the trauma. Additionally, he is privy to negative information that he is unable to disclose about the males who are trying to pursue them: “I know stuff from the other side that they do not know.”

Pastor Wheeler has engaged in this type of conversation on more than one occasion. He finds that in some situations, the survivors respond with anger. However, his focus is on keeping them safe. “I would rather make you angry, to keep you safe or attempt to keep you safe, than let you go and I know that you are in danger.” Here Pastor Wheeler finds that the females will enter
in intimate relationships with males who are not sincere. Wheeler has a mental health background, which serves to alert him on how the consequences of CSA will show up in adulthood. Pastor Wheeler found that he may encounter that same female down the road and that she will thank him for intervening in her personal affairs. Wheeler says that he recognizes that the females could not foresee the danger ahead, but he could see it. He demonstrates a keen awareness of the outcomes of CSA, specifically the way in which they may surface with the female survivors in his congregation. He fosters supportive relationships with CSA survivors in his role as the clergy-safety guard. He hopes that females will later distinguish the essential role, he played in protecting them.

Pastor Wheeler recognizes that there are victims of CSA in the church as he recalls a childhood experience. He was aware of an upstanding citizen and fellow-congregant who was sexually abusing his own son. Wheeler talks about having to observe him in the congregation, giving praises to God. Wheeler describes being a child and watching this man as a painful process: “There was a family full of boys; they all had been victims and they actually arrested him and he went to prison.” The man had sexually abused all the children. The CSA perpetrator died while incarcerated. Pastor Wheeler found that he recalled the incident throughout his childhood and into adulthood. He feels that his memory of the occurrence of CSA in the church at a young age inspires and empowers him to be a safeguard and help other CSA survivors. He adds that he has sisters, and engages in a brotherly way with congregants: “I have that older brother syndrome, and I feel a need to protect people.” While Wheeler is adamant about being a safety guard for CSA survivors, he and Brooksmith recognize that gender barriers are present in regard to CSA.
Gender Barriers

Pastor Wheeler

While Wheeler successfully engages as a clergy-protector, he finds that “there are times when people disclose to me that they are victims of sexual abuse, but as a pastor, you must be careful. You do not want people to mistakenly take your empathy and concern as something else.” Therefore, Pastor Wheeler feels there is a precautionary line that he must draw when interacting with CSA survivors: “I think you can cause more problems if you are not real definitive about those lines.” The line that Wheeler is referring to is a gender-congregant-clergy boundary that is specific to females and a male pastor. Specifically, as a male pastor that is demonstrating empathy that is sharing in the “feelings and thoughts” (p.29) of his female congregants who are CSA survivors, he feels that this type of connection can be misconstrued. He says that such congregants may view him as having an interest that extends beyond his role of their pastor. The barriers and safeguards are present for only female survivors, because when it comes to working with male CSA survivors, Wheeler finds that men are reluctant to come forward regarding their CSA experiences.

Pastor Wheeler shares the same viewpoint as Pastor Brooksmith regarding male-to-male disclosure of CSA. From Wheeler’s perspective, “Females disclose easier and are freer to disclose to pastors than males are; males have more of a problem disclosing hurtful things to another man.”
**Pastor Brooksmith and Hollendale**

Recall in Brooksmith’s earlier account he discussed how it is difficult for Black men to talk about CSA: “It is very rare to find an African American male who will share with you that they have had something like that happen.” Brooksmith attributes this silence to the blame factors that confront CSA survivors. He feels that survivors think CSA happened because of them.

Pastor Hollendale also finds that gender can be a barrier for CSA survivors. He says that he empathizes with the plight of such survivors, recognizing that “They are a group of people that can be trapped and imprisoned by their past, and unable to move forward.” Pastor Hollendale recognizes that when encountering CSA survivors, it is necessary to be more sensitive, citing that they may not “feel comfortable around certain genders.” As a male, he believes that female CSA survivors in his congregation may view him negatively because the CSA perpetrator was male. Therefore, in his interactions with congregant-survivors, he demonstrates love, care, and sensitivity. He takes time with them and regards each as significant: “Because God has given me a pastor’s heart, I have got to make sure that I take the necessary steps to hear them [CSA survivors] out, and be sensitive to what they are going through.” Pastor Hollendale believes that “people must feel the connection or love. I think the most important thing is the love and support, and the encouragement that the survivor will feel as a result of being a part of the body of Christ.” The next section is on the love relationships that five clergy feels occurs in their congregations.
Love Relationships

**Pastor McFadden**

McFadden connects with people in general by demonstrating love: “We believe everybody needs love. If you love and have a safe environment, then whether it is domestic violence, sexual abuse, shame, or perfectionism, it may be that safe environment that creates the atmosphere to open up.”

McFadden and other clergy in her congregation recognize that congregants may have a need to feel that their leaders care about them. She desires that congregant-survivors “feel safe.” At the same time, she encourages them to “facilitate a journey.” Here, McFadden is talking about the journey to recovery. McFadden uses care in her interactions with survivors, since she recognizes that they “are hurting, and they come [to church] with the trauma of having been abused. You cannot handle someone that has been through abuse the same way you handle someone that has not.” McFadden feels that when working with survivors “there needs to be a level of understanding because in your attempt to help, you may be triggering something [negative] within that individual. If you are unaware that you are triggering it, then you are actually causing hurt.” McFadden wants to be aware of the survivor in such a way that she does not cause them pain.

In her love relationships, McFadden, along with other clergy in her congregation, fosters supportive relationship with CSA survivors. She says, “We must not condemn, but care for them [survivors] with love, and help them to heal.” In supportive relationships, congregant-survivors experience the love of their pastor as they engage in the kind of relationships that promote healing.
Pastor Brooksmith

Like McFadden, Brooksmith feels he is a “voice of peace, a mouthpiece for God, to let folks know that God will take care of you.” In his role as pastor, he communicates to survivors how God loves them and is concerned. McFadden is seemingly knowledgeable about the consequences of CSA on survivors, while Brooksmith’s knowledge is based on being a survivor.

Brooksmith feels that he and his congregants embrace loving relationships and that they do not engage in discriminatory practices towards CSA survivors in the congregation. He claims, “People have a love quotient that is high enough where they don’t have prejudices that they press on those people [CSA survivors]. We all have a level of love.” Pastor Brooksmith focuses on helping survivors “acclimate back into society.” He helps them heal so that they, like him, can survive and successfully engage in their communities.

Survivors in Brooksmith’s congregation are helped through love relationships. In earlier accounts, Brooksmith talks about how he survived and now engages in his “love language.” He hugs congregants, and he feels it is a meaningful practice both for him and others. Brooksmith engages in his “love language,” which is hugging, and Pastor Workman acknowledges that communication is important, since CSA survivors “really need someone to talk to and release the problem that exists in their lives.” He is there to “befriend, talk, and cheer them [CSA survivors] to progress beyond the traumatic occurrence.”

Pastor Workman

Workman emphasizes that he is not formally trained in the area of CSA, he connects with survivors and says, “I offer what little help I know and what I cannot do, I refer them to others.” Pastor Workman discusses his enormous love for people, and he says that the love is “just
embedded in me.” He demonstrates his love as he cares for his congregants and survivors.
Workman feels that what contributes to this understanding is being a good listener and having
love for others. “I have great compassion for people. I tell people all the time, tell my
congregation that I would not be worth the salt in my bread if I did not have compassion.” He
feels that his great love is the guiding force that helps him to form helpful relationships with
survivors/congregants. Workman demonstrates that he connects with and fosters supportive
relationships with survivors.

**Pastor Alexander**

Pastor Alexander finds that showing love is crucial: “I cannot minister effectively, if I do
not love. I got to love, because ministry comes out of love.” He is able to talk, engage, and
connect positively because of the love he has for others. If he did not love them, he would fail as
a clergyman. He is able to help congregants as he loves them. Alexander compares his love for
people to God’s love for himself:

God’s sacrifice came out of love. Everything comes out of that [God’s love]. God so
loved the world that he gave. Jesus loved us so much that he went. Then he came, and got
us, and gave us access to restore us back to the father. And now because he loves me I
got to turn around and love you.

In his role as clergyman, he wants to model the love of God:

God said love your neighbor as you love yourself. Not just childhood sexual abuse
survivors, but people that have been verbally abused, and that abuse is just as hard, and it
builds up calcium that is rotten. It has been there so long, and it is so hard to get beyond.
It takes God, a skilled master physician, to literally go in and break that down to come out with a whole person.

