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Evaluating Church Hurt in the Black Church

Sheriyse Williams
Walden University

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Evaluating Church Hurt in the Black Church

by

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MA, Norfolk State University, 2011

BA, Norfolk State University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The Black Church has been a significant source of support for many African Americans and has served as a protective factor while meeting religious and spiritual needs. However, some studies have suggested that the Black Church can also be a source of trauma, betrayal, and abuse for some African Americans. The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on outcomes associated with church hurt and understand occurrences of church hurt using betrayal trauma theory. A nonexperimental, quantitative, correlational research design was used evaluate data from 155 African American adults. Participants were recruited from the Facebook group Church on Sunday, Therapy on Mondays using snowball sampling. Online questionnaires consisted of the demographic questionnaire, Religious Proscription Scale, Psychological Abuse Experienced in Groups Scale, Religious Support Scale—Adapted, and Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale and disseminated using SurveyMonkey. A factorial analysis of variance was used to analyze the data. The results of this study were not statistically significant. The study revealed that emotional manipulation and spiritual bullying had a significant independent relationship with church hurt, and spiritual neglect was experienced by most participants. The results of this study can be used to promote positive social change by educating members of the Black Church on church hurt issues and potentially reduce or prevent the occurrence of church hurt for some African Americans.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my amazing husband, Lorenzo, two beautiful children, Isaiah, and Lauryn, and soon to arrive sweet little baby girl. Thank you for allowing me to write daily and bring my laptop to events, games, and practices. Your patience and sacrifices allowed me to successfully complete this journey.

To my mom and dad, thank you for your love, support, and prayers that led me to pursue greater. I also dedicate this work to my little sisters who served as inspirations after becoming an attorney and doctor. This work is dedicated to my grandmother, Lucinda, who never missed an opportunity to tell me how proud she was and the memory of my late grandfather who loved me whole heartedly. To my family, including my aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and cousins who encouraged me every step of the way, your love was felt throughout this journey. Thank you to my awesome friends and church family who told me that the impossible was possible with God.

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I am fortunate for my husband and children. You all extended grace to me to be great in many ways and forgiveness when needed. I also acknowledge my family for pushing me to be great. Special thanks to my friends for supporting me along the way. Thank you to anyone else who offered words of encouragement throughout this journey, I am grateful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The Black Church has served as a foundation for the growth and resiliency of many African Americans. This religious organization has reflected strength and grace for numerous African Americans who have continued to experience oppression and mistreatment (Barnes, 2015; Thompson et al., 2020). The Black Church is a source of hope for many African Americans and provides them with a sense of belonging (Streets, 2015). In addition, the Black Church has provided a place where the intersection of public and private lives of African Americans can exist (Avent et al., 2015). The Black Church has provided social services to countless African Americans in areas related to finances, health, food, and counseling. In addition, it has offered support in addressing socioeconomic and social disparities experienced by many African Americans (Hays, 2015).

Systematic oppression and opposition have contributed to some of views held by African Americans pertaining to the mistrust of systems outside of the Black Church (Bilkins et al., 2016). Hence, many African Americans have endured numerous struggles that have prompted them to seek refuge in the Black Church from the world (Shelton & Cobb, 2017). The significance of the Black Church is evident as 60% of African Americans are connected to this religious organization (Avent et al., 2015). Some African Americans have in turn learned to use the church, their religion, and their spiritual beliefs to cope with stressors in everyday life (Shelton & Cobb, 2017), and the Black Church has offered shelter to expound on their faith in exchange. Some African Americans have

overcome adversities unique to their culture by allowing their faith to guide their beliefs and values to help them adapt to life (Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018). Many African Americans have sought safety in the leaders of the Black Church and have placed their trust in them. These leaders have served as parents, family members, counselors, healers, comforters, and advisors. Additionally, they have supported congregants through crises, deaths, births, and other meaningful times throughout their lives (Ruffing et al., 2018).

While in this study, I recognize the significance of the Black Church and contributions made to the African American community, I also introduce another side of the Black Church that is rarely examined. The Black Church is also known for being a source of hurt and pain for some African Americans (Streets, 2015). One reason associated with the trauma experienced within the Black Church includes differences in denominational beliefs. Denominational views on sexuality, gender discrimination, marital separation, abortion, politics, and charitable giving have had a negative impact on some congregants (Dempsey et al., 2016; Shelton & Cobb, 2017). These views have led to the departure of some congregants from the Black Church.

Another possible reason connected to trauma experienced by some African Americans in the Black Church includes unhealthy leadership traits. Narcissistic and authoritative leaders have the potential to generate toxic environments for congregants. Their insulting, demeaning, and aggressive demeanor has caused some congregants to become distant from God, resulting in traumatic experiences (Ruffing et al., 2018). Congregants take on the pulse of their leader and become an extension of them, creating traumatic situations for some congregants in the Black Church as well. Mahlangu (2020)

asserted that followers are discouraged from thinking critically or independent of their leader. Moreover, group think may cause congregants to support a toxic leader while betraying their peers.

The views of the denominations and actions of the leaders and other congregants can be detrimental to many African Americans in the Black Church. In fact, it is suspected that these entities associated with the Black Church use specific strategies to perpetrate betrayal and trauma, resulting in religious and spiritual abuse. Although there are likely several components leading to religious and spiritual abuse, in this study, I examined specific factors such as emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect (see Cashwell & Swindle, 2018; Ward, 2011). I hypothesized that these factors would result in “church hurt.”

Understanding the effects of church hurt are critical in resolving betrayal and improving the state of the Black Church. Hays (2015) emphasized the importance of developing and implementing guidelines to assess the effectiveness of Black Church organizations. Addressing issues related to church hurt offers several critical implications necessary in promoting social change within the Black Church. In this study, I sought to promote social change that can be used to educate the Black Church on ways to identify occurrences of church hurt from a trauma-informed perspective. This study could also implicate social change by increasing awareness of issues pertaining to trauma in the Black Church.

Another implication of social change involved providing information through research for leaders of the Black Church on leadership traits that create traumatic

experiences for congregants. This study could be used to encourage leaders in the Black Church to execute influence and charisma in a healthy way while remaining accountable. Harris and Ulmer (2017) emphasized the importance of the ability of the Black Church to maintain their position as an agent of change for the African American community. Finally, this study could be used to educate leaders and congregants of the Black Church on forms and experiences of abuse. Recognizing abuse has the potential to fortify the structural foundation of the Black Church organization and allow it to continue to serve as a healthy, significant source of support for many African Americans.

Background

The Black Church is a religious organization led by Black pastors and predominantly attended by Black congregants (Barnes, 2015; Thompson et al., 2020). The Black Church was birthed out of a place of oppression, trauma, and pain to serve as a refuge for a myriad of African Americans (Barber, 2015). In essence, the Black Church has served as an overall source of support for African Americans throughout several generations (Hays, 2015). Historically, the Black Church has preserved the rich culture, traditions, and rituals of the African American community since slavery began (Dempsey et al., 2016). At present, the Black Church continues to provide support with managing stressors related to the financial, social, mental, emotional, and physical needs of many African Americans (Hays, 2015).

Almost 80% of African Americans identify as Christian (Davis & Johnson, 2020; Masci, 2018), and many affiliate with one of the seven predominantly Black denominations. These denominations include the Church of God in Christ (COGIC),

National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. (NBC), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), and African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Although there are other churches attended primarily by African Americans, they are not a part of the traditional denominations associated with the Black Church (Davis & Johnson, 2020). Each denomination has its own views, practices, political stances, and beliefs that make it unique (Avent et al., 2015). These unique beliefs have been the source of confusion and hurt for some congregants, leading to their separation from the Black Church.

Leaders and congregants also play a significant role in the Black Church. These leaders may be identified as pastors, clergy, or other individuals who have been placed in a position of authority (Dunbar et al., 2020). Leaders are influential and will use their charismatic qualities to influence congregants in the Black Church. However, these leaders may struggle to balance influence and leadership, which can be extremely detrimental based on the closeness of their relationship to their congregants (Ruffing et al., 2018). Leaders possess the potential to influence their congregants to mistreat others, leading to alienation and neglect for some congregants (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Abuse occurring within the religious and spiritual context may result in neglect, bullying, manipulation, and discrimination (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018; Ward, 2011).

Research on the Black Church and African Americans is limited although there is a significant amount of research on Protestant, Christian Churches from predominantly White religious organizations. McGraw et al. (2019) reported that much of the available

research has focused on church hurt experienced by victims of sexual abuse involving a church or religious leader. Researchers have advocated for additional research on the effects of clergy abuse beyond sexual abuse (McGraw et al., 2019). There is a need for additional research on the effects of clergy abuse within the Black Church as well. The limited research on this topic creates numerous challenges in understanding trauma occurring within the Black Church and how to appropriately resolve these conflicts.

Furthermore, there is ample research on religiosity and spirituality. However, the definition of these constructs is vague based on the current research. For example, Oakley et al. (2018) explored spirituality and spiritual abuse although it overlapped with other forms of abuse and some aspects of religiosity. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) offered an operational definition for religious abuse although they referenced aspects of spirituality as well. In addition, Davis and Johnson (2020) attempted to introduce clarity between the two constructs although there was still a degree of ambiguity. Hence, it is important to provide further clarity on the differences between religiosity and spirituality.

The need to understand the role and impact of leaders within the Black Church has pointed to gaps in the literature. Leaders in the Black Church are important as they are highly respected and influential, especially during critical moments involving responses to violence and racial disparities (Pegram et al., 2016). Harmon et al. (2018) researched the level of influence held by pastors over their congregants in the Black Church from a mental health perspective. However, the research did not provide insight on potentially dangerous outcomes connected to unhealthy influence. Ruffing et al. (2018) explored toxic traits of leadership such as narcissism and authoritarianism. Ward

(2011) highlighted toxic traits of leadership that could result in bullying and neglect of congregants. However, these researchers were unable to thoroughly explain the outcomes experienced by the congregants or determine why they were susceptible to reoccurring trauma and abuse. Additional research is needed to address gaps relating to how leaders influence congregants and their actions contributing to trauma.

Again, there is even less research available on church hurt. Pingel and Bauermeister (2018) used church hurt to describe experiences of homosexual males in the Black Church although their research was not generalizable to heterosexual congregants. There were no other studies that addressed church hurt based on the literature search; however, church hurt does exist. Acknowledging the existence of church hurt is critical in safeguarding African Americans from reoccurring trauma. Equally important is recognizing that close, unhealthy relationships between the leader and congregant can lead to exaggerated effects of betrayal and trauma (Ruffing et al., 2018).

The framework of the betrayal trauma theory (BTT) was useful in understanding outcomes associated with betrayal and trauma. BTT has been used to explain trauma outcomes associated with religious and spiritual abuse in two studies (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018; Yusoff et al., 2018). Further research could expound on the use of BTT and contribute to the research relating to church hurt. Hays (2015) highlighted the strengths of the Black Church. However, the researcher did not reflect on the overall significant weaknesses associated with this organization. Understanding the magnitude of the Black Church's impact upon its community also increases the importance of

understanding how the Black Church may have a negative impact on the lives of many African Americans.

Problem Statement

The Black Church continues to provide support with managing stressors related to the financial, social, mental, emotional, and physical needs of countless African Americans (Hays, 2015). Despite the meaningful roles fulfilled by the Black Church, it has also been identified as a source of trauma and even abuse for some African Americans. Throughout time, various known factors such as denominational views and practices, religious leaders, congregants, and the overall religious organization have contributed to this trauma. Differing views on issues such as homosexuality, charitable giving, abortion, divorce, and cultural unity have led to division within denominations and the mistreatment and discrimination of some congregants (Shelton & Cobb, 2017). These religious views have alienated and separated congregants from the Black Church as well.