As a CSA survivor, Alexander fosters supportive relationships with survivors, as he understands their plight and shares a survivor-to-survivor relationship with them. He engages in loving relationships as he allows God to be his prototype.

Alexander compares the difficulty that all survivors experience to the effects of tartar on the teeth. This can be difficult to get rid of and may often require the help of a dentist to remove. In this comparison, Alexander from his survivor perspective is identifying with the long term effects that CSA may have for some survivors. Pastors Alexander speaks from his survivor perspective and Schwartz from his knowledge of CSA.

**Pastor Schwartz**

Schwartz talks about how CSA survivors struggle with “their identity.” He works with survivors to discover their purpose: “I believe that once you know God you can learn about yourself. Then I believe your purpose can be revealed to you. When your purpose is revealed to you, then you are going to be healthier, spiritually and emotionally.”

In his connection with survivors, Pastor Schwartz finds that he observes them facing the obstacle of severing thoughts and feelings that often are integrated in their persona. Consequently, CSA survivors may associate negative circumstances to the traumatic experience. Pastor Schwartz treads gently and with love, which is his remedy for CSA survivors. “I love and we just develop a relationship. We do not do anything special.” Kia-Keating, Sorsoli & Grossman (2009) report that “childhood sexual abuse (CSA) involves a violation within an interpersonal context, infringing on a survivor’s sense of trust and safety in relationships”
(Briere, 1992; p. 666). Frequently, survivors of CSA may struggle with relationships as described by Schwartz. Kia-Keating et al. confirmed that “both clinicians and researchers have identified relational challenges for CSA survivors including intimacy problems, emotional discomfort, alienation, and anger (Gartner, 1999; Kendall-Tackett Williams, & Finkelhor, 2001; Urquiza & Capra, 1990), leading to difficulties relating with others and building lasting, healthy relationships” (p. 666-667). Schwartz feels that if he “just treat (s) them like everybody else,” that this helps them to connect in relationships.

In Pastor Schwartz’s interactions with survivors, he listens without “filters. I imagine that I am in their shoes.” He shares the “thoughts and feeling” (p. 27) of his survivor/congregants, in doing so, he is engaging in “mutually empathic” (p. 29) relationships (Miller and Stiver, 1997). Pastor Schwartz talks about when he first meets the survivor, it is a time to:

Really to hear their story. It is a very organic conversation. I try to put aside all my preconceived ideas, what I think I know, and I listen. My first round is to listen without trying to give any solutions. I just want to hear them out. I want to hear what they are going through. I want to hear why they feel the way they feel.

Schwartz allows survivors the opportunity to talk without prejudging their comments. In his empathic perspective, he views them in his mind's eye as if he, too, were a CSA survivor. In his imaginative way, this helps him to understand the survivor, and therefore, he feels that he is able to connect with them empathically and lovingly. Schwartz connects by displaying authentic listening quality, which he believes to be very effective. While Schwartz uses his imagination to help him to connect with survivors, Hooverman demonstrates the love of God in her relationship to survivors.
**Pastor Hooverman**

In her work with survivors, Pastor Hooverman consistently stays in tune with God. She does not want to unknowingly cause additional hurt to survivors. Hooverman strives to maintain healthy and long-lasting relationships with survivors. She recognizes that she can inadvertently cause hurt; therefore she proceeds cautiously when interacting with survivors. “Sometimes, the little things that we do to people can be offensive. We may not realize it [the hurt inflicted]. I want people to love and want to be around me. When people see me, I want them to see Jesus.” That is in her connection with survivors that she desires to emulate God. To her, this means to communicate and demonstrate love to everyone.

Hooverman is aware that when people have been “hurt and rejected, they have to learn to trust.” She recognizes that in her relations with survivors, she is working with a population that has experienced severe trauma, and the outcomes can be many. Therefore, she works on building trusting relationship with survivors. Hooverman’s approach in building trust in relationships is to center the survivor’s attention on God’s love. She works to help them have an ongoing spiritual connection with God, and believes that if they stay connected to God “he will never fail them.”

Hooverman’s other method of building and connecting in relationships is sharing her “shortcomings.” Hooverman shares with survivors her inadequacies. She believes that in doing so, she is able to connect and build relationships with CSA survivors:

I try to get them to relax and to build a safety net. They got to feel safe with you, and they got to feel that you care. It takes time, but it is relationship. It all goes back to relationship with God. It is about relationship. We can have a healthy relationship with
him or an unhealthy relationship with him. So, then I think that my ability to share with them, and get them to a place of feeling safe helps.

Pastor Hooverman expresses a strong desire to help survivors to feel comfortable and to connect with her in relationship. Therefore, she begins the discussion with self-disclosure to allow survivors to identify the disclosure as a way of modeling. From this perspective, she demonstrates that she is not embarrassed to share her faults. As she models, talks and engages with stories about herself, survivors begin to feel that she is a safe person to entrust with their intimate secrets. In addition, she sees her modeling as reflective of the type of relationship survivors can have with God. Hooverman demonstrates understanding survivors as she fosters supportive relationships with them and models for them by entrusting them with her secret faults.

**Relational Activities**

**Pastor Alexander and Pastor Michelson**

Pastor Alexander engages with survivors from a survivor-to-survivor perspective. He understands the needs of survivors and engages in relational activities that strengthens his connection with them. Pastor Michelson also engages in relational and familial activities with his congregants. This segment reflects the accounts of two clergy.

Alexander has activities where the congregants come together with their families. All the celebratory activities are valued in his congregation. It is important to Pastor Alexander to engage with survivors/congregant in activities. Many times, survivors experienced disconnection from his or her families. As a survivor, Pastor Alexander attempts to fill this void by encouraging involvement. He states, “I engage them in activities. Where you know in some cases, you have to actually, now there may have to be a little bit more encouraging or engaging.
Getting people to be engage in situations. But, I think it is one of the things that help them become a part.” Alexander feels that the activities are helpful, and the congregant-survivors are able to feel that they belong to a family.

Pastor Alexander likens the process of encouraging/engaging to the progression of quilting:

It is almost like a quilt. The quilt is full of beautiful colors, fabrics, and designs. But, on the edge, the frayed edges are not that pretty. You know and we do not realize that beauty is just that fragile. So, it is like patch work where the stitching has come apart. If you do not have the right tools to patch it, you cannot fix it. I see that person who had some stitching removed, who needs help being restored. We can do that [restore] by engaging them, by showing love.

By likening the restoration process to quilting, Alexander demonstrates an understanding of CSA survivors. That understanding reflects that despite the characteristics of the survivor/quilt, the outcome can be stupendous. The end product is based on the course of action that you engage. He must be vigilant, since the action affects the relationship/quilt.

Pastor Alexander relates that he has discovered the value in relationships through his experience as a survivor. Therefore, he is acutely aware when he engages survivors in activities, he challenges himself and others to “try to commit” to love with the intensity that he believes God loves. He offers the Bible to support his feelings: “The Bible says that God is love, so we have got to show love. Love is the main thing. I do not care what religion you are involved in, God is love.” Pastor Alexander feels that the love he shares enables him to have relationships with survivors. He believes in demonstrating this love to members and non-members. Pastor
Alexander shares that he is known for allowing people in varying communities to participate in his congregational events. Both Pastors Alexander and Michelson engage in activities with congregants as a means to connect effectively in relationships.

**Pastor Michelson**

Pastor Michelson offers services that bring survivors together with other parishioners for a time of fellowship - food, fun, and social time - as well as encouraging survivors to take part in other activities that offer the opportunity to “develop and sustain meaningful relationships. We are careful to not single out CSA survivors, because it would adversely affect the individual’s development.” Pastor Michelson demonstrates an understanding of the survivors’ dilemma that they would like to blend in with other congregants as if CSA were not an historical phenomenon in his or her life.

Pastor Michelson engages in relational and familial activities, such as family fun night, picnics, or park outings, which offer the opportunity for people to build relationships. He points out that the traditional worship time is a practicable time for relational engagement. He comments, “Some people are so heavenly bound that they are no earthly good.” From this perspective, the Christian is viewed as conversing and interacting as if they are in a holy dreamland, and therefore are unable to relate and connect because of this illusion.

Michelson feels that he has a responsibility to survivors: “We have to be able to meet those needs and create those kinds of relationships.” He does not want to fail and cause disconnections in relationships, because “the focus is on getting to heaven.” He attests that “there is a whole lot of life between now and heaven.” Therefore, he is able to successfully
provide and connect with survivors/congregants in a way that build relationship through relational and familial activities.

Michelson talks about how his congregation is moving forward to integrate classes that will “deal with the issues of abuse, abstinence, homelessness, finances, income, and family planning.” Pastor Michelson planned to embark on creative services and move away from the traditional pattern of attending church on Sundays. From his perspective, people will be attracted to the classes that are trendy and that deal with real life occurrences. He feels that the newer non-traditional focus of weekly service will attract “those people who have suffered from abuse.”

Pastor Michelson feels that people have “a plethora of issues that manifest in physical ailments, such as African Americans suffering from the silent killer of hypertension. The church therefore tries to focus on activities that meet all needs.” He declares that the “church cannot do everything for everybody. We have to be able to manage the resources that we have so that we can impact the most people.” Pastor Michelson willingly admits that the lack of financial resources is a weakness in his congregation: “We do not have enough money to do the things that we really would like to do or the things that we need to do.” Michelson appreciates the significant familial events that occur in his congregation, but explains that tailoring of services for a specific issue is not feasible; however, creating services that integrate other domains is achievable. He expresses that he has the desire to make it happen [varying services for CSA survivors], but lacks the funding.

Pastor Michelson has a daughter who experienced CSA, and in spite of counseling, she continues to struggle with the effects of CSA. Michelson shares that his daughter’s efforts
toward recovery increase his empathy for other CSA survivors: “I am not only empathetic but I am also keenly aware and connected to the outcome of that kind of situation.” Pastor Michelson’s profession before his clergy role was social work. He feels that because of his social work background and his daughter’s experience, he can understand the plight of CSA survivors.

**Reflections**

There were clergy in the study who demonstrated that they understood the nature of their relationships with CSA survivors. Pastor Hooverman effectively connected with survivors. She understood the necessity of helping them get beyond the horrors that are sometimes associated with CSA, and embrace applicable means of coping. She describes her relationships as built on love, modeling trust, and helping the survivors to focus on God’s love. In doing so, she helps survivors move beyond the pain of CSA.

Pastor Wheeler connected with survivors, and understood the dilemma of female survivors. He was knowledgeable about the consequences of CSA. He understood how CSA adversely influenced and affected his female survivor-congregants. He noticed that they were marred by the traumatic experience and gravitated toward unhealthy relationships with men. He acted as a safety guard for them, and in this role, steered them away from such relationships. He wanted to make sure that they did not experience adult victimization.

Pastor Wheeler and Brooksmith were reflective as they discussed gender barriers, especially how in their experiences males did not customarily share with other males the
occurrence of CSA or other painful experiences. The two pastors found that males tend to suffer in silence, whereas the female survivor-congregants could approach them and were vocal about the pain of their CSA experiences.

Many of the clergy interviewed spoke of loving relationships. They worked with survivors to connect by demonstrating the love of God. Each recognized the important role that love plays in being able to demonstrate successful connection in relationship with congregant-survivors.

Pastors Wheeler and Michelson demonstrated the importance and value found in creating relational and familial activities. It is through these types of connecting activities that CSA survivors are able to feel that they are a part of a family. That is a caring congregation. Positive connections and supportive relationships are fundamental to CSA survivors, and serve to “buffer the effects of CSA” (Adams & Bukowsky, 2007, p. 652). The African American clergy demonstrated the ability to offset the consequences that are associated with CSA.

Even as RCT in spiritual connections occur when people are in connections with God, some aspects of RCT emerged between individuals. Specifically in these connections, the clergy “joined together based on the authentic thoughts and feelings” (p. 29) of the survivors, which is “mutual empathy” (p. 29).

The accounts represent the personal perspectives of interviewed clergy, and it is clear that they understood the nature of their relationships with survivors. This understanding is demonstrated in their connection with CSA survivors in “thoughts and feelings” (p. 29). It is important to point out that the experience of “mutual empathy leads to mutual empowerment”
African American Clergy

(Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30). A research study that investigates survivors and clergy’s experiences of “mutual empowerment” (p. 30) can serve to further reveal if and how the components of “mutual empowerment” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30) emerge for other clergy and survivors.
Chapter 9

Disconnections

As a social institution, the church is often viewed as a safe environment. Unfortunately, disconnections may occur in environments that are viewed as safe. This chapter demonstrates how CSA survivors encountered and created disconnections in respective congregations. The main themes of those disconnections are isolation and stereotypes.

Isolation

Pastor McFadden

McFadden observed CSA survivors who were isolated. She believed that after a sufficient amount of time passed, those individuals would “trust that they were in a safe environment, and so it required us to be long-suffering and to continue to reach out and be intentional in loving them, and being patient with them.”

Pastor McFadden explains that if an incident occurs in her congregation involving a CSA survivor, that the members of the clergy and elders, who are the leaders of the congregation, would exercise care in approaching that person. The leaders of the church would discuss the situation, pray, and obtain direction from God before discussing the situation with the survivor and risk causing further isolation. “So, before we have a chance to cause isolation we are definitely talking with our chief pastor. We wait to hear from God so that we handle the person with compassion and empathy.”

Pastor McFadden has witnessed people within the clergy and the congregants who would not connect with CSA survivors, because they viewed them as “too needy.” She says that even though these individuals were not aware that the individuals they viewed as “needy” were CSA
survivors, they still rejected them based on their behavior. McFadden says that the clergy and congregants who were rejecting these individuals would comment, “I just don’t have the energy to deal with them today,” or “I do not have the energy to deal with that anger.” Pastor McFadden and other leaders in her congregation expressed dissatisfaction with such a response. Pastor McFadden told me that she and other clergy within her congregation would advocate that, “Christ was long-suffering with us, and therefore we must be long-suffering with the survivor.”

In the interview, Pastor McFadden describes what she feels is the experience of survivors: “I have been burned and bitten so much and so I am gonna to be slow to trust.” She acknowledges that most CSA survivors have been hurt repeatedly, and do not enter relationships quickly. The survivor treads carefully and slowly when interacting in settings. McFadden describes this process:

   It is almost like they are going to throw the shoe in the room and wait to see if the shoe is going to come out. ‘Okay, the first one did not, but I am still not going in the room. So, I will throw another shoe.’ Whatever their limit is after they have thrown enough shoes, then they are ready to go on in.

   McFadden attributes the distant behavior of survivors to “what they have experienced not only out in the world but what they have actually experienced to some degree in churches.” McFadden attested that “Not every place that is a place of faith and that professes to be safe is actually safe.” McFadden is aware that she and other clergy suffer the consequences of church leaders who have caused devastation in people’s lives: “We [clergy] recognize and say sometimes that we have to pay for the sins of others.” When congregants disconnect or come in feeling isolated, she and other clergy “take the position that they feel unsafe, and we love on
McFadden engages in loving relationships to help the congregants who demonstrate isolation to feel secure in the church setting, and to feel that they are loved. Brooksmith understands from a survivor-to-survivor perspective why survivors isolate.

**Pastor Brooksmith**

From his survivor-to-survivor perspective, Brooksmith recognizes that isolation can be a defense mechanism for the survivor. He discusses how CSA survivors isolate themselves. In his experience, the survivor causes the isolation. “They [survivors] would not dine out with other people.” The individual “formed those behaviors and concluded that is the way they were born.”

Based on his background as a CSA survivor, Pastor Brooksmith speaks about the feelings of isolation that marks the survivor’s experience, and offers an analogy to describe how CSA experiences influence the behavior of survivors: “Unfortunately that is not the way we [CSA survivors] are, but that is how we have become in order to survive.” He understands that the experience of CSA can cause survivors to become isolated in an attempt to protect themselves. He describes how survivors may try to resist the feelings that cause them to isolate themselves from others. He discourages survivors from engaging in isolating behavioral patterns, telling them, “God really does not want us to be abused. The abuse was not God’s design and plan for your life.” He likens survivors who isolate to trying to change the station on a radio:

You have set it and you push the button and it goes to another channel. It always goes to some other channel that was not you. You really do not like that music, but you have come to accept it, because it always goes to that channel. The enemy has messed with our presets.
Pastors Brooksmith and Alexander have similar experiences with congregants who have isolated themselves.

**Pastor Alexander**

Pastor Alexander speaks of a woman who had disconnected from another congregation prior to arrival at his congregation. The woman did not join his church, but was in regular attendance throughout her recovery. The woman had been abused by a pastor at another congregation. The survivor came to Alexander’s congregation seeking a place of safety. Alexander observed that the woman was separating herself from other people, and indicated to me that he felt that she herself was creating the isolation. Alexander relayed that the woman was “quiet for a while. She had a problem with clergy.” It was his opinion, in observing the woman that her abuse by a previous pastor had affected her relationship with other male clergy.