Religious leaders can contribute to trauma experienced within the Black Church given their roles of influence and divine authority as perceived by the congregants. In fact, some leaders are self-serving and allow charisma and influence to evolve into narcissism and authoritarianism while using their power to manipulate and abuse vulnerable congregants (Ruffing et al., 2018). Religious leaders may be victims of abuse and trauma as well and experience spiritual burnout, causing them to develop into toxic leaders. These leaders may create an atmosphere conducive for trauma and abuse (Ward, 2011). The overall religious organization and some congregants are associated with

traumatic experiences as they often model the actions of their leaders. Trauma experienced by leaders of the Black Church may cause a disruption in the congregant's faith (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018).

Trauma is further complicated when exposure to similar traumatic events reoccur. These reoccurrences are likely to take place when congregants continue to participate in religious and spiritual activities following exposure to abuse. This type of abuse may be referred to as religious or spiritual abuse. There is significant confusion surrounding religious and spiritual abuse, like the ambiguity surrounding religiosity and spirituality. Studies often use the terms interchangeably and have difficulty with distinguishing between the two constructs (Oakley et al., 2018). Religious abuse typically occurs in religious settings and may include forms of sexual, mental, emotional, and physical abuse. It can also include experiences related to gender discrimination and emotional manipulation (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Spiritual abuse includes bullying, misinterpretation of biblical teachings, neglect, misrepresentation of spiritual principles, or exploitation of spiritual content by an individual in a position of spiritual authority (Ward, 2011).

Consequentially, religious and spiritual abuse occurring within the Black Church may lead to traumatic outcomes or church hurt. The effects of this type of abuse within the religious and spiritual context may have dire consequences for victims. For example, victims experience changes in their mood, self-worth, emotions, memory lapses, denial, stigmatization, dissociation, and mental and psychological distress. Victims are likely to experience depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Cashwell & Swindle,

2018). Church hurt may impact an individual's unique relationship with God and lead to a distorted view of spirituality (Leo et al., 2019). Furthermore, some victims are not aware of the abuse and refrain from seeking help (Oakley et al., 2018). As a result, it is critical to understand factors that lead to church hurt to safeguard congregants from the harmful impact of these outcomes.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing literature pertaining to the Black Church and to provide insight on how church hurt occurs and effects African Americans within the Black Church. Additionally, I sought to offer clarity to the constructs of religiosity and spirituality. Based on the relevant literature, there was a significant amount of ambiguity surrounding the understanding of religiosity and spirituality. The interchangeable use of the terms has been cited as a gap in several studies. I sought to address this gap by operationally defining the terms and offering additional clarity to the current literature.

The existing literature related to religious and spiritual abuse has primarily addressed sexual abuse relevant to Catholic and White denominations (McGraw et al., 2019). However, religious and spiritual abuse can occur within the Black Church. I addressed this gap by highlighting experiences of abuse occurring within the Black Church from a quantitative approach and correlational design, using a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA). Demographic questions and other tools were used to determine the significance of the relationship between factors and church hurt outcomes. Furthermore, Oakley et al. (2018) suggested that further clarity is needed to understand

how it effects congregants. In this study, I used BTT to understand church hurt within the Black Church. Previous studies have addressed BTT stemming from religious deviance and spiritual abuse along with clinical implications for clients experiencing religious abuse (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018; Yusoff et al., 2018). In this study, I expanded on the use of BTT to explain outcomes associated with church hurt and contributed to the scarce research relating to BTT and religiosity and spirituality. The information gathered was used to generate implications for social change for African Americans in the Black Church.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

I used emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect as predictor variables, and they were measured as categorical variables. The criterion variable selected was outcomes associated with church hurt and was measured as a continuous variable. I investigated the following research questions (RQ), null hypothesis (H_01), and alternative hypothesis (H_a1) for the purpose of this study:

RQ1: What is the relationship between emotional manipulation and church hurt?

RQ2: What is the correlation between gender discrimination and church hurt?

RQ3: What is the relationship between spiritual bullying and church hurt?

RQ4: What is the correlation between spiritual neglect and church hurt?

H_01 : There is no statistically significant relationship between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and outcomes associated with church hurt.

H_a1: There is a statistically significant relationship between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and outcomes associated with church hurt.

Definition of Terms

Black Church: A Protestant, Christian religious organization led by Black pastors or leaders with a predominantly Black congregation and affiliated with Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal denominations representing the cultural and traditional practices of African American (Barnes, 2015; Davis & Johnson, 2020; Thompson et al., 2020).

Church hurt: Outcomes associated with religious and spiritual abuse as well as traditional forms of abuse such as dissociation, lapses in memory, stigmatization, psychological distress and illnesses, and denial (Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018).

Denominations: Methodist, Baptist, or Pentecostal organizations that include seven predominantly Black Protestant denominations such as the COGIC, NBC CME, NBCA, AMEZ, PNBC, and AME Church generated from the organization (Shelton & Cobb, 2017).

Leader: A highly influential mainstay in the Black Church that may include pastors, deacons, elders, and ministers who foster spiritual growth and offer various types of support to members of the Black Church (Avent et al., 2015; Bilkins et al., 2016; Dunbar et al., 2020; Ruffing et al., 2018).

Religious abuse: Emotional, physical, sexual, mental, and other forms of abuse that occur when leaders or the religious institution attempt to dominate, manipulate,

control, or discriminate against congregants within the context of the religious organization (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018).

Religiosity: An avenue in which spirituality is practiced in a way that is usually inclusive of an organized system of shared beliefs within a specific religious view, denomination, or community (Davis & Johnson, 2020; Leo et al., 2019; Villani et al., 2019).

Spiritual abuse: The misuse of authority, power, manipulation, control, or domination, by a person in authority and neglect and bullying that may cause disruptions in an individual's spiritual well-being, lifestyle, beliefs, or sense of identity (Davis & Johnson, 2020; Segura-April, 2016; Ward, 2011).

Spirituality: Spirituality is an intimate experience that encompasses introspection, interconnectedness, and transcendence and involves the process of identifying purpose, direction, and developing a meaningful interpretation of life while relating to God or a higher power (Davis & Johnson, 2020; Meichenbaum, n.d.; Villani et al., 2019).

Theoretical Framework

BTT served as the theoretical framework for this study examining church hurt. Gagnon et al. (2017) noted that BTT was initially developed to comprehend the effects of interpersonal trauma leading to memory disruptions for victims who are dependent on their abusers. The researchers posited that betrayal trauma occurs because of dependency and the extent of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator. Betrayal blindness or adaptive blindness is a major component of BTT (Gagnon et al., 2017; Zimmerman et al., 2017). The nuances of the relationship cause victims to unknowingly submit to abuse

from the perpetrator out of desperation of maintaining the relationship. BTT also asserts that relationship schemas develop because of betrayal trauma. Betrayal trauma changes the way victims behave and think in a relationship, causing them to develop schemas (Gagnon et al., 2017). This is especially likely to occur when individuals are exposed to repeated traumas.

BTT can be used to explain additional outcomes of trauma, considering the context of the theory (Gagnon et al., 2017). This theory has been used in a previous study to guide clinical implications for therapists treating victims of religious abuse. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) asserted that betrayal trauma is a violation of an individual's safety or trust. The researchers found that betrayal trauma also occurs in a religious context, and BTT is useful in understanding the impact of betrayal given the relational dynamics between religious leaders and congregants. Yusoff et al. (2018) also used BTT to understand outcomes associated with betrayal in the religious and spiritual context. BTT ultimately provided guidance on interpreting church hurt outcomes and could lead to trauma-informed care practices to address trauma and abuse within the Black Church. BTT and the dynamics associated with church hurt are further explored in Chapter 2.

Nature of Study

A review of the overall literature revealed that many of the studies pertaining to the Black Church and African American clergy were performed using a qualitative research approach (Harris & Ulmer, 2017). Therefore, this study was quantitative in nature and used a correlational design. A nonexperimental quantitative approach was appropriate for this study as it could be used to hypothesize relationships between

predictor variables and outcomes (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically, a correlational design satisfies the goal of understanding the dynamics of a relationship between variables (Burkholder et al., 2016). The primary goal of this study was to determine the relationship between factors and church hurt outcomes for African Americans in the Black Church. The independent variables used were emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect. These predictors variables were used to assess the significance of the relationship associated with church hurt outcomes. Self-report surveys were used to obtain insight into perceptions of African American experiences within the Black Church relating to church hurt.

Assumptions

There are several assumptions associated with the study. First, I assumed that participants would primarily be derived from the Facebook group created to discuss church hurt experiences. Secondly, I assumed that all the participants in the study would self-identify as African American. Thirdly, I assumed that participants would identify as a previous or current Christian attending a Black Church and would reflect on experiences from their time at a Black Church. In addition, I assumed that the participants would consent to participate in the study and be receptive to accurately responding to the self-report online survey based on having experienced some degree of church hurt. These assumptions were important to the study because African Americans and the Black Church are significantly under-researched (see Harris & Ulmer, 2017). Furthermore, a factorial (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data based on assumptions met for the test.

Meeting the assumptions for the factorial ANOVA model was important to the accurate interpretation of the results.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included African Americans who currently or previously attended the Black Church. I used Facebook to obtain participants as it provided access to participants from varying locations. Facebook was chosen as the platform to access participants due to the perceived difficulty associated with gathering a significant amount of data from local churches. However, it was noted that potential ethical dilemmas should be considered when conducting research using social media (see Hammack, 2019). Another delimitation of the study is that participants were likely to be guarded or restricted in their responses if asked to participate in person due to the need to protect the reputation of the Black Church and their leaders. Davis and Johnson (2020) suggested that participants may be guarded due to their interest in protecting their leader, even when their relationship is unhealthy. The age of participants was another potential delimitation associated with using Facebook to solicit participants, considering the average age of users. Based on the study, the results are likely generalizable to African American Christians who have attended the Black Church and access social media.

Limitations

In this study, I determined if there was a significant relationship between emotional abuse, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and church hurt outcomes for African Americans in the Black Church. The unit of analysis for this study was adult African Americans who attend or previously attended a Black

Church. Focusing on experiences specific to African Americans attending a Black Church from one of the seven denominations served as a potential limitation to this study. Given the narrow focus of the study, the data may not reflect other views held by African American congregants in a nontraditional Black Church.

Another limitation of this study involved using Facebook to solicit participation from the targeted audience. Participants were asked to join a Facebook group that focuses on issues salient to the Black Church. The participants were asked to complete a self-report online survey for the study. Participation in the study was limited to individuals who accessed Facebook, which would prevent older individuals who do not use Facebook from participating in the study. This sampling method also excluded possible participants who do not use Facebook. Limitations to administering surveys online involve ethical considerations associated with less protective measures in place when using social media sites (Hammack, 2019).

Significance of Study

This study was significant because I expected that it would fill a gap in the literature relating to the scarcity of research pertaining to religious and spiritual abuse, offer insights into factors that predict church hurt, and expand on the use of BTT in the understanding of church hurt. This study was specific to African Americans and the Black Church as recommended by researchers (see Hays, 2015; Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018), considering that this area is not often highlighted in research. In addition, I used a quantitative approach, while most studies conducted on African Americans and the Black Church have been qualitative in nature (see Harris & Ulmer, 2017). Equally contributing

to the significance of this study was the use of BTT to explain church hurt. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) and Yusoff et al. (2018) completed research using BTT to explain religious and spiritual abuse based on the literature obtained using the literature search strategy. The limited research on the use of BTT to comprehend church hurt outcomes further validated the significance of this study.

Cashwell and Swindle (2018) recommended that future research provide implications for addressing religious and spiritual abuse. The intended outcome of this study was to provide implications for reducing and preventing church hurt experienced by many African Americans in the Black Church. This study is relevant and meaningful because approximately 50% of African Americans attend religious services weekly, with most of those individuals identifying as Christian (see Avent et al., 2015). Also, almost 60% of African Americans are connected to the Black Church. The Black Church represents optimism, strength, security, belongingness, and guidance for many African Americans (Shaw et al., 2020). It has been beneficial in helping African Americans cope with stressors and overcome adversities (Dempsey et al., 2016). The results of this study have the potential to be used to fortify the Black Church by identifying tools to promote continued social change and growth for many African Americans.

Summary

The research topic of African Americans and the Black Church was introduced in Chapter 1. Considering the struggles experienced by several African Americans such as racial and social injustices, systematic oppression, and poverty, it is necessary to have a stable, healthy system of support. The need for this support validates the role that the

Black Church plays in the lives of many African Americans. The involvement of the Black Church has led to growth and success for African Americans. However, the Black Church has also been a source of trauma and should be researched to assess the significance of these outcomes.

In this chapter, I also examined the background information on the significance of the Black Church as well as its association with trauma. The gaps were reviewed and addressed as indicated by the problem and purpose statement. The problem identified in the study focused on trauma and abuse within the religious and spiritual context. Trauma can occur due to denominational differences, flaws in leadership, and mistreatment by other congregants. Trauma experienced based on these components was also explored and identified as a factor connected to church hurt. These variables included emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect. In addition, trauma can be reoccurring and can lead to religious and spiritual abuse. Outcomes associated with religious and spiritual abuse are associated with church hurt.

In addition, I reviewed the operational definitions for terms that are used throughout the study. Assumptions, scope, and delimitations were critically analyzed to determine possible barriers to the study and ethical concerns. Furthermore, the research questions and hypotheses were introduced based on an examination of the gaps in the literature. In this chapter, I offered insight into how the gaps were addressed by the study and the significance of this study. Finally, social change implications were discussed based on the intended goal of the study. This study has the potential to have a significant

impact on the Black Church and offers insight on ways to reinforce this organization as it continues to serve members of the African American community.

In Chapter 2, I explore the literature surrounding African Americans and the Black Church, denominations, characteristics of leadership and congregants, trauma, religiosity, spirituality, religious and spiritual abuse, and church hurt. Chapter 2 provides information on additional factors that may contribute to church hurt for African Americans in the Black Church. I also review the literature search strategy to include key words used to support the alignment of the research study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The Black Church has served as a significant source of support for many African Americans since its establishment during slavery. Symbolically, it represents a place of safety where many African Americans can find refuge from the oppression, pain, and trauma associated with life (Dempsey et al., 2016). It is a representation of strength, resiliency, pride, and community. The Black Church is valuable to the African American community as it is predominantly led and attended by African Americans (Barnes, 2015; Thompson et al., 2020). The Black Church is comprised of seven predominantly Black denominations (Davis & Johnson, 2020; Masci, 2018), providing African Americans with varying options to express their religious practices and spiritual beliefs. The leader of the Black Church is highly respected and an influential pillar within the organization. Their charismatic style, ability to lead, and divine authority as perceived from God has granted them access to power within the Black Church (Avent et al., 2015). Consequentially, the Black Church has continued to remain relevant, resourceful, and a prominent source of influence in the lives of several African Americans throughout time.

Although the Black Church has offered many African Americans protection from a harsh reality and inequality, there is more to this organization beneath the surface. The Black Church has been the source of trauma and abuse for some African Americans. In some instances, the church has forced congregants out and has mistreated, discriminated, neglected, bullied, manipulated, betrayed, and abused them. No organization is without flaws; however, betrayal experienced from a religious organization, leader, or other

members is traumatizing. This is particularly evident when the trauma is reoccurring, and the cycle of abuse is perpetuated (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Denominational differences and views can breed trauma (Shelton & Cobb, 2017). Furthermore, spiritual burnout, toxic leadership, narcissism, and authoritarianism can create an atmosphere conducive to abuse for some congregants (Ruffing et al., 2018). The overall religious organization and congregants create traumatic experiences and may cause congregants to experience a disruption in their faith. Religious and spiritual abuse outcomes known as church hurt can have lasting effects that are not easily recognizable or understandable (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). However, the question remains about how an African American congregant who feels betrayed by their trusted leaders or the Black Church and no longer experiences safety due to religious and spiritual abuse or church hurt is affected.

Church hurt has occurred throughout the history of the Black Church although it has not been formally researched. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between factors that are correlated to spiritual and religious abuse leading to church hurt. Specifically, I aimed to determine if there was a significant relationship between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and church hurt. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) asserted that individuals who experience abuse in a religious or spiritual context are likely to experience changes in their emotions, denial, memory lapses, dissociation, and mental health related illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. I sought to understand the effects of church hurt using the theoretical framework of BTT.

In Chapter 2, I review four major sections to include the literature strategy search, theoretical framework of BTT, review of current literature, and summary. The literature strategy search addresses the key words and search terms used to identify the literature for the study. The second section provides a thorough overview of BTT and major propositions and assumptions used to explain trauma associated with betrayal and abuse. The third section covers pertinent literature relating to the Black Church to include the historical foundation, functions, and denominations within the Black Church. African American congregants and the role and influence of the leader are discussed. This section explores spirituality, religiosity, trauma predictors of abuse, abuse, and church hurt. In the final section of the chapter, I summarize the key findings identified in the literature.

Literature Strategy Search

The literature search was conducted primarily using the Walden University Library. Search engines such as EBSCO, EBSCOhost, Thoreau, Gale Power-Search, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text provided peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles for review. Commercial databases were used to locate open access articles using Google Scholar and Pew Forum due to the overall limited amount of information available. Search terms included *Black Church*, *African American/Black*, *clergy*, *Black clergy*, *spiritual abuse*, *religious abuse*, *spirituality*, *religion*, *church hurt*, *trauma*, and *betrayal trauma theory*. Variations of these terms offered more exhaustive search results. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles published within the past 5 years, ranging from 2015 through 2020. A seminal article was used when appropriate given the paucity of the topic.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to have a clear understanding of what betrayal entails to entirely understand BTT. Maxwell (2017) asserted that betrayal occurs in a relationship when one person fulfills their own interests over the welfare or needs of another person. It happens when conflict arises between a system of social dependence and an external reality. Betrayal is a violation of an individual's trust within an interpersonal relationship. The betrayal results in a disruption of balance in a relationship between individuals or organizations. Betrayal can be incidental or intentional, making it difficult to completely comprehend how and when the trust is broken. Unlike some forms of trauma, betrayal can be measured by the extent of the actual harm, leading to trauma (Maxwell, 2017). Ultimately, betrayal is the key component of BTT.

BTT was developed by Freyd over 2 decades ago to understand human nature in response to trauma (Kim, 2018). Freyd posited that BTT could predict negative outcomes associated with betrayal and the impact of an individual's ability to process and recall events following the betrayal (as cited in Maxwell, 2017). As cited in Kim (2018) Freyd conceptualized two primary conditions associated with betrayal leading to trauma. One condition involved recognizing the sensitivity to betrayal and the decision to confront the situation or withdraw from it. The other condition identified the need to be dependent on others, resulting in attachments (Kim, 2018). The existence of these conditions may increase the likelihood that betrayal will occur.

Kushner (2020) emphasized that BTT involves the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. This is likely due to the victim's level of dependence on the

perpetrator, consequentially leading to outcomes that are consistent with trauma.

However, the victim may not recognize the betrayal when it occurs due to the proximity of the relationship (Gagnon et al., 2017). The foundation of BTT asserts that the dependent relationship between the victim and perpetrator survives because the betrayal is not obvious (Kim, 2018). This theory focuses on the interruption of interpersonal relationship components (Kushner, 2020). BTT is useful in understanding the dynamics of the relational aspects related to trauma and symptomology (Maxwell, 2017). The theory further explains how the victim's interpretation and process of a negative event will determine the extent of the violation of trust by the individual they trusted.

BTT views reactions to traumatic experiences as threats to life and social relationships. Threats of life are defined as possessing a fear of bodily harm. Threats to social relationships jeopardize a victim's safety and trust in the interpersonal relationship (Zimmerman et al., 2017). Regardless of the extent of the threat that occurs, the victim experiences a level of betrayal. Betrayal trauma can occur at low or high rates. Experiencing low betrayal trauma may solicit a response to flee an abusive relationship. Low betrayal trauma prevents victims from experiencing a prolonged traumatic situation or reoccurrence of betrayal trauma. Some victims of low betrayal trauma may recognize and interpret the situation as being dangerous, especially when it does not involve interpersonal factors. In addition, it is easier to terminate the relationship because they are not consumed with protecting it or the perpetrator (Platt & Freyd, 2015). Having a distant relationship with the perpetrator may lessen the overall degree of trauma experienced by the victim (Zimmerman et al., 2017).

The proximity or emotional attachment of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator influences the degree of trauma and negative consequences experienced (Zimmerman et al., 2017). High betrayal trauma refers to the duplicity that occurs in relationships characterized by higher levels of closeness (Platt & Freyd, 2015). BTT posits that psychological disorders are more likely to occur when high betrayal trauma is experienced (Zimmerman et al., 2017). Furthermore, research on BTT has identified difficulties with regulating emotions as a mediating factor between high betrayal trauma and psychological symptoms (Platt & Freyd, 2015). Symptoms associated with high betrayal trauma may include anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression. Victims may also encounter physical symptoms or engage in risky behaviors in response to the betrayal, particularly if they experience repeat victimization associated with high betrayal trauma (Zimmerman et al., 2017).

A key component of BTT is betrayal blindness or adaptive blindness (Gagnon et al., 2017; Zimmerman et al., 2017). Gagnon et al. (2017) further suggested that betrayal blindness is like traumatic amnesia as individuals may not be aware of events associated with the abuse or the memory connected to the betrayal. Specifically, betrayal blindness distorts the victim's ability to encode the traumatic event while interfering with behavioral and psychological responses. The inability to discern betrayal may cause the victim to continue to remain in the abusive relationship with the perpetrator. Victims often adjust to the trauma, allowing them to remain present in the relationship (Gagnon et al., 2017). Adaptive blindness dissipates with age and maturity for some victims;

however, it can become a self-preservation tactic for others and place them at greater risk for repeat victimization (Zimmerman et al., 2017).

BTT offers a theoretical framework to provide an interpretation of outcomes associated with trauma and abuse. Gagnon (2017) asserted that some victims of BTT internalize their experience and engage in self-blame. Individuals may experience a level of shame and minimize the abuse or justify actions from their perpetrator. Other victims deal with alienation and become emotionally distant from their perpetrator or perceive that others are distant from them. Alienation helps the victim to physically remain present in the relationship as they can emotionally disassociate. Like cognitive avoidance, victims become emotionally numb to the betrayal and are unable to recognize it or respond to it. Victims often lose their sense of identity when this occurs. Theoretically, self-blame, shame, and alienation may become protective factors that allow the victim to remain in an abusive relationship. In addition, they offer an alternate view of the abuse as the perpetrator is not observed as the source (Gagnon et al., 2017).

BTT examines how well-being, stability, and psychological outcomes are impacted by cognitive processes. Activities of executive functioning such as self-monitoring, attention, operating information in working memory, and preventing the processing of unnecessary information may be affected by exposure to betrayal trauma. Victims struggle with coping with the effects of betrayal trauma as skills associated with effective functioning have been depleted. Deficits in executive functioning has additionally been linked to an increase in depression. Exposure to betrayal trauma creates

deficits in executive functioning areas that may lead to impairments in future responses to trauma as well (Gagnon et al., 2017).