Alexander feels that an important factor in helping CSA survivors to feel reconnected when they have experienced clergy victimization is to build a trusting relationship. Alexander discusses how the relationship began to build for this female as she began to talk and share her experience of victimization with other females in the congregation. Slowly, as she began to observe Pastor Alexander’s relationships with others in the congregation, she began to trust him. Pastor Alexander explains to me that for survivors in the congregation, seeing him interact was helpful because “they see that, and they feel, and you know you have got to break down that wall. So that they feel like they can trust. That doesn’t come until they feel they can trust you with the information.” Alexander notices that as survivors such as this woman observe how he and other congregants are interacting, they begin to trust him. Once the woman felt comfortable
enough with him to share her traumatic experiences, the two of them began to build a trusting relationship.

Alexander feels that this survivor experienced healing in his congregation and that her isolation ceased. Alexander stated to me that she “was a different person than when she arrived.” Pastor Alexander felt fortunate to be able to make a difference in her life, and indicated to me that he is often called upon to help survivors who have experienced clergy victimization and disconnection from their congregations. He attributes this to his background and knowledge of CSA. Serving in the capacity of a clergy-survivor helps him to bring connection where disconnection has occurred.

Pastor Schwartz

While Pastor Alexander’s experience was with a self-isolated survivor, Pastor Schwartz discusses a male survivor who experienced isolation from congregants. Schwartz recounts how he observed a CSA male survivor who was ostracized and rejected because of displaying effeminate characteristics. In particular, Schwartz recalls an individual with whom he had a close relationship. The young man had been sexually abused. Pastor Schwartz believes that because of sexual abuse, males sometimes may demonstrate feminine traits rather “than what the men are used to. Men expect men to act like themselves, rather than recognize that oftentimes-young men may also demonstrate their mother’s mannerisms. Often, the response of other people toward the young men who act feminine is ostracism.”

Pastor Schwartz thought the young man’s isolation occurred because of his feminine characteristics, as opposed to the knowledge of others of his abuse. Schwartz recognizes that in many cases, male survivors struggle with their identity. He discusses their connection with God:
“I know personally that they truly loved God.” Pastor Schwartz discusses how survivors who have been reared by their mothers may acquire the feminine “traits of their mother.” He continues by saying that this survivor had the mannerisms, which closely matched those of his mother, rather than those of his dad, with whom he had very little interaction:

He struggled with that [effeminate behavior]. His father was sickly, and most of his interactions were with his mother. His mother did a lot of nurturing. So, he had many of his mother’s traits. He was picked on and called names. He was male, but he just had his mother’s traits.

Pastor Schwartz relates how this individual encountered a series of problems that negatively affected his life.

Schwartz discusses male clergy who are labeled as gay with effeminate behavior. Schwartz identifies isolation and disconnection occurring for the male clergy: “I have heard people say, ‘Don’t go to his church, he has feminine ways, don’t go, and hear him preach, you know he is funny.’” Schwartz feels that the allegations that were used by the clergy and congregants were untrue, and that people were wrongly discouraged from attending the churches of these clergy. In Schwartz’s observations, it is the clergy and congregants in churches who are responsible for disconnections and isolations that occur for the survivors of CSA among them.

Pastor Schwartz feels that the responsibility of clergy and congregants is to love one another, and that both have “become too churchy.” He believes that there is a “deficiency” in love and compassion in churches. He believes that the people erect “pedestals, and are not reaching out with love.” He further states that there can be many programs and services in a church, but without the foundation of love, you have “nothing.”
Pastor Brooksmith

Brooksmith observes that victims who had been sexually abused become isolated in the church, and that congregants and clergy who are aware of the victimization of CSA survivors treat the victim like a criminal: “Unfortunately, they will look at the victim in an attempt to identify behaviors that would justify the victimization.” He feels that congregants and clergy try to put a label on the survivor to justify the isolation, and that this is harmful to the victim, serving to increase the victim’s feelings of loneliness. Pastor Brooksmith feels that the condemnation that is directed at the victim is disappointing. He disapproves of that type of conduct “because no one desires to be abused.”

Pastor Brooksmith also indicated to me that when others try to “redirect the abuse to the victim” it is “vicious behavior,” and that people can be cruel when they look for reasons to blame the victim for being sexually abused as a child: “In most cases of sexual abuse, it is some adult who has abused a child.” Pastor Brooksmith expressed his opinion that other adults perpetuate the maltreatment by targeting the victim as a perpetrator of CSA rather than the victim:

Many times people want to look at the child’s behavior. I personally hold the adult responsible. However, people will side with the adult and victimize even further the one that was abused. I get incensed, livid, and it just angers me. I have literally been in heated debates in the church over issues like this.

Pastor Brooksmith acknowledges that adults should, but do not always, take responsibility for the abuse. Brooksmith states that he questions whether such individuals have an accurate perception of the child’s behavior or form opinions based on their biases regarding
how children should act. He finds that some children who are extroverts are friendly and engage easily in relationships. Brooksmith finds that many times things are not always, what they appear to be; and that people are notorious for misjudging behavior. He reflects on his own CSA experience: “I did not do anything to be abused, and it should not have happened to me. If I had been flirtatious, would adults have said the same thing about me?” Pastor Brooksmith has difficulty understanding adults who cite a child’s behavior as justification for an adult to rape him or her. Since he was abused, he recognizes that adults can be perpetrators, and do not need impetus from the victim to abuse. Again, reflecting on his traumatic past, he states, “Adults were supposed to take care of me, not abuse me.” Pastor Brooksmith feels that children need to know that they can trust adults to protect them and provide supportive care, rather than to experience abusive sexual acts at their hands. His CSA experience fuels him with passion to help survivors.

In Brooksmith’s experience, the disconnect occurs because adult congregants misunderstand the child. The adults attribute adult behavioral characteristics to the child, and reason that if someone was involved in a sexual act with a child, the child enticed them and invited the abuse. Brooksmith views this type of isolation and disconnection as devastating to the survivors of CSA.

**Stereotypes**

**Pastor Schwartz**

**Females**

Schwartz has seen both men and women experience disconnections based on the stereotypical thinking of others. First, he discusses disconnection from a female perspective. He believes that CSA survivors get comfortable in the environment of the church, and forget that it
is a “hospital, full of sick people.” He believes that female survivors who “may have shared about their abuse, may be not in a safe environment, but, just among people in general.” The women who are survivors are “unaware that it may be unsafe to share so candidly, even in the presumed safety of the church.” He believes that there is a misconception in the church that everyone in the church loves as God does. The survivor who may be new to the church may feel comfortable sharing their experience, however unwise that might be.

Consequently, Schwartz feels that those who he regards as the “sick people” in his church will interpret the survivor’s CSA experience to mean that the individual is provocative or promiscuous. This perception is often attributed to female survivors from female congregants. Pastor Schwartz conveys that this is more likely to occur if the CSA survivor is a single, attractive female. The survivor is then viewed as a female competitor. The married females in the congregation begin to stereotype the survivor as a predator and disconnect from her because they feel that she may show interest in their spouses. He attributes this disconnection to the low self-esteem and stereotypical thinking of married females in the congregation.

He feels that this perception is based on stereotypical thinking that the survivor is promiscuous, and blames the media - soap operas, love stories, and movies - for this portrayal of survivors. He blames the media because in many instances in the media, a CSA survivor is depicted as seductive and promiscuous. He feels that, regrettably, the CSA survivor does not understand that “Everybody is at varying maturity levels in the church.” There are some members who have demonstrated the love of God, and form positive, “mutually empathic” (p. 29) relationships, while there are others who will hurt people and cause disconnections (Miller and Stiver, 1997).
Pastor Schwartz has witnessed some CSA survivors who remain connected to the church while disconnections are occurring and others that will depart. The stereotype that develops is that the survivor:

Is a loose woman. She cannot help nor control herself. So, you had better protect your man, because this harlot is going after him. Their paradigm is not based on experience in the area, but it is just based on what the media has shown them. So, at first there is a sister who gets the effect of ‘Wow, you are hurt. My sister, come in.’ Then after a while, their paradigms unfold. Then you see a distancing. If she is not so attractive, there is not so much distancing.