BTT asserts that alterations in relationship schemas occur because of betrayal trauma. Betrayal trauma changes the way victims behave and think in a relationship, causing them to develop schemas. Abuse becomes a normal component of a relationship, increasing their role as a victim. Victims feel incapable of leaving unhealthy relationships and are even more likely to remain in the unhealthy relationship. The negative effects of an abusive relationship may serve as the blueprint for future relationships (Gagnon et al., 2017). Trauma associated with betrayal may result in reoccurring traumatic experiences, violence, avoidance, and dissociation. Additional responses include psychological illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression (Kushner, 2020).

Trauma effects everyone in a different way and may or may not have a lasting impact on an individual. However, Cashwell & Swindle (2018) emphasized that the trauma associated with betrayal stemming from a sacred experience or person is likely to be exaggerated. Their study used BTT to understand trauma related outcomes associated with clients who experienced religious abuse. The results of their study revealed that there are several ways that betrayal can lead to trauma. Congregants experiencing rejection after they have sought the support of the church may experience betrayal and trauma. Neglect is more likely to occur when the congregant's issue involves a morally questionable issue as determined by the church (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018).

In addition, the betrayal experienced consequentially by religious abuse may affect the congregant significantly as the abuser may be viewed as having supernatural

power (Cashwell & Swindle, 2016). Yusoff et al. (2018) used BTT to explain how congregants experience betrayal in a religious and spiritual context. Leaders and institutions operating in spiritual and religious abuse overpower their congregants and use their influence to hurt them, further leading to psychological damages. This allows the congregant to be controlled and even exploited (Yusoff et al., 2018). BTT is appropriate in exploring the outcome of church hurt associated with religious and spiritual abuse.

BTT was likewise used to understand trauma related outcomes beyond the victim and perpetrator. Although the feeling of betrayal is common, it can be complicated for the abuser, observers, and victim. Observers of the abuse may blame the victim in support of the abuser. Religious abuse may lead to further betrayal as the victim's family members may possibly choose to remain connected to the abuser or religious institution (Cashwell & Swindle, 2016). The previous studies demonstrate the potential use of BTT in understanding church hurt outcomes for African Americans in the Black Church. These studies validate the need for further research in understanding how church hurt effects some African Americans, especially when considering the closeness of the relationship between the Black Church, congregants, and leaders.

BTT is useful in understanding the dynamics of religious and spiritual abuse and how betrayal blindness prevents congregants from escaping the abuse or reoccurring trauma (Gagnon, 2017). This is often the case when they are victims of religious or spiritual abuse (Yusoff et al., 2018). Victims may become guarded and protect their leaders or perpetrators using tools such as scriptures and other religious beliefs (Davis & Johnson, 2020). Victims of abuse often lose their identity when they experience betrayal

trauma (Gagnon, 2017). This occurs as the congregant accepts the identity assigned to them by the leader or religious organization and lose sight of their former reality. It is beneficial to consider how these outcomes can be understood through the lens of BTT.

Literature Review

The Black Church

The Black Church is characterized as a religious organization led by Black pastors with a predominantly Black congregation (Barnes, 2015). Scholars use this term as a frame of reference to describe African American Christians in America (Davis & Johnson, 2020). The Black Church also serves as a physical location where many African Americans gather to express their religious beliefs and engage in celebration (Hays, 2015). It is a place that offers hope and fosters a sense of belonging and community for their African American congregants (Streets, 2015). The Black Church is categorized by their culture of worship, expression of spirituality, denomination, doctrine, size, class, and additional traits (Avent et al., 2015). This organization represents the cultural and traditional practices of many African American Christians (Barnes, 2015; Thompson et al., 2019). In short, this organization is a meaningful representation of the relationship between an abundance of African Americans and religion and spirituality.

The Black Church is equipped to meet the spiritual needs of their congregants (Barber, 2015). It is a place that incorporates the use of symbols such as the cross, hymnals, bible passages, shouting, and dancing as a representation of beliefs, and reflects aspects of the African American experience (Hays, 2015). It is a diverse organization that is connected to religion, spirituality, and Christianity (Smith, 2017). The Black Church

serves as a place where the integration of public and private lives of many African Americans can exist (Avent et al., 2015). It represents strength, optimism, comfort, and guidance. Numerous members of the African American community have primarily relied on the Black Church and clergy to offer support in significant areas of their life (Shaw et al., 2020). Many African Americans exhibit a high level of regard for their clergy and this religious organization (Shaw et al., 2020). Dempsey et al., (2016) noted that the Black Church has helped members of African American community to overcome stressors and manage psychological issues. Overall, the Black Church promotes social change for African Americans (Streets, 2015). In some ways, the African American culture is synonymous with Black Church culture when considering the rich historical context of this institution (Harmon et al., 2019).

Historical Context of the Black Church

The Black Church is rich in history and has served as a protective factor for many African Americans. Historically, the Black Church was birthed out of slavery, oppression, trauma, and pain to serve as a refuge for most African Americans from the dominant world (Barber, 2015). Culture, traditions, and rituals were maintained throughout slavery because of the Black Church (Dempsey et al., 2016). Hymns have served as a major component of the Black Church. Transcripts from the past revealed the dual purpose of these religious symbols. On one hand, they were used to strengthen the spiritual walk with God. On the other hand, they were used to instill hope and communicate messages of freedom. For instance, “Steal Away to Jesus” was a hymn that provoked a message of escape from slavery while also referencing the desire to be with

God (Barber, 2015). The messages contained within hymns continue to be relevant to the Black Church.

The Black Church serves as a foundation for numerous African Americans following slavery. The Black Church evolved to meet their needs even as society found new ways to keep them oppressed. Dempsey et al. (2016) noted that the Black Church served as a critical support for these individuals during intense periods of segregation, the civil rights era, and social injustices (Dempsey et al., 2016). In fact, the Black Church was one of the first institutions to offer some protection against the harmful effects of segregation and social inequalities (Hays, 2015). Throughout time, the Black Church has provided advocacy for the advancement of many African Americans as well as resources to navigate during difficult times (Dempsey et al., 2016).

Throughout time, the Black Church has continued to serve as schools during the week, church on Sundays, and a physical place to host social events, funerals, and offer alternative sources of support (Harmon et al., 2019). Programs offered by the Black Church promote health and awareness, reentry for justice involved individuals, support for at-risk youth, and community education (Dempsey et al., 2016). Many African Americans are provided with clothing, land, shelter, food, and other economic staples. Meanwhile, many of these programs and resources are offered at no expense to the congregants (Dempsey et al., 2016). Additionally, countless programs are still offered to members of the African American community through the Black Church.

The Black Church is identified as the largest economic organization within the Black community affording them the ability to support the African American community

(Barber, 2015). The Black Church is a source of empowerment and creates a sense of community for many African Americans when they were previously disregarded. It provided opportunities for leadership and advancement that were not necessarily available to them in society. Moreover, the Black Church served as a model for leadership and moral standards for many African Americans to follow. In essence, the Black Church has been associated with positive outcomes such as improved health, organization of social networks, social justice, and decreased deaths for members of the African American community (Hays, 2015).

Functions of Black Church

Harris and Ulmer (2017) asserted that the Black Church helped many African Americans overcome adversity germane to their community. The Black Church has also been a source of culture, values, beliefs, unity, and music. Using foundational tools, the Black Church organized activities within the African American communities. The development of church-based programs aided the Black Church in addressing physical health needs and offering suicide prevention, employment resources, and several other services used to counter health barriers and social hardships. The ability of the Black Church to advance allowed this organization to maintain their position as an agent of change for several African Americans (Harris & Ulmer, 2017). This institution continues to provide food, health resources, financial support, and counseling to the African American community at large. Moreover, the Black Church has continued to evolve over the years to meet their needs as social inequalities and socioeconomic conditions experienced were perpetuated (Hays, 2015). Many African Americans have flourished by

employing their beliefs, values, and engagement in programs because of the Black Church (Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018).

The Black Church has been a significant source of support for some African Americans yet, this organization is not free from criticism. The Black Church has struggled to maintain lasting impacts on issues that relate to structural change. The Black Church has been perceived a place of segregation, separatism, and oppression amongst their African Americans congregants. The church has remained divided and used stances on racial inequality, women in leadership, and economics to maintain a line of separation. Some scholars believe that the ignorance of the Black Church and inability to deal with social issues and lack of secularization has stunted the growth of their African American followers. Opponents of the Black Church also believe that many African Americans were encouraged to behave as equal, White, middle-class citizens in hopes of being accepted by their counterparts. The agenda of acceptance was objectionably pushed during years of segregation while African Americans continued to be mistreated. Pastors and leaders sharing this view also supported the idea of using the church as a tool to teach their African Americans congregants to compromise with society (Barber, 2015).

The Black Church has been identified as a place of resistance and a lack of support for public engagement. It is believed that in some ways, the Black Church has evolved into a place of social control exercised over their African Americans congregants (Barber, 2015). It should be noted that some scholars believe that the influence of the Black Church is dissipating (see Harris & Ulmer, 2017). Although the Black Church has been linked to unfavorable experiences for some African Americans, it has not decreased

the number of African Americans in the Black Church. Only 12% of African American Christians reported not being a part of a religious affiliation (Masci, 2018) while the number of African Americans in the Black Church remains high.

Denominations

Davis and Johnson (2020) reported that 80% of African American Christians are affiliated with one of the seven predominantly Black Protestant denominations. These denominations include the COGIC, NBC CME, NBCA, AMEZ, PNBC, and AME Church. Also, Black Pentecostals affiliate with the Apostolic Pentecostal Christian denomination (Davis & Johnson, 2020). The denominations are categorized as Methodist, Baptist, or Pentecostal (Shelton & Cobb, 2017). Masci (2018) reported that over 80% of African Americans indicated that they are Christians which is higher than any other ethnicity. Over 53% of African Americans claimed affiliation with a historically Black Church (Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018).

Streets (2015) asserted that the traditional denominations of the Black Church have been a source of stability for many African Americans. The AME denomination was established in 1816 as the first independent denomination for African American followers. This denomination was characterized by a more formal religious experience with a centralized authority figure. The AME experience was less focused on traditional expression of beliefs connected with religious zeal and primarily comprised of individuals from the Black middle and upper class. The AME denomination was fashioned like the mainstream White denominations (Streets, 2015).

The Baptist denomination was initially established in 1758 although they did not support organizational hierarchy. Specifically, the NCBA was officially founded in 1895 and known for a more emotional religious experience that included music and liturgy (Harris & Ulmer, 2017). This denomination currently represents the largest Black Church in the United States (Masci, 2018). The NCBA focused on the “call” to ministry and leaders were not required to receive formal training or education to lead the church (Shelton & Cobb, 2017). Moreover, the NBC and PNBC wanted to provide their African American followers with a platform to assume their own religious identity apart from slavery and Caucasians (Harris & Ulmer, 2017).

The COGIC denomination is a part of the Holiness/Pentecostal organization and is the largest denomination within their organization. This denomination was unique as it brought African Americans, Caucasians, and Latinos together. In fact, followers were drawn to African American preachers such as William Seymour and Charles H. Mason. However, the movement was unable to maintain its multiracial status as Black leadership was not permitted during that time (Shelton & Cobb, 2017). Denominational differences may be observed through their organizational structure, religious expressions, practices, culture, and political agendas (Shelton & Cobb, 2017). There have also been noticeable differences between denominations that have had negative outcomes for African Americans (Dempsey et al., 2016). Differences associated with homosexuality, charitable giving, abortion, divorce, and cultural unity have led to division even within denominations. For example, individual churches within a denomination may have

differing views, leading to inconsistent practices and adverse effects on some members of the Black Church (Shelton & Cobb, 2017).

Religiosity

Religiosity involves the formal institution that contains the outward expressions of an individual's sacred beliefs. Religious beliefs are usually consistent with a specific religious view, denomination, or community (Villani et al., 2019). Religion allows individuals to develop a closer relationship with God through the practice of their beliefs. Religion is an avenue in which spirituality is practiced although the two constructs differ (Davis & Johnson, 2020). Congregants religious beliefs reflect their religious experience, inclusive of an organized system of shared beliefs. Religious beliefs also provide context to develop worldviews and assign meaning to events (Leo et al., 2019). Moreover, religion was created to facilitate the spiritual journey and promote well-being (Park et al., 2017). Religion can be corporately practiced in a church, temple, synagogue, mosque, or in another community (Smith, 2017). Religion involves rituals, customs, traditions, and symbols (Meichenbaum, n.d.; Okunroumu et al., 2016; Park et al., 2017).

Approximately 60% of Americans are members of a local religious group and 40% of Americans participate in weekly religious services (Meichenbaum, n.d.). This rate is higher for African Americans as 68% belong to a church and 92% attend church services regularly (Bilkins et al., 2015). The practice of religion may be conducted within an organization or outside of an organization or place. Religious engagement may involve attending a church service or event. Research found that over 53% of African Americans attend church routinely (Hays, 2015). Also 30% of adults engage in religious

practices through prayer (Meichenbaum, n.d.). The Black Church has provided their African Americans congregants with foundational knowledge on how to engage in singing and praise as ways to deal with their stressors and grow spiritually (Dempsey et al., 2016). The use of prayer has been as an essential tool in addressing psychological and physical problems to support numerous African Americans (Shaw et al., 2020). Furthermore, the use of worship has offered a cathartic experience to release stress (Streets, 2015). Non-religious involvement may include listening to religious music, reading the bible, and prayer outside of a religious facility. Furthermore, religion has been associated with positive health outcomes and lower rates of mental illness (Hays, 2015).

Spirituality

Spirituality is an intimate experience and serves as evidence of the extent of conviction associated with religious beliefs (Leo et al., 2019). It involves a personal connection that encompasses introspection, interconnectedness, and transcendence (Villani et al., 2019). Spirituality reflects the individual journey to establish a meaningful interaction with God (Davis & Johnson, 2020). Spirituality involves the process of identifying purpose, direction, and developing a meaningful interpretation of life while relating to God or a higher power (Meichenbaum, n.d.). It is also a search for the divine manifestation of a higher power or God (Park et al., 2017). This experience is considered sacred and offers hope (Meichenbaum, n.d.). Spirituality motivates individuals to understand the world in a way that can foster positive outcomes (Hodge et al., 2019). It is also a construct that can exist outside of a religious organization (Smith, 2017).

Spirituality can be a mystical process that ranges from rational to irrational experiences (Smith, 2017). Hodge et al., (2019) suggested that African Americans were more spiritually animated than any other culture. At least 90% of Americans reported that they believe in a higher power or God and 80% indicated that they desired to grow spiritually (Meichenbaum, n.d.). The Black Church serves as a place where many African Americans can grow closer to God while developing their spiritual relationship (Hays, 2015). Some African Americans have relied on their spiritual relationship with God to overcome barriers in life (Dempsey et al., 2016). Spirituality is a component that is weaved throughout all religions (Streets, 2015).

African American Congregants

Members of the Black Church have endured an ongoing process of growth and change throughout the existence of the church (Barber, 2015). Approximately 50% of African Americans attend religious services weekly with majority of those individuals identifying as Christian. Furthermore, almost 60% of African Americans are connected directly to the Black Church (Avent et al., 2015). Many African Americans rely heavily on their faith to deal with stressors in everyday life. They are also more likely to engage in religious practices such as prayer and attend worship services than members of white denominations. African American congregants from the Black Church are 12 times more likely to participate in spontaneous physical worship and 15 times more likely to verbally respond to the preacher during the sermon when compared to other congregants (Shelton & Cobb, 2017).

Several African Americans have endured numerous struggles that have led them to seek refuge in the Black Church. Streets (2015) found that many congregants within the Black Church suffer from emotional pain and trauma. Consequentially, countless African Americans are mistrustful of larger systems outside of the Black Church (Bilkins et al., 2015). Therefore, they place their trust in the Black Church and their leaders. Some African Americans view their leaders or clergy in the capacity of a parent, counselor advisor and in many other ways. They have high expectations for them and occasionally seek perfectionism at times. In some instances, African American congregants in the Black Church are vulnerable. Their identity and emotional issues increase their susceptibility to manipulation, exploitation, and commitment and control. Also, congregants who are in crisis or have a low self-concept are likely to develop trust in unhealthy, narcissistic leaders (Ruffing et al., 2018).

Religious Leaders

Religious leaders play a significant role in the Black Church and are comprised of pastors, clergy, or individuals in the position of authority (Dunbar et al., 2020). The Black Church may also identify deacons, elders, and ministers as leaders (Bilkins et al., 2015). The pastor is recognized as the backbone of the Black Church (Avent et al., 2015). Pastors are perceived as having a highly influential role in their respective community (Ruffin et al., 2018). Leaders of the Black Church support members of their church while also fostering their spiritual growth (Dunbar et al., 2020). Leaders try to maintain their personal spirituality while leading others (Ruffing et al., 2018). In addition, they assume charge of the Black Church and are interpersonally connected to the congregants (Hays,

2015). Many leaders within the Black Church encourage the growth of their church to increase the number of congregants (Joynt, 2017).

Charisma

Many leaders are caring and model Christian standards for their congregation (Dunbar et al., 2020). The leaders within the Black Church provide spiritual guidance and counseling to the congregants when needed (Davis & Johnson, 2020). They tend to be bold visionaries and may have a charismatic style of leadership (Ruffing et al., 2018). Charisma is one of the most effective tools of leaderships. Charismatic leaders possess power, influence, and attract followers (McDermott, 2020). Some leaders in the Black Church can deliver charismatic messages that emphasize the use of religion to cope with even daily stressors (Harris & Ulmer, 2017). Charismatic leaders may be transformational as they meet the needs of their congregants. These leaders typically align with the values and mission of the institution (Hays, 2015).

Historically, leaders have served as more than pastors and preserved culture and tradition within the African American community (Harmon et al., 2019). They have been revered as experts in many areas regardless of their educational status (Avent et al., 2015). Moreover, they have significant influence over congregants within the Black Church (Dempsey et al., 2016). Evidence of their influence is grounded in their titles, as members of the Black Church often refer to their leaders using their title and last name (Harmon et al., 2019). African Americans exhibit high levels of trust for their leaders (Dempsey et al., 2016). Many leaders maintain this level of trust and influence by asserting that their relationship with God grants them divine influence based on

impartations received from God (Harmon et al., 2019). Although leaders have influence, many of them maintain open communication, reasonable expectations, and encourage congregants to freely discuss their concerns and needs (Ward, 2011). While influence is not necessarily a negative trait, it can be detrimental to members of the Black Church if leaders do not use wisdom (Harmon et al., 2019).

Values of a healthy and balanced leader include respect for the independent development of others, demonstration of power, and promotion of critical thinking. These leaders are sensitive and responsive to their balance of power. They desire to adopt a holistic approach when meeting the needs of their congregants. Balanced leaders are introspective and receptive to acknowledging and addressing their limitations. Additionally, they encourage the autonomous growth of their congregants (Ward, 2011). While the role of spiritual leadership is rewarding, serving as a leader within the Black Church can be highly stressful. Most leaders assume the stressors of their congregants, while also trying to figure out how to manage the needs of the church and their personal families. In many instances, the leader may hold a job outside of the church to financially sustain the needs of their personal family. The leadership role can become more time consuming and assume higher precedence over their family throughout time (Harmon et al., 2019). Balancing the role of a leader of the Black Church while maintaining a personal life can be a challenge (Ward, 2011).

Narcissistic Leaders

Narcissism influences an individual's ability to interact and perceive others, themselves, their spiritual relationship with God, and professional role (Ruffing et al.,

2018). Recent studies have found that there has been an increased observation in narcissistic traits in clergy. Several factors place clergy leaders at a greater risk for narcissism. Risk factors include unrealistic expectations, loneliness, idealization, and isolation. The isolation is a significant factor as clergy often have few close peers that they can confide in or let down their guard. Leaders experience pressure to be idealized which leads to vulnerabilities to narcissism. Characteristics of narcissism include making self-centered decisions, lacking patience with others, micromanaging, or over delegating tasks, becoming threatened or jealous of more qualified individuals, and requiring attention or wanting to be recognized as being the best. They tend to lack empathy and struggle in relationships with others (Vrbicek, 2020). These leaders may become defensive when their ego is threatened. Unhealthy leadership traits may cause the leader to become aggressive, insulting and demeaning, and blame others while brewing a toxic environment for the congregation (Ruffing et al., 2018).

Christianity views narcissism as pride which creates distance from God.

Narcissistic pastors can appear to be godly, speak in a compelling way, while using tools to manipulate their congregants. Overt narcissism quickly catapults leaders into positions of influence (Vrbicek, 2020). In fact, pastors who presided over a congregation of 200 or more congregants were likely to present with high levels of overt narcissism. On the other hand, pastors with smaller congregations were more likely to present with covert narcissism. Research found that narcissistic pastors neglected their pastoral visitations unless it was an emergency. These pastors were likely to engage in misconduct to include affairs with members in and outside of their congregation. They tend to be less connected

to God, partly due to their inconsistent engagement in religious practices. Some leaders may have a need for attention and to be admired. These leaders believe that they possess more spiritual power than others and are entitled to the level of influence they have over others. Moreover, there is limited accountability for the leaders of the Black Church (Ruffing et al., 2018).

Spiritual Burnout

African American leaders reported that their role as a pastor was rewarding although there were numerous challenges associated with fulfilling the needs of this role (Avent et al., 2015). Leaders within the Black Church are more likely to maintain employment while also operating in the role of a pastor. In addition, they were less likely to be financially supported by their churches when compared to White churches (Harmon et al., 2019). A lack of financial support may be likely as some congregants may be from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018; Oakley et al., 2018). Additionally, they deal with factors relating to intrapersonal, vocational, family, and social stressors (Ruffing et al., 2018). Many pastors and clergy are highly susceptible to burnout and may experience moments of discouragement and dissatisfaction in their personal spiritual relationships. Research revealed that younger clergy are more likely to encounter feelings of burnout. Moreover, burnout has led clergy and pastors to become frustrated, depressed, exhausted, and distressed (Oakley et al., 2018). Leaders encounter fatigue and stress when trying to meet the overwhelming expectations of their role (Ruffing et al., 2018), resulting in burnout.

Oakley et al. (2018) found that pastors and leaders may be victims of abuse by congregants (Dunbar et al., 2020). Unfortunately, leaders who have been victimized tend to in turn, abuse their followers as their experiences influence the way they lead others (Mahlangu, 2020). It is possible that the strain of the role and abuse from congregants may contribute to burnout. Outcomes associated with burnout have the capability of affecting how many pastors and clergy respond to the demands of their role (Dunbar et al., 2020). This stress can have calamitous mental and physical health outcomes for leaders (Harmon et al., 2019).

Burnout combined with disproportionate power may contribute to unhealthy and even toxic traits of spiritual leadership (Ward, 2011). Unhealthy leaders may be self-serving, narcissistic, and authoritative. These leaders struggle to maintain boundaries, engage in risk-taking behaviors, and have difficulty with relational interactions with congregants (Ruffing et al., 2018). The position of leadership may cause the leader to become possessive over their members. Possessiveness prevents congregant from growing or expanding their spiritual and religious experiences. For example, congregants may feel trapped in their relationship with the leader and have difficulty with developing a clear path of escape (Ward, 2011).