**Pastor Workman**

Pastor Workman recalls an incident of sexual abuse in the congregation. The CSA survivor was dressed provocatively, and he was alarmed because “she has got on like hot pants.” Although people were not aware of the incident of CSA, the victim was stereotyped and isolated because of the seductive attire. Pastor Workman had a conversation with the survivor. The disconnection was not what he deemed appropriate for the people of God. Conversely, he did not address the issue congregationally, but rather focused on helping the victim. He recognized that further victimization could have occurred if he formulated a sermon or made a speech to address disconnection based on appearance. In an attempt to protect the congregant, Workman remained silent and allowed his congregants to engage in disconnecting behaviors. He believed the best results would have been gained by talking with the survivor, but also, that the congregants needed to be made aware of the impact that disconnections have on others.
Workman feels that the disconnections were hurtful and disarming to fellow-congregants; however, Workman selected to work with the survivor rather than talk with his congregants.

**Males**

Pastor Schwartz shares another story about a male CSA survivor who had disconnected from his congregation and was in another community “stripping and doing drugs.” Pastor Schwartz attributes this disconnection by congregants to “not being able to cross that barrier.” The barrier he refers to is an inability to not internalize rejection and/or disregard the opinion of others. Schwartz has found that when people are stereotyped and disconnected:

For some people, it [stereotyping/disconnection] makes them stronger, and for others it is another form of rejection. And they say, ‘Okay you rejected me, so okay, I am going to go ahead and be that,’ thinking that they are hurting the other person. They do not realize that they are hurting themselves.

There are survivors who, according to Pastor Schwartz, are able to triumph even though others disconnect from them, while others are not able to handle labeling and disconnections. Therefore, they engage in harmful behaviors that are self-defeating:

They are missing the relationship with God. They are confusing the relationship with God, with people. God is saying ‘I have never rejected you. I love you, why are you leaving me. You are leaving me. I did not do anything but love you. I did not do anything but provide for you. You allow other people to cause you to move away from me.’ That is what I have seen happen in the church.

Pastor Schwartz recalls individuals who have separated from the church because of the hurt and the pain that occurs at times:
They will not come to the church. They have been hurt by the church, they have been ostracized by people in the church, and they refuse to have anything to do with the church. That has nothing to do with the spirituality piece that is church and religion.

**Reflections**

Overall, disconnections occur “whenever a relationship is not mutually empathic and mutually empowering,” which means we experience disconnections often. The degree of disconnection can vary from a very minor feeling of being out of touch to major trauma and violation” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 51). Therefore, when a relationship is not “mutually empathic,” (p. 51) the survivor suffers greatly. Many disconnections are in direct relationship to isolation and stereotypical behavior patterns that congregants develop and impose onto other congregants.

The clergy who confirmed that disconnections occurred in their respective churches experienced feelings of disappointment and were disheartened that congregants did not demonstrate God’s character in their interactions with one another. Rather, they caused congregant-survivors to experience disconnection. In some situations, devastating consequences were the result of those disconnections.

Despite the supportive relationships with CSA survivors that clergy can foster, the survivors can still experience disconnection because of the stereotypes held by the congregants and the isolation that they impose on survivors. One clergyman, in his attempt to protect a survivor, allowed the perpetuation of stereotypical behavioral patterns and disconnections to persist in his congregation. He thought that by talking with a congregant-survivor about her inappropriate dress that he was addressing the problem of the disconnection. A better solution
would have been to address the topic with congregants, creating a message of how stereotypes cause disconnections.

There were other clergy in the study whose accounts are not represented in the section on disconnections. They were not aware of disconnections occurring in their congregations. Even in congregations where clergypersons were cognizant of the occurrence of CSA in churches, the mention of any type of disconnection related to CSA did not surface. This lack of awareness may point to the code of silence that occurs in congregations regarding CSA and the denial by clergy of disconnecting behavioral patterns that occur in churches. Two clergymen, in their letters to their congregant-survivors spoke of the necessity of the clergy and their congregations to initiate dialogue about the trauma of childhood sexual abuse.

It is clear that disconnections occur in churches. However, it is reassuring that most of the clergy interviewed were aware of the disconnections, and demonstrated an understanding of the survivor’s plight of disconnected relationships within their churches. Conversely, it is disappointing that the congregants were not always confronted. Congregants must be accountable for causing disconnection in their respective congregations. Consequently, the burden of confrontation of disconnection is on the clergy. As leaders, it is incumbent upon them to be bold and demonstrate a loving persuasion when confronting congregants about the isolation and the stereotypes that create disconnections in churches. If the disconnections are not addressed, then congregants who fall prey to the stereotyping and isolations will suffer greatly. This is a reflection on the congregation and its leaders.

Disconnections can be “the source of psychological problems” (p. 65). CSA survivors enter congregations with vulnerabilities. They do not need the additional psychological burden
that emerges from such disconnections. Disconnections are detrimental, hurtful, and represent the “psychological experience of rupture that occurs whenever a child or adult is prevented from participating in a mutually empathic and mutually empowering interaction” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 65). Just as connections are meaningful and “mutually empathic,” (p. 26) disconnections are harmful and demonstrate a lack of empathy. They serve to cause harm to individuals and even to the congregation as a whole.
Chapter 10

Discussion

This study investigated how ten African American clergy fostered relationships with African American survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). The clergy had the opportunity and access to individuals who had encountered a wide-range of difficulties in life that were a direct result of CSA. While the relationships between African American people and the church are reflected in the literature, there was a need for research on the relationship between African American clergy and CSA survivors. How did they understand the nature of their relationship with survivors? What were the types and purposes of services offered?

Researchers have consistently labeled the Black Church as a dependable resource for African American families. In this association, researchers comment, and repute, “African Americans are known for dutiful commitment to the church: “It could be said that blacks set the pace for people of all colors in this nation. They are arguably the most religious people of color in the world” (Gallup, 2002, p. 8). Inherent in this “dutiful commitment to the church” (p. 8) rests the reassurance of relational benefits such as … “mutual reinforcement” (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1999, p. 7). The ambiance that emerges in the Black Church impels African American families to feel knit together. The Black Church “creates for most black families their initial or primary identity,” (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1999, pps. 7, 402) and in this manner, African American families are equipped to embrace their distinctiveness as a church unit. In this unit, the clergy serve as role models, and the congregants rely on their pastors for leadership and direction (Mitchem, 2007). As viable leaders, the clergy feels that they embrace an understanding of their relationship with CSA survivors.
Understanding the Nature of Relationships with CSA Survivors

The results of this research confirmed that the Black Church is a social institution that continues to arbitrate on behalf of Black people (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1999). The research study investigated whether African American Clergy fostered supportive relationships with CSA survivors. Specifically, the research questions examined how African American clergy understood the nature of their relationship with CSA survivors and what the types and purpose of services offered to survivors of CSA by clergy were. The ten clergy studied demonstrated how they understood the nature of their relationship with CSA survivors in chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.

In Chapter 5, how the understanding occurred was viewed from a survivor-to-survivor perspective. The clergy demonstrated how the devastating occurrence of CSA might affect the life of the survivor. In addition, their experience shaped how they understood the nature of their relationships with CSA survivors.

Chapter 6 narrates in detail the survivor-to-survivor perspective, and specifically, how understanding was garnered through the religious coping method of prayer. It was reflective and intrinsic to the studied clergy’s experience with CSA survivors. In addition, Chapter 6 explains how each clergyperson had a spiritual connection in prayer with God, and how the outcome of that connection was “empowerment” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 31). This experience helped survivors have a “greater sense of connection and desire for more connections” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 33) with other survivors.

According to relational cultural expert Dr. Judith O. Jordan, “There has not been much explicitly written about spirituality and RCT, although many have made the connection.” (Personal communication with Dr. Judith Jordan on February 4, 2011). As stated by Dr. Jordan,
people are beginning to recognize the relationship between RCT and spirituality. The persuasive power of the components of RCT in spiritual connections significantly influenced the three clergy survivors of CSA in the study. The occurrence is substantiated in the narratives, and reflects what I observed, which is the clergy survivors experienced the “empowerment” (p. 30) that comes from “mutually empathic” (p. 30) relationships as discussed by Miller and Stiver, 1997. What is unique for the clergy-survivors in the study is that empowerment occurs as a consequence of their spiritual connections with God.

The experience of empowerment on the part of these clergy-survivors reinforces their collective belief that growth occurs in their spiritual connections with God. This occurrence of the components of RCT in spiritual connections may offer hope, and encouragement for other clergy to embark on such relationships with congregant-survivors in their churches. The understanding of the survivor-clergy in the study was respectively heightened by their own experiences as CSA victims, and differed from that of the other seven clergy studied. In this differentiation, the survivors, Brooksmith, Alexander, and Jacobs conversed, interacted, and understood survivor-congregants from a survivor-to-survivor perspective. In contrast, how the other seven clergy understood the nature of their relationship with survivors was based on knowledge of CSA trauma, and its effect on individuals, and the interactions with congregants who were CSA survivors.