Yusoff et al. (2018) asserted that authoritarian leaders suppress criticism, strive for perfectionism, and are unbalanced. They are image conscious and operate in an abusive system. These traits are identified as the dark side of leadership (Mahlangu, 2020). Their behavior combined with the traits listed above are toxic and dysfunctional (Yusoff et al., 2018). Leaders who have an authoritarian style prevent their followers

from growing and do not allow them to have freedom. They implement a structure that is rigid and lacks space for creativity. These leaders are intolerant, lack patience, and demand obedience for their followers to avoid penalty. In addition, they have been described as manipulative, aggressive, and exploitive (Mahlangu, 2020). Their intentional, destructive actions are detrimental and devalue individuals in positions beneath their leadership (Joynt, 2017).

Toxic Leaders

A toxic leader can be present in any organization. Toxic leaders do not prioritize the well-being of their followers and have a negative impact on their organization and the environment. They also tend to be self-serving and lack genuine concern for others. They intimidate or bully their followers while their power grows and prevents others from responding due to fear (Mahlangu, 2020). Toxic leaders are aware of their improper use of power although their judgment may be impaired due to the rewards associated with their representation of spiritual authority. These leaders often exploit the spiritual needs of their congregants to fulfill their personal needs. In addition, toxic leaders prioritize a sense of false spirituality while minimizing the needs of their congregants. They also struggle with introspection and evaluation, which further contributes to their narcissistic ego (Ward, 2011). Toxic leaders may pressure their followers to advance their personal agendas while withholding information from them. Followers may feel attacked and be afraid of their leader. In addition, followers may feel that they are incapable of making decisions independent of their leader (Mahlangu, 2020).

Toxic leaders are poisonous to the religious organization, congregants, and the community. In fact, it is likely that the religious organization will regress beyond the time the toxic leader initially began leading the church. Joynt (2017) asserted that toxic spiritual leadership may create traumatic experiences for the congregants, especially if the leader becomes abusive. Toxic leaders have the potential to destroy the organization and abuse followers. Unfortunately silence from the abused congregants, fuels toxic leaders, and breeds trauma (Joynt, 2017).

Trauma

Toxic leaders create traumatic environments for their followers. These leaders attack their followers, withhold information, and may be inapproachable. The interactions between the leaders and followers are abusive and traumatic. In addition, it reduces the likelihood that the followers remain engaged (Mahlangu, 2020). Trauma is an overwhelmingly stressful event that prevents people from implementing effective coping strategies. Individuals experiencing trauma struggle with countering the anxiety they experience and are prevented from resuming normal functioning in life (Maxwell, 2017). Not only is trauma significant, but the reoccurrence of trauma is likely to occur for members of the Black Church (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Trauma is not reserved to one-time occurrences (see Streets, 2015) but can involve ongoing exposure or multiple events. This is especially true for congregants while participating in religious activities following exposure to religious abuse. Given the influence of the church, other congregants may not understand why victims continue to support this religious organization after being victimized or betrayed (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Trauma can

be problematic for individuals who observe it (Streets, 2015), and this phenomenon may be difficult to interpret.

Religion and spirituality should be safe avenues to enhance relationships with God without resulting in harmful and traumatic encounters by people (Davis & Johnson, 2020). However, it should be noted that trauma is more likely to occur when the congregants have a distorted view of God and encounter suffering. The combination of these factors may cause the congregant to alter their religious beliefs or reject them. Trauma creates difficulties in regulating emotions and leads to an altered identity. It impairs the ability to respond rationally to traumatic events and creates significant distress (Pressley & Spinazzola, 2015). Trauma is overwhelming and causes some individuals to lose their sense of self (Streets, 2015). It destroys core foundational beliefs and may violate their faith (Pressley & Spinazzola, 2015).

Traumatic experiences may lead congregants to believe that God is unable to keep them safe. It is difficult for individuals to appropriately resolve traumatic experiences using spiritual or religious beliefs, especially when the religious institution or spiritual leader also serves as the source of trauma (Leo et al, 2019). Ultimately, trauma leads to stigmatization or isolation from others. It causes congregants to feel that they are being punished by God or judged by others (Streets, 2015). Congregants who experience harm in religious settings or by a leader may experience additional hurt resulting in disruptions in their spiritual relationship or journey (Cashwell & Swindle, 2016). Their relationship with God may be damaged or broken due to the experiences associated with trauma (Maxwell, 2017).

Numerous members of the Black Church submit to and respect the authority of the leader, often validating the depths of their influence. Leaders are provided with a platform by members of the Black Church; however, their ego may lead them to abuse the power that comes with this territory (Harmon et al., 2019). Balancing power and authority can become stressful. Maxwell (2017) suggested that the ability or lack of ability to deal with the stress associated with the role of leadership within the Black Church is influenced by the way the leader leads within the position. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) asserted that religion and spirituality can lead to traumatic outcomes or abuse when leadership and influence is misused.

Emotional Manipulation

Manipulating emotional aspects of followers can strategically occur with ease. Leaders can manipulate their congregants' emotions based on misrepresenting information and giving false cues to elicit a response (McDermott, 2020). Shaw et al. (2020) asserted that some clergy distort scriptures to emotionally manipulate their congregants. Spiritual abuse is also associated with manipulating a congregant's beliefs, emotions, and thoughts. In addition, congregants may be manipulated into making financial contributions to the religious organization or individual (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018; Oakley et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant to socioeconomically disadvantaged congregants and occurs despite the Black Church being recognized as the largest economic institution within the Black community (Barber, 2015).

Leaders do not always emphasize the role of servitude. Instead, some of them have a way of strategically manipulating others by employing their social identity and

emotions. In fact, the followers may not even be clear on the possible outcomes or benefits of following their leader yet, they feel compelled to follow. Leaders can intimidate their followers using fear tactics, threats, and anxiety. They coerce followers by taking advantage of their influence over them, making false statements, or becoming abusive. They even threaten to remove individuals from the group when necessary (McDermott, 2020). These leaders tend to be toxic and seek to manipulate their followers (Mahlangu, 2020). In addition, they confuse their followers and deter them from pursuing self-interests. This confusion prevents followers from responding appropriately to their suspicions of being manipulated or exploited. Followers are likely to refute thoughts of opposition, risks, and costs associated with the relationship. Meanwhile, those feelings of suspicion are exchanged for happiness and a deeper connection to other followers (McDermott, 2020).

Some leaders intentionally use manipulation to reach their desired outcome. Even charisma can be used to manipulate followers. Leaders appeal to their emotions and can transform their identity to maintain the favor of their followers. Some leaders use charisma to reduce opposition and recruit new followers. Moreover, followers are more susceptible to emotional manipulation when they are uncertain of their identity. Evoking these emotions from followers will likely lead to negative outcomes (McDermott, 2020). Manipulation is detrimental for followers (Shaw et al., 2020).

Gender Discrimination

African American women must deal with factors associated with their gender and race. Specifically, they are marginalized in many religious institutions throughout

America, including the Black Church (Parker-McCullough, 2020). The Black Church has a reputation of upholding gender discrimination (Barber, 2015). Clearly, some African American women have benefited from support and resources from clergy and other congregants within the Black Church (Davis & Johnson, 2020). However, this same institution has also been a source of oppression and discrimination for many African American women. Unfortunately, some women have a complicated relationship with the Black Church. For instance, African American women are major supporters of the Black Church yet, the Black Church has not always reciprocated their support for women (Parrish, 2020; Barnes, 2015). Moreover, women are overwhelmingly underrepresented in leadership within this religious institution. This lack of leadership representation also parallels the position of women in society. Approximately 70% of attendees in the Black Church are African American women. However, only 11% of them hold positions as clergy in American churches and this rate continues to be significantly low (Parker-McCullough, 2020).

Historically, members of the Black Church were not receptive to female pastors and leaders (Harmon et al., 2019). Overall African American women have struggled to achieve roles as pastors and clergy for at least the past 200 years. Some religious organizations are challenged with accepting the calling of African American women by God to positions of pastoral leadership. The Baptist denomination was found to be more discriminatory against African American women pastors and clergy than any other African American denomination. Approximately 10% of African American women serve as pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, and Free Methodist

Church. On the contrary, African American women are significantly represented in seminary school and obtain higher levels of education than men. Yet, their achievements do not always grant them access to the pastoral platform. Many women in these organizations are encouraged and permitted to teach Sunday school or lead auxiliaries for women. They assume roles as singers, teachers, and assist with establishing new churches although they are typically not assigned to the role of the pastor (Parker-McCullough, 2020). They are also likely to be represented in other roles such as the church administrator and trustee and fulfill roles when there is a need to complete tasks for the church (Barnes, 2016). Women are more likely to serve in the capacity of assistant or interim pastor for smaller churches when granted the opportunity to lead (Parker-McCullough, 2020).

The concept of leadership is not synonymous with women and gender continues to influence how leadership roles are filled within religious organizations. Men serve as the pastor and clergy in majority of the Black Churches, but women should also be allowed to occupy more of those positions. However, African American women are likely victims of hidden discrimination, further restricting their access to pastoral leadership (Parker-McCullough, 2020). African American women encounter more challenges than men do in ministry, partly due to traditional views and concepts taken from the bible. Furthermore, they are often encouraged not to accept the role of a minister or fulfill the role of full-time ministry (Mahon, 2015).

Some African American women have decided to take a stand and advocate for support from the Black Church. They have also expressed frustrations with receiving a

lack of support from the Black Church (Shaw et al., 2020). Due to this lack of support, African American women have been encouraged to become educated and organized to refute church politics within the Black Church (Parker-McCullough, 2020). In fact, there is even more pressure on African American women who must be intentional and diligent in asserting their leadership style when they are permitted to lead (Harmon et al., 2019). Many women continue to struggle to achieve higher positions of leadership within the Black Church (Parker-McCullough, 2020).

Spiritual Bullying

Spiritual leaders are perceived to represent the pinnacle of spiritual authority. Their position of authority allows them to determine the expectations and judge standards of behaviors for their congregants based on their interpretation. Ward (2011) found that congregants believed that they were unable to live freely and function within their own identity. Members expressed that they felt violated and forced to meet the expectations of their leader. In addition, congregants were uncomfortable with leaving the religious organization because of threats by their leaders or for fears of being labeled a “backslider” (Ward, 2011). Oakley et al., (2018) claimed that religion was used to defend spiritual bullying in some cases.

Spiritual bullying involves rejection, intimidation, and can include exploitation, excessive blaming, fault finding, and emotional manipulation. Some leaders use their power to threaten their congregants (Oakley et al., 2018). It involves the cruel and harmful treatment of a congregant by leaders in a spiritual context (Yusoff et al., 2018). Spiritual bullying has been found to have traumatic and adverse effects on congregants

(Ward, 2011). An example of spiritual bullying may include being forced to confess transgressions publicly to the congregation (Cashwell & Swindle, 2016).

Spiritual Neglect

When reflecting on the level of respect for the leader of the Black Church, not having a relationship with that leader can be problematic for congregants. The absence of support from the spiritual leader during a time of necessity constitutes as spiritual neglect. Congregants experiencing physical, emotional, or mental challenges such as a terminal illness, divorce, or domestic violence may be left to deal with them independently when the leader refuses to offer their support (Meichenbaum, n.d.). Furthermore, research revealed that narcissistic leaders often neglected pastoral care needs of their congregants, leaving them to fend for themselves (Ruffing et al., 2018). This is problematic as up to 60% of individuals seek clergy for help before accessing outside resources (see Meichenbaum, n.d.).

Congregants who pursued outside treatment, were more likely to be ostracized by their religious support system. In some instances, congregants were blamed for their sufferings and experiences and viewed as being spiritually weak. Furthermore, congregants who attempted to or successfully left their religious leader often experienced spiritual neglect. Omission is a key component of spiritual neglect and creates deep roots of hurt, pain, and rejection. Leaders and the religious institution are often viewed as a solution to many problems and crises. However, the absence of compassion during such a critical time has been proven to be overwhelming for the congregant (Ward, 2011).

Congregants are indirectly placed at risk for spiritual neglect when they extend help to other congregants that their leader or church has refused to assist. A decision to offer support to a congregant that was ostracized also resulted in punishment for congregants and perceived as a sign of weakness (Ward, 2011). This is likely to occur because followers who think outside of the box or group are typically punished. They are discouraged from thinking critically and independently and not permitted to question the decision of their leader even if they disagree (Mahlangu, 2020). Followers are likely to draw from the strengths and views from within the group although the leader is the central aspect (McDermott, 2020). This is concerning, especially if the group shares the view of a toxic leader. Ironically, followers who agree with their leader are often promoted to a leadership role or receive additional benefits (Mahlangu, 2020). The decision of congregants to follow their leaders while neglecting their peers in need may perpetuate the abuse and trauma cycle for the peers especially if they shared a close relationship with them.

Religious Abuse

Religious abuse refers to abuse that occurs within the context of religion and may also include sexual abuse, embarrassment, and harassment (Nobakht & Dale, 2017). Religious abuse also occurs when leaders or the religious institution attempt to dominate and control the congregants or an individual. This type of abuse may include typical categories of abuse such as emotional, physical, sexual, and mental; however, it occurs within the context of the religious organization. Religious abuse also involves emotional manipulation and gender discrimination (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). There are several

examples of religious abuse such as shaming others, holding unrealistic expectations relating to perfection, punishments, threats of damnation, and extreme indoctrination (Segura-April, 2016). Another example of religious abuse may include receiving pressure from the religious organization and leaders to remain in a marriage with an abusive spouse (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Interestingly, the leader or clergy is not always responsible for religious abuse as it can be caused by other congregants within the religious institution (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018).

Spiritual Abuse

Research found that some religious groups are emotionally, spiritually, and physically abusive to their followers. These interactions are characterized by boundary violations and lead to abuse (Ward, 2011). Spiritual abuse involves the misuse of authority, power, manipulation, control, or domination, by a person in authority (Segura-April, 2016). Spiritual abuse can cause disruptions in an individual's spiritual well-being or lifestyle due to degrading an individual's spiritual value. This form of abuse is connected to the individual's sense of self and being. The justification of violence and other types of abuse may be categorized as spiritual abuse when it distorts the individual's spiritual beliefs and concepts of spirituality (Davis & Johnson, 2020). Victims of spiritual abuse may require higher levels of spiritual support or need other types of assistance. These individuals are mistreated and may be manipulated in a spiritual context by a person in authority such as a pastor or clergy member. The pulpit can be used to control congregants and obtain their submission. Distortion and intentional

misinterpretation of scriptures allow the person in leadership to gain control of a congregant's decision making or behavior (Oakley et al., 2018).

Some leaders use threats pertaining to spiritual consequences when congregants do not comply with their demands, leaving them to feel spiritually weakened (Oakley et al., 2018). Ward (2011) revealed that leaders use fear and guilt, submission, social isolation, and images of God to inflict abuse on their victims. Some leaders intentionally misrepresent scriptures to their advantage to achieve a desired outcome from their congregant (Davis & Johnson, 2020). Congregants can be misled to believe that the leader can assert divine authority over them because of their position (Oakley et al., 2018). Moreover, congregants believe that leaders have been granted the highest authority by God and required to submit to their authority and obey them. This authority allows the leader to correct or punish the member in a similar way that a parent corrects their child. Parent-child interactions with the leader lead to diminished self-worth (Ward, 2011). To the same extent, this type of faulty leadership allows the leader to believe that they are beyond personal correction, further creating an atmosphere conducive for spiritual abuse (Yusoff et al., 2018).

In addition, many congregants may be strongly encouraged to isolate from others and conform to their leader's requests due to significant pressure based on accountability and deception. Congregants refrain from questioning their leader's authority because of the perception of the leader's divine position. Spiritual abuse is inclusive of emotional and psychological abuse and can have significant negative consequences on congregants. Furthermore, spiritual abuse can be traumatic for the congregants who experience it.

Congregants reported being fearful of sharing their experiences of spiritual abuse.

Congregants may not realize that they have been victims of spiritual abuse which reduces their likelihood to seek help. They were less likely to request support from the church to resolve issues related to abuse (Oakley et al., 2018).

Further evidence of spiritual abuse is depicted by an entanglement that prevents the congregant from leaving or understanding the dynamics of their relationship with their spiritual leader or religious institution. In those instances, congregants often tried hard to please their spiritual leaders. The self-serving position of leadership preserves the imbalance of the relationship and leads to spiritual abuse (Ward, 2011). In short, spiritual abuse is a complex phenomenon that can be experienced as a simultaneous process and as a single occurrence and involves a range of different types of abuse. Threats, intimidation, blatant disregard, oppression, manipulation, micro-supervision, and fault-finding are components of spiritual abuse. Unfortunately, this type of abuse is common for people in positions of power (Ward, 2011). Abusive behaviors are even more prevalent for toxic leaders as they use bullying and threats to maintain domination over their followers (Mahlangu, 2020). The pain inflicted from spiritual abuse can be more lasting and stressful than pain from physical abuse (Ward 2011).

Victims of spiritual abuse may struggle with their spiritual identification and uncertainties about the validity of their spiritual beliefs. Individuals who are unable to overcome spiritual abuse may ultimately decide to separate from their spiritual beliefs (Yusoff et al., 2018). Victims may in turn fear God and no longer love him (Lang & Bochman, 2016). The effects of spiritual abuse can be detrimental to a congregant's

emotional and interpersonal growth and lead to a distorted view of God and spirituality (Yusoff et al., 2018). Spiritual abuse is toxic and causes an individual to experience a distorted spirituality. Distorted spirituality limits an individual's ability to understand the character of God and develop a meaningful spiritual relationship. In addition, it discourages spiritual development and leads to an inaccurate view of God (Lang & Bochman, 2016).

Church Hurt

Church hurt consist of outcomes associated with religious abuse and spiritual abuse and may have significant consequences for victims. For example, victims experience changes in their mood, value, and emotions. Church hurt may include feelings of dissociation, lapses in memory, and denial. Additionally, difficulty with recalling may lead to hidden trauma that is also experienced by victims. Church hurt may lead to stigmatization, especially when the congregant is allegedly the source of the abuse. Interestingly, congregants may not realize that they have been victimized or label their experience as abuse. Congregants may also be separated from their religious or spiritual community and no longer receive the support of these systems because of abuse and betrayal. This is likely to occur, even when the decision to separate is held by the victim. Separation can be difficult for the victim who desires to remain connected or who remains connected to the organization but is uncomfortable with completely engaging in the church (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018).

However, there are instances where the church makes the decision to revoke the membership of a congregant. Congregants experience guilt, anxiety, and confusion when

giving an account for their circumstance of abuse. This process is like dealing with grief or loss. Emotional trauma is prevalent in congregants who have experienced religious abuse. Some congregants are likely to experience a spiritual crisis or a disruption in their faith because of religious abuse. Questions about their spiritual beliefs are likely to occur as well. Furthermore, victims of abuse also report experiencing feelings of powerlessness (Cashwell & Swindle, 2016).

Church hurt is a newer term that has been recently referenced in the literature pertaining to the Black Church. Pingel and Bauermeister (2018) used the term church hurt to reflect the experiences of gay and bisexual African American males in the Black Church. Yet this term has existed informally for years. Pingel and Bauermeister's (2018) study did not provide an exhaustive overview of church hurt outcomes and indicated that future research should focus on church hurt based on denominations within the Black Church. In addition, most of the existing relevant research on religious and spiritual abuse does not specifically speak to the Black Church and African Americans (Davis & Johnson, 2020). A few studies specifically highlighted the African American experience and the Black Church. For example, Hays (2015) validated the importance of the Black Church in the lives of African Americans yet, the study did not offer insight on weaknesses and adverse experiences that occur within the organization. Harris and Ulmer (2017) noted the lack of relevant research while conducting their study. Moreover, their study further confirmed the lack of research studies available based on denominations or traditional values relative to the Black Church.

The literature surrounding spirituality and religion is convoluted as many studies have struggled to clearly define the terms. The review of the literature continues to reveal the need to clarify spiritual abuse and religious abuse as the terms are often used interchangeably. Oakley et al. (2018) reported that further research is necessary to clearly define spiritual abuse and identify ways to protect the congregants from it. There is not a significant amount of research focusing on spiritual abuse or ways to reduce it and prevent it. This is partly due to not gathering sufficient data from victims of spiritual abuse. The literature on spiritual abuse tends to be associated with exploring spiritual aspects of childhood trauma or cult abuse. Research is further lacking in areas on how to determine which factors or deficits in leadership lead to spiritual abuse. Therefore, the definitions of religious and spiritual abuse continue to remain ambiguous (Ward, 2011).

Equally important, Cashwell and Swindle (2018) emphasized the need for future studies to address outcomes related to religious abuse. Interestingly, Nobakht and Dale (2017) found that the body of literature pertaining to religious abuse decreased after the 90s. On the other hand, Cashwell and Swindle (2018) identified categories of religious abuse to include emotional manipulation and gender discrimination which serves as a relevant component for this study. McDermott (2020) illustrated how emotional manipulation was toxic within an organization. However, the study was not geared to the religious setting. Research on gender discrimination was limited as well. Parker-McCullough (2020) suggested that religious organizations are reluctant to release statistics on women pastors or the data does not exist. Furthermore, not many studies focus on experiences specific to women (see Parker-McCullough, 2020). These two

categories of abuse require further research to determine their impact on outcomes or church hurt and were identified as predictor variables for the current study. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) identified categories of religious abuse to include emotional manipulation and gender discrimination. Their research was pivotal to this study. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) introduced another important component relative to the current study as their research introduced the use of BTT to understand outcomes associated with religious abuse.

Based on the literature, many of the studies pertaining to the Black Church and African American clergy were performed using a qualitative research approach. Avent et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study that explored perceptions of African American pastors and services offered within the Black Church. Campbell and Littleton (2018) conducted a qualitative study on the relationship between the Black Church and their capacity to meet the needs of congregants using a focus group and in-depth interviews. Hardy (2012) completed a qualitative study on perceptions of African American Christians and help-seeking behaviors. Harmon et al. (2018) used a qualitative grounded theory approach to explore the influence of African American clergy and leadership. The seminal work conducted by Ward (2011) offered insight on spiritual abuse using a qualitative research approach. Lang and Bochman (2016) used a qualitative approach while referencing the seminal study completed by Ward to conduct a phenomenological study regarding distorted spirituality. Qualitative research is appropriate when wanting to capture information to describe a phenomenon and is based on inquiry and the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Although these qualitative studies have offered relevant

information, they tend to be less transferable to the larger population due to their small sample sizes. This is a limitation, considering the significant number of African Americans attending the Black Church.

There are a few qualitative studies that focus on the support offered through the Black Church but, the research is lacking in quantitative approaches (Harris & Ulmer, 2017). Hardy (2014) conducted a quantitative research study using the data from the earlier qualitative study conducted in 2012. The study used the Attitudes Toward Religious Help-Seeking Scale (ARTHSS) to assess perceptions of African American Christians pertaining to accessing help. Okunroumu et al. (2016) used a quantitative research approach and logistic regression design to assess and analyze the relationship between religiosity and engagement. The results of the study offered useful information related to a traditional Black Church denomination. Bilkins et al. (2016) evaluated the attitudes of African American church leaders and their experience with racial discrimination at a Black megachurch. The use of the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) was used in a few quantitative research studies examining perceptions in the Black Church. The limited number of quantitative research studies conducted on African Americans and the Black Church demonstrate the need for future quantitative studies specific to this population. This study will use a quantitative research approach to contribute to the research on the Black Church and African Americans.