Chapter 7 demonstrates how the seven clergy who were not survivors understood their relationship with survivors as seen through the themes that emerged out of the cultural sways. The themes were prayer, scriptures, and sermons. The clergy interviewed expressed their belief that through the practices of the religious services, that is, the cultural sways, that the CSA
survivors in their congregations were helped. Specifically, they expressed the belief that the
influence of the sways caused their congregants to receive healing and rejuvenation, and
experience positive interactions with God.

Chapter 8 reveals how the clergy in the study understood the nature of their relationship
with CSA survivors. They talk about the connections that occur in their congregations with
congregants. Specifically, nine studied clergy talk about the varying ways of connecting to
survivors. The tenth clergy speaks of connecting from a survivor perspective.

The areas of connections for the clergy were moving beyond the pain of CSA, gender
safeguards, gender barriers, love relationships, and relational activities. The clergy feels that the
various areas of connections served as methods of religious coping for CSA survivors.
In addition, what is represented is “a connection between two or more people that is “mutually
empathic and mutually empowering” (p. 26). From the clergy’s perspectives, the survivor-
congregants experience positive connections with them.

In Chapter 9, disconnections were discussed. The narratives emphasized the awareness
of the clergy of the fact that survivor-congregants experienced isolation in the church and
suffered from stereotypes held by other congregants. It is clear that “a relationship may be
composed of connections and disconnections, usually a mixture of both” (Miller and Stiver,
1997, p. 26). However, the consequences of those disconnections caused the survivor-
congregants of the clergy studied to experience isolation and stereotyping. Although the clergy
recognize why it occurs, in some instances, the survivors were causing the isolations, and in
others, the congregants were the isolators. In regard to stereotypes, three clergy talk about
stereotypes, which resided in their congregations regarding CSA and its victims.
The concern regarding the occurrence of disconnection in churches is that none of the clergy in the study talks about addressing those disconnections congregationally. One clergy addresses the behavior of a CSA survivor based on the isolating behavior that was presented to that survivor by fellow-congregants (in this instance the clergy reports that the congregants were not aware of the CSA history). Each clergy demonstrated how he or she understood the nature of their relationship with CSA survivors. However, what they failed to notice is that there is a need to avoid and confront disconnections. This should be an integral element in the nature of their understanding.

The other clergy did not observe disconnections occurring in their congregations. This may suggest that there is a silence in the churches concerning CSA. Their failure to note the disconnections may imply the need for further investigation of not only CSA, but also other topics of concern that go unaddressed in congregations.

**Verbal Messages to CSA Survivors**

In their letters, each clergy person demonstrated an understanding of the plight of the survivor as they conveyed messages to survivors. Collectively they conveyed a sense of support and encouragement to survivors. The recurring themes of the letters were that people make choices that are not connected to God, and in that way they fail to emulate a godly character. The abuser in such a state of mind will cause hurt to occur, and that is childhood sexual abuse. The sub-themes that emerged were reflective of two clergy who were sending messages to clergy and congregations to address the silence surrounding the issue of childhood sexual abuse that is prevalent in churches.
Types and Purpose of Services

The clergy in the study all observed that there are different types and purpose of services for CSA survivors. It is critical to note that many believed that empowerment is achieved through spiritual connections, such as the medium of prayer. The components of Relational cultural theory (RCT) emerged in the clergy-survivors’ descriptions of their connections with God in prayer. The clergy demonstrated that spiritual connections occurred. The three clergy-survivors described experiences of “mutual empathy and mutual empowerment” (p. 29) with God (Miller and Stiver, 1997). For example, Pastor Brooksmith conveyed, “God began to show me in my prayer time who I was and what happened to me.” A conversation with God occurred, resulting in Brooksmith’s revelation concerning his traumatic past. This in turn empowered him to design and teach a course in the community.

Pastor Jacobs recognized that she needed help: “I think because God is who he is and there was really nobody to show me. God himself had to do it.” Jacobs was empowered by the peace that resulted from prayer. The empowerment was a catalyst for counseling others regarding CSA.

Additionally, Pastor Alexander shared, “I could have a specific dialogue in my prayer time with God. It was through that dialogue that I actually came to a point that I could let it go.” Alexander allowed this empowerment in prayer to be a springboard from which he counseled CSA survivors.

The components of RCT that occurred in spiritual connections were helpful to both clergy and their congregants. The prayers demonstrated a powerful relational component of “mutual empathy and mutual empowerment” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30). Even though the
component of RCT is generally viewed as an occurrence between humans, the narratives of interviewed clergy in the study suggest that the essential aspects of RCT can also occur between humans and God.

Based on the clergy’s accounts, as individuals seek out God they are able to have connection with God in such a way that the outcome demonstrates that “mutually empathic” (p. 30) relationship occurs and that the individual is “mutually empowered” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30). The outcomes of the empowerment were zest, action, knowledge, sense of worth, greater sense of connection, and a desire for more connection. RCT in spiritual connections was a life-changing occurrence in the life of the petitioners, as they sought God out in prayer.

The clergy interviews suggested that the cultural sways in the congregations were influential and caused spiritual connections to emerge. Specifically, prayer, scriptures, and sermons were themes that emerged, and the sub-themes that reflected RCT in spiritual connections were healing and interaction with God. The reason for constructing the term “cultural sway” is that it represents the influence that is encapsulated when African Americans come together congregationally, participating in various cultural/religious activities in the church.

The clergy did not have services that were specific to CSA survivors. However, the cultural sways were clearly positive methods of religious coping that occurred in their churches. Furthermore, the services established a connection for survivors to connect to their clergy and other congregants. In addition, the clergy identified the effects of the services as a basis for healing and interaction with God.
Clergy Visions

In the interview, the studied clergy answered question # 21: If finances were plentiful, what would be your ideal type of services for CSA survivors? The question on unlimited financial resources generated positive visions for services. There were some commonalities among the clergy; the main themes that emerged were a facility and a therapist for survivors. Each of the clergy had relative visions for the survivors.

Facility

Pastor McFadden believed that her congregation would be known as a “place of restoration. So rather than what we are doing now, which is we kind of meet with folks one to three times, get them comfortable, and get them connected, and see them on. In some cases, that drops [people to not follow through with community connections] because ‘I kind of feel safe here, and I am not so sure about there.””

Pastor McFadden pointed out that people felt safe in the church. After referring her congregants to community services, McFadden is not able to follow up to see if the individuals have connected safely with the community referral. In addition, her congregants will decline community referrals. McFadden and Brooksmith share similar viewpoints for CSA survivors - each expressed the desire to have a facility for CSA survivors. Pastor Brooksmith talks about creating a facility, and refers to it as a “ministry,” which is a service. Schwartz envisions the potential center as a facility to help people to “be able to experience the love of God, and be in healthy relationships.” The next pastor, Hooverman envisions her facility as a mobile center that reaches out to survivors in the community.
Pastor Hooverman presents her service as a community outreach effort. She visualizes CSA survivors as viable speakers who “help me around the city. They would represent us in schools around the city. They would sweep the city, putting an end to the abuse.” She wants survivors to allow his or her voice to make a change in the city concerning sexual abuse. Hooverman envisions survivors as being able to eradicate sexual abuse.

Pastors McFadden, Brooksmith, Schwartz, and Hooverman each desire to have a type of center that helps survivors recover and prepares them to have successful and productive lives. The clergy that stood out as dissimilar in her vision was Pastor Jacobs, who spoke from a female-survivor-to-female-survivor perspective. She wants to create a cozy home for survivors. She indicated that the home would be ideal since, “I might just want to talk to you. Get together and talk privately.” She recognized the necessity to have a facility that caters to the needs of female survivors.

**Therapist**

Pastor Workman would like to see the clinicians “teaching courses and workshops.” He recognizes that his congregation is lacking in the area of teaching, and desires to influence CSA survivors by providing adequate curriculum and seminars. Workman has broader visions of services that could help all congregants. Workman and Alexander are similar in their visions: Both want a form of teaching to occur in the congregation. Pastor Alexander, from his survivor perspective, expressed concern about stigmas. Therefore, he envisions counseling and group work, including programs in diverse areas.

Michelson’s view was the same as Alexander’s. He wants a therapist on board to “be able to help people get through whatever the kinds of issues and obstacles they have.” His focus
is not totally directed toward CSA survivors. He recognizes that CSA survivors struggle, and wants to have the expertise of a therapist available to assist, but has a passion to help in various areas. Wheeler differs from Michelson in that he envisions a therapist who specializes in sexual abuse. Additionally, Hollandale envisions counselors who were both Christian and secular conducting sessions.

The participating clergy were excited to answer this research question, and ultimately, they shared similar visions to help CSA survivors. The African American clergy in the study were supportive of CSA survivors and demonstrated that support throughout the investigation.

**Limitations and Validity**

**Limitations**

The study was based on 10 African American clergy in the Midwest. The opportunity to investigate clergy on a small scale demonstrated how clergy understood the nature of their relationships with CSA survivors. While the study revealed that growth occurred in spiritual connections, and there are services in churches that assist CSA survivors, a larger study of the population of African American clergy would serve to reveal this growth on a broader scale. In addition, there remains a degree of silence surrounding the issue of CSA. Two of the clergy in the study discussed silence on the subject of CSA as a problem in congregations. Additionally, there were clergy who did not observe disconnections occurring in their congregations. A broader research study may reveal more on this type of disconnection.

**Validity**

Maxwell (2005) discusses how “bias and reactivity can affect validity relating to qualitative research studies (p. 108). He explained how values and expectations influence the
conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding negative consequences (p. 108). Reactivity refers to “the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” (p. 108). As the author mentioned, individuals are not able to do away with their “values and expectations.” As the researcher, I understood that my values and viewpoint could interfere, if not addressed. The biases that I brought to this research study were a ministerial calling, and my experience as a counselor in a church, an advocate for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and a social worker. All of these roles required that I step back and take on a non-judgmental and non-defensive role.

The necessity to have integrity as a researcher far exceeded any preconceived notion during the interviews, analysis and throughout the process. My biases were suppressed by thoroughly conducting self-introspection to prohibit biases from affecting and interfering with this research study. Again, the desire for integrity in research was important and a key factor that guided my research study. I accomplished this integrity by journaling throughout the process. I had a notepad in each room of my home, and consistently journaled about varying thoughts and processes throughout this research study.

It was important to obtain verbatim data, and not to guess at what participants were saying. For instance, on three transcripts, a few words were unclear, so the participants were contacted to reread the question, and I sought to obtain what they actually wanted to convey. The relational stance guided my interviewing process. For me, to assume such a stance involved honorableness and integrity in research. Raider-Roth (2005) talks about the role of relational stance when interviewing, and how it is crucial to understand precisely what the individual’s word means: “For example, I asked students to explain specific terms, such as confidence and
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

respect, being sure not to assume a shared understanding” (p. 181). It was important not to understand what interviewees in the study were saying based on my background and/or knowledge, but to obtain the authentic/verbatim meaning of their words. I applied extreme caution and care to analyze the data, giving particular attention to words and a false injection of words. When the data was unclear, I contacted the participants, and obtained clarity.

**Implications**

The implications of this research study revealed the significant occurrence of aspects of Relational cultural theory (RCT) in spiritual connections and the ensuing empowerment that occurred for African American clergy in the study who were also survivors of CSA. The study revealed that the clergy believed that cultural sways informed the clergy-survivor relationship. A valuable contribution to African American congregants would be for clergy to create specific programs for CSA survivors, using aspects of relational cultural theory (RCT). The cultural sways demonstrated the influence of spiritual connections in congregational settings. Again, the sways summarized and captured what happens when African Americans come together congregationally, participating in various cultural/religious activities in the church. The clergy’s collective experience of “mutual empathy and mutual empowerment,” (p. 30) positively affected their lives and how they interact with others. Each was empowered to work with other CSA survivors. The elements that emerged out of empowerment for the clergy were zest, action, knowledge, sense of worth, greater sense of connection, and desire for more connection (Miller and Stiver, 1997, pps. 30-31).

If clergy such as these create programs that include aspects of RCT, it would be helpful to have on board a therapist that values spirituality and that is familiar with the components of
RCT. From this perspective, the therapist would be able to help clergy create successful programs that would aid in recovery for the CSA survivor.

The specific programming would clearly reveal that clergy understand the nature of their relationships with survivors. This would profoundly affect and strengthen the clergy-survivor relationships in the church. A great number of CSA survivors may emerge and be attracted to an environment that demonstrates an understanding of CSA. Additionally, that provides clearly outlined services/programs that are conducive to serving the CSA population.

African American clergy would have the opportunity to affect their communities, and others. This type of services development would be advantageous for the CSA community, clinicians, and others who are interested in solutions to trauma not only in African American churches, but also in all churches. The formulation by clergy of CSA survivor-specific programs may trigger replication of services for CSA populations across the Midwest.

Pargament & Saunders (2007) found that “contrary to the views of some of our professional forerunners, religion and spirituality are not contrary to mental health and mature relationships, but are vital to the very being of most of our clients” (p. 906). I observed in my study that the cultural sways found in churches mirror the outcomes that occur in “mutually empathic” (p. 30) relationships (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 30). The sways are inherent in the concept found in religion and spirituality. For individuals who value religion and spirituality they can achieve methods of help through the channels of religious activities found in churches.
Recommendations

Gallup (2002) found that “black churches could indeed become the crucible for renewal of American faith in society. They provide community, grounding in biblical truth, and sometimes-fiery spiritual intensity” (p. 8). By influencing change in the Midwest, the African American clergy and/or leaders would be sought after as advisors to formulate change regarding the influence of spirituality.

It is recommended that clergy create an environment that includes a part-time clinician, psychiatrist, nurse, and RCT/spiritual connection professional. It is preferable that the mental health professionals value spirituality. The mental health professionals will receive training regarding RCT occurring in spiritual connections with God. The team of mental health and RCT professionals would be directly involved with the supportive care of CSA survivor-congregants, and other congregants who may need the services. The professionals can be the first-line assessors, and refer the congregants to other resources as required.

The programs would include counseling, group sessions with the clinician/RCT/spiritual connection professional. The clinician can integrate therapeutic practice with RCT/spiritual connection teachings, seminars, and workshops that cater to the needs of CSA survivors and others who have encountered traumatic experiences. The seminars will nurture relationships with members of the CSA population and others. This will be accomplished by building connection through loving and “mutually empathic” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 26) relationships. Group members will have the opportunity to spend time rediscovering and reconnecting with themselves.
Private practitioners and community agency-based clinicians can learn how to formulate services to include spirituality components and relational cultural theory to help CSA individuals in the recovery process. In addition, if clergy include components of the relational cultural theory as a method of religious coping, others will understand that for spiritual individuals there is a connection and empowerment that transpires in his or her relationship with God. This can serve to strengthen the clinician and clergy communities, as they interact with people who value spirituality, and they can tailor their services accordingly. The outcome would be to produce a helpful channel of communication linking clergy and clinicians in the community, while serving to build positive relationships. Pargament & Saunders (2007) found, and I agreed, “Psychologists ignore the spiritual dimension of psychotherapy to the detriment of their field and their clients” (p. 906). Specifically, including the component of relational cultural theory (RCT) with religion and spirituality offers a newer way of approaching psychotherapy and spiritual counseling in churches and the community.

My research will add to the body of literature a reflective view of the impact that clergy can have when they understand the nature of their relationship with CSA survivors and when they cultivate relationships that support and demonstrate this understanding. It will be beneficial for clergy to understand that CSA survivors are confronted with various outcomes related to their victimization.
References


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter of Support

To whom it may concern:

My name is Eleanor Bolar. I am a doctoral student in the department of Educational Studies at the University of Cincinnati, College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services. The research area of interest is sexual abuse, specifically, for this study, Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA). My interest in CSA survivors is an inherent compassion toward defenseless children and suffering adults. The study that I am currently preparing to begin is on African American Clergy: Fostering Supportive Relationship with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse.

However, prior to the interview, the University of Cincinnati (UC) Institutional Research Board require site letters of support that confirms that the researcher has been granted permission to enter the site where the research/interview will be conducted.

There are very few articles in the literature on African American clergy. Therefore, I hope that you will be interested in participating and supporting my research effort. You can agree to allow me to enter your congregation by replying affirmatively via email to Eleanor.bolar@uc.edu or by signing below. Your affirmative response does not mean that you are obligated to participate. At anytime, you can decide that you are not interested in participating. I appreciate your support of my research study. I will be happy to answer any questions or concerns. Thank you.
Letter of Support for Eleanor Bolar

To: University of Cincinnati, Institutional Research Board (IRB)

Title of Study: African American Clergy: Fostering Supportive Relationships with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

I support Eleanor Bolar’s research study. This is a letter of support stating that Eleanor Bolar has my permission to enter my facility to conduct her research study/ interview (s).