Furthermore, implications for minimizing and preventing church hurt are needed, given the significance of the Black Church in the African American community. Identifying ways to equip and fortify the Black Church is essential to ensure that they

continue to provide refuge to as many African Americans as possible. Churches need to identify policies to safeguard against spiritual abuse (Oakley et al., 2018) as well as religious abuse. It is also important to hold the Black Church and spiritual leaders accountable to promote lasting change. In addition, trauma-informed care should be offered to support congregants with overcoming trauma (Streets, 2015). Further research should be conducted to understand the extent of spiritual abuse (Ward, 2011) and religious abuse (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Contributions to the current literature will serve as a foundation for evidenced-based practices that could promote significant changes in the Black Church.

Summary

Unquestionably, the Black Church is a significant source of support for many African Americans. The rich culture, traditions, and rituals salient to most African Americans have been preserved because of the Black Church. The Black Church fostered spiritual growth while also meeting the social needs of their congregants. Numerous African Americans experienced a sense of belonging, advocacy, trust, financial support, spiritual growth, and safety in exchange for their continued support of the Black Church. The leaders or clergy of the Black Church serve as a staple in this organization and have major influence over the congregants. The research revealed that healthy leaders value members of the Black Church and often provide solutions and guidance to resolve their issues. The history of this organization and current relevance serves as evidence of the meaningful impact that the Black Church has had on the lives of many African Americans throughout time.

It is possible for the Black Church to be dichotomous in a way, meaning it can be a source of support while being a source of rejection and trauma. Differences in denominations, the leaders, and members of the organization are guilty of inflicting trauma on congregants. Highly trusted leaders of the Black Church may struggle with balancing their position and relationships, leading to the misuse of their influence and power. Leaders become toxic, especially when they exhibit traits of narcissism and authoritarianism. The belief that leaders have received divine authority by God further adds to their toxic influence over congregants.

Religion and spirituality can be used to betray the trust of congregants and may result in traumatic outcomes. Factors of religious and spiritual abuse include emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual neglect, and spiritual bullying. The outcome of spiritual and religious abuse is referred to as church hurt and it can be difficult to understand. Partly because visible harm and effects of church hurt are not likely to be observed, although the effects are lasting. In addition, victims of abuse experience threats to their spiritual foundations and are vulnerable to reoccurring traumatic outcomes. The effects of church hurt may include, dissociation, lapses in memory, denial, anxiety, depression, betrayal, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

With this study, I sought to fill a gap by contributing to the limited research on the Black Church and African Americans. I also sought to address gaps in the literature by examining the relationship between emotional discrimination, emotional manipulation, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on church hurt outcomes. This study offered clarity on the term's religiosity and spirituality. In addition, this study addressed the gap

related to understanding church hurt outcomes by using BTT. Lastly, this study provided implications on ways to prevent and reduce church hurt in the Black Church. Chapter 2 primarily provided information on the literature search strategy, theoretical framework, and relevant literature relating to the Black Church, research, religious and spiritual abuse, and trauma. In Chapter 3, I focus on the research design and rationale, methodology, threats to validity, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides information on the methodology used for this research study. Specifically, I provide an overview of the research design and approach, research questions, setting and sampling, measurements used, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the significance of predictors associated with church hurt for African Americans in the Black Church. Predictors such as emotional manipulation, gender, discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and effects on church hurt were examined. In this chapter, I review the methods that were used to conduct research on African Americans in the Black Church. In addition, the measurements selected are included in this chapter along with the actions that were taken to protect participants.

The Black Church is a significant source of support for many African Americans (Barnes, 2015; Thompson et al., 2019). However, researchers have mentioned that the Black Church may also be a source of trauma for some African Americans (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). There is limited research on African Americans within the Black Church. Specifically, there is little research on the effects of church hurt and the relationship with significant factors leading to betrayal and trauma for some African Americans within the Black Church (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Understanding the significance of this effect can lead to meaningful implications for the Black Church.

Research Design and Rationale

I used a nonexperimental quantitative, correlational research approach to determine the significance of the relationship between the predictor variables and criterion variable. The predictor variables used were emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect. The outcome variable was outcomes associated with church hurt. Nonexperimental designs can be used to quantify the opinions of a population when a sample of that population is studied or observed. A correlational research approach is appropriate in determining the association between variables that are measurable although they are unable to be naturally manipulated (Burkholder et al., 2016). Curtis et al. (2016) indicated that correlational research employs parametric analyses that result in correlational evidence. In addition, researchers can use this design to determine the extent of differences between variables (see Curtis et al., 2016). In this study, I used a parametric analysis, a factorial ANOVA, to assess the correlation between variables. The ANOVA is a statistical test that appropriately aligns with the correlational research approach (Curtis et al., 2016).

Correlations exist when there is an increase in a variable while the dependent variable also increases or decreases (Curtis et al., 2016). This approach is not appropriate for determining causation; however, it allows the researcher to make predictions based on the outcome of statistical tests (Burkholder et al., 2016). The correlational research approach was appropriate in examining the strength of the relationship and effects of church hurt outcomes for African Americans in the Black Church. In addition to the correlational research approach, a factorial ANOVA is a parametrical analysis used in

nonexperimental research designs. Factors that innately happen within group memberships do not represent causation although they can be appropriately analyzed through nonexperimental, correlational designs (Warner, 2013).

I used a survey method to disseminate online questionnaires to participants. Survey methods are useful in gathering information that may be attitudinal, behavioral, or descriptive and can include a combination of this information (Burkholder et al., 2016). Specifically, online surveys have several benefits for participants. These surveys offer additional privacy and may allow the participant to feel comfortable with responding to sensitive questions (Burkholder et al., 2016). Self-report, online surveys were appropriate for this study as the nature of the study dealt with the sensitive topic of abuse and trauma in the Black Church. Disseminating surveys online provides a faster return of completed surveys than traditional methods (Burkholder et al., 2016). Reduced completion rates were also important because it supported the desired progression of this research study. The administration of surveys began after approval was received from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Methodology

Population

Participants in the study included adult self-identified African American Christians who are over 18 years of age with access to Facebook. I sought to obtain at least 100 participants for this study. Participants met the criteria for the study based on their previous or current attendance in a traditional Black Church and were able to reflect on their experiences within this religious organization. The Black Church is defined as a

Protestant, Christian religious organization led by Black pastors or leaders with a predominantly Black congregation and affiliated with Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal denominations representing the cultural and traditional practices of African American (Barnes, 2015; Davis & Johnson, 2020; Thompson et al., 2019).

Sampling and Procedures

Nonprobability, purposive sampling was used for the purposes of this study. Purposive sampling allows researchers to identify participants based on the needs of the research study (Burkholder et al., 2016). Snowball sampling is a type of purposive sampling and was used to recruit participants for the study. This sampling method allows the participants to refer potential participants to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Facebook is effective in recruiting participants using snowball sampling methods. Snowball sampling used on social sites is also referred to as respondent driven sampling. This type of sampling is relevant to Facebook as users can draw other Facebook users in to participate in research studies (Pedersen & Kurz, 2017).

Other forms of nonprobability such as convenience sampling and quota sampling were not selected for this study. These specific forms of sampling would not have necessarily provided a representation of the specific population being studied. Probability sampling, such as stratified random sampling, simple random sampling, and simple random sampling were also not selected. These forms of probability sampling would result in a sample that is a more accurate representation of the population. However, I determined that these sampling techniques were not feasible as it involved increased time and costs (see Burkholder et al., 2016). It would also have been difficult to obtain the

number of participants needed for the study given the specific characteristics of the population.

Therefore, I selected respondent driven sampling for this study. I was able to reach participants online using this method. Participants were easily targeted, especially individuals who were members in the Facebook group. In addition, purposive sampling was beneficial in reducing the time constraints associated with screening out participants outside of the target group. Furthermore, I selected purposive sampling because this method was feasible when focusing on adult African Americans who are currently a part of the Black Church or previously attended the Black Church. The sampling frame for this study accounted for experiences of African Americans within the Black church.

Sample Size

Gall et al. (2007) indicated that researchers should aim to use at least 15 participants per each predictor variable included in the study when referencing an alpha of 0.05. Equally important is the recommendation for researchers to use a range of 30 to 500 participants when using parametric tests (Gall et al., 2007). I was interested in achieving a medium effect size value of .25 and a statistical power of .80 for a factorial ANOVA analysis. This study included four predictor variables, and I sought to obtain data from at least 60 participants, although I aimed for a minimum of 100 participants. The strength of the relationship between the predictors and criterion variable was determined based on the proximity of the results to the identified effect size. Descriptive statistics associated with the sample size was conducted using the Statistical Package for

Social Sciences (SPSS) and identified percentages, measures of variation, central tendency, and frequencies.

Recruitment Procedures

Participants were primarily recruited online through the Facebook group, Church on Sundays, Therapy on Mondays. As the group moderator, I posted weekly group topics relating to the Black Church and therapy and engaged participants in discussion ahead of requesting their participation in this study. The posts were made shareable by group members to other Facebook users outside of the group. The Facebook group was used to disseminate the SurveyMonkey link along with screening criteria for eligible participants to participate in the research study. I provided participants with a consent form and they were required to review it prior to participating in the study. Their completion of the questionnaire following their review of the consent form served as an agreement to participate in the study. Pendersen and Kurz (2016) indicated that there are several benefits associated with using Facebook for recruitment. Researchers have found that Facebook is more effective in reaching initial participants than traditional recruitment methods. In addition, Facebook is typically less expensive than recruiting participants via other Internet-based platforms and the postal service. It also provides access to a large and diverse sample pool (Kosinski et al., 2016; Pendersen & Kurz, 2016).

Participant Protection

During the study, I provided participants with an electronic informed consent form. The consent form included the title of the study, my contact information, information pertaining to confidentiality, risk and benefits associated with participation,

and limitations. Completed questionnaires after review of the consent form served as the participant's agreement to participate in the study. I also notified potential participants that their participation in the survey was anonymous.

Permission was obtained by the Walden University IRB to conduct this research study prior to collecting any data from participants. The administration of online surveys offered participants additional protection and anonymity. In addition, no personal identifying information was collected from participants. Again, I informed participants that the purpose of this study was to understand the effects of church hurt for African Americans and that consent forms and questionnaires would be anonymous. The questionnaire was placed in Appendix A.

The Religious Proscription Scale (RPS), Psychological Abuse Experienced in Groups Scale (PAEGS), Religious Support Scale—Adapted (RSS), and Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale (RSSS) were measurements used to collect data for this research study. The instruments were appropriate in measuring the significance of outcomes associated with church hurt for African Americans in the Black Church along with assessing for each predictor variable. In Chapter 4, I provide information on the analyses and results of the measures used. In addition, the conclusion of the results is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Data Collection

I submitted my proposal to Walden University to obtain approval from the IRB, prior to conducting the research. Participants received a SurveyMonkey link containing the prepared questionnaire. The questionnaire was comprised of four self-report survey

instruments and disseminated via Facebook to collect data from participants. Surveys are useful for collecting information from participants. Surveys are nonexperimental and provide descriptive information pertaining to characteristics and behaviors. Specifically, survey research is appropriate when using self-report measures. Data from surveys should align with the research question and the relationship between variables (Burkholder et al., 2016). I ensured that SurveyMonkey's method of procedures were consistent with the Walden University IRB standards.

The instruments used in this study were self-administered, self-report online questionnaires. In many instances, self-administered