Sincerely,

Print Name

Facility

Signature
APPENDIX B

Adult Consent Form

Adult Consent Form for Research

University of Cincinnati

Department: Educational Studies

Principal Investigator: Eleanor Bolar

Faculty Advisor: Miriam Raider-Roth

**Title of Study:** African American Clergy: Fostering Supportive Relationships with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

The person in charge of this research study is Eleanor Bolar, the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Educational Studies. Dr. Miriam Raider-Roth, who is a faculty member of the University of Cincinnati, is guiding her in this research.

The purpose of this research study is to examine how African American clergy understand the nature of their relationship with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Secondly, what are the types and purposes of services clergy offer to CSA survivors.

The participants in this study will be African American clergy or individuals the clergy may designate to interview. The number of participants that will take part in this study will be 10-15. You may be in this study if you are a member of the clergy or designated by clergy to interview. You may not be eligible to participate in this study if you are not a member of the clergy or undesignated by clergy to interview.
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

Taking part in this research study is not a part of your job. Refusing to be in the study will not affect your job. You will not be offered any special work-related benefits if you take part in this study.

You will be asked to participate in an opened-ended, audio-recorded interview. It will take about 1-2 hours to complete the interview and consent form. The interview will take place at a designation selected by the participant. The participants will be asked to sign this consent form, which may take about 10 minutes to read and sign. Next the interview will follow, which will be less than 2 hours. A one-session interview is required for this study. The interview will take place at a designation selected by the participant. The information obtained from the participant will consist of interview questions that pertain to the title of this research study, which is African American Clergy: Fostering Supportive Relationships with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse.

It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk by being in this research study.

You will probably not get any benefit because of being in this study. However, being in this study may help other clergy and survivors of sexual abuse understand how African American clergy foster supportive relationships.

You will not have to pay anything to take part in this study. You will not be paid (or given anything) to take part in this study.

If you do not want to take part in this research study you:

    May simply not participate.

    Will not be treated any differently.
You have a choice whether or not to take part in an audio-taped interview. There is a place at the end of this paper to mark your choice.

Information about you will be kept private by:

Using a study ID number instead of the participant's name on the research forms.

Keeping the master list of names and study ID numbers in a separate location from the research forms.

Not including the participant's name on the typed transcript.

Erasing audiotapes as soon as they are transcribed.

Keeping research data on a password-protected computer.

Your information will be kept in a locked file, located in my campus office at the University of Cincinnati for three years. After that it will be destroyed by using a shredder.

The following explains how the researcher will make sure the participant's identity and his/her research data are not disclosed:

The information will be in a locked cabinet in the researcher's campus office.

Signed consent documents and master lists of participant names and ID numbers will NOT be stored in the same place as identifiable data.

The research data and consent documents will be kept for three years, and at that time destroyed by shredding. Identifiers will be removed after typing up the transcript; therefore, the identifiers will be removed as soon as possible.

The raw data will be kept for a minimum of two years after the study is closed.

The records will be de-identified or destroyed in a confidential manner following these steps:
removing participant's name from all research data deleting computerized records shredding paper research files when the study is complete.

The data from this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by name.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

The researcher cannot promise that information sent by the internet or email will be private.

Data may be compiled and analyzed manually and/or via Zoomerang online software program. However, there will not be identifiers used when compiling and analyzing information.

Your identity and information will be kept confidential unless the authorities have to be notified about abuse or immediate harm that may come to you or others.

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

What if you have questions about this research study?

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Eleanor Bolar, (513) 556-1624 or (513) 205-8320 or you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Miriam Raider Roth, (513) 556-3808.

The UC Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-S) reviews all non-medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the Chairperson of the UC IRB-S at (513) 558-5784. Or, you may call the UC Research
Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB-S, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may skip answering questions that you do not want to answer. You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Eleanor Bolar, (513) 556-1624 or (513) 205-8320.

Agreement:

I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

__ YES, you may audiotape my interview

__ NO, I do NOT want you to audiotape my interview

Participant Name (please print) ________________________________

Participant Signature __________________________________________ Date _______

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent ___________________________ Date _______
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

African American Clergy: Fostering Supportive Relationships with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

1. Position Title: Denomination: Gender:
2. How many years have you been pastor of this congregation?
3. How many years have you been affiliated with this congregation?
4. Describe the types of services available in your congregation that help survivors of childhood sexual abuse experience. Who are the providers?
5. Describe the purpose of those services that are in your congregation that help survivors of childhood sexual abuse experience.
6. Explain how and why you believe the services are important.
7. Explain the role of these services in fostering supportive relationships with CSA survivors.
8. Do you see CA survivors as having unique needs? If so, what do you think those unique needs are?
9. If there are unique needs, how do you respond?
10. Explain your methods for promoting a relationship with survivors of CSA.
11. What are your strengths and weaknesses in regards to your relationship with CSA survivors?
12. If you could send a verbal message to survivors expressing how you understand the lived reality of CSA in the church what would you say?
13. Does empathy and/or mutual (shared) empathy affect and influence your relationship with CSA survivors? If so, how and if not, why not?
14. Describe the types and causes of disconnections (such as isolation, shunning, gossip) that might be occurring in your congregation between CSA survivors and clergy and/or other congregants.
15. Describe what it means to you and how does it affect you, if there are disconnections occurring in your congregation with CSA survivors.
16. Do stigmas exist and affect your congregants who are survivors of CSA. If so, how?
17. Do you address the stigmas and its affect on CSA survivors? If so, how?
18. Describe how and in what way religious practices are related to the culture in this church that has helped congregants who are CSA survivors - prayer songs, scriptures, sermons, other.
19. Describe how spirituality has aided and/or impeded CSA survivors.
20. How do you see God or higher power as it relates to helping CSA survivors?
21. If finances were plentiful, what would be your ideal type of services for CSA survivors?
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Flyer

African American Clergy: Fostering Supportive Relationships with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is part of a graduate degree program. Approximately 10-15 clergy are being asked to participate. There are no penalties if you decide to withdraw your participation.

The person in charge of this research study is Eleanor Bolar, a doctoral candidate of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Educational Studies. Dr. Miriam Raider-Roth, Faculty Advisor, is guiding her in this research.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate clergy in African American and Non-Denominational Churches on how they understand the nature of their relationship with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Secondly, what are the types and purposes of services clergy offer to CSA survivors?

The people who will participate in this study are: Clergy and/or their appointed representatives

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?

The participant will select a date and location to conduct the interview session(s).

Face-to-Face audiotape recorded interview (the interview will take 1-2 hours). The interviews will take place at the location selected by the participant.

If you are interested in participation, please leave a message at 513-556-1624 or eleanor.bolar@uc.edu to confirm your interest.
Email Notification

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is part of a graduate degree program. Approximately 10-15 clergy are being asked to participate. There are no penalties if you decide to withdraw your participation.

The person in charge of this research study is Eleanor Bolar, a doctoral candidate of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Educational Studies. Dr. Miriam Raider-Roth, Faculty Advisor, is guiding her in this research.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate clergy in African American Churches on how they understand the nature of their relationship with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Secondly, what are the types and purposes of services clergy offer to CSA survivors?

The people who will participate in this study are: Clergy and/or their appointed representatives

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?

   The participant will select a date and location to conduct the interview session(s).
   Face-to-Face audiotape recorded interviews (the interview will take 1-2 hours). The interviews will take place at the location selected by the participant.

If you are interested in participation, please leave a message at 513-556-1624 or eleanor.bolar@uc.edu to confirm your interest.
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

APPENDIX F

African American Clergy: Fostering Supportive Relationships with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Telephone Script

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is part of a graduate degree program. Approximately 10-15 clergy are being asked to participate. There are no penalties if you decide to withdraw your participation.

The person in charge of this research study is Eleanor Bolar, a doctoral candidate of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Educational Studies. Dr. Miriam Raider-Roth, Faculty Advisor, is guiding her in this research.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate clergy in African American Churches on how they understand the nature of their relationship with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Secondly, what are the types and purposes of services clergy offer to CSA survivors?

The people who will participate in this study are: Clergy and/or their appointed representatives

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?

The participant will select a date and location to conduct the interview session(s).

Face-to-Face audiotape recorded interviews (the interview will take 1-2 hours). The interviews will take place at the location selected by the participant.

If you are interested in participation, please leave a message at 513-556-1624 or eleanor.bolar@uc.edu to confirm your interest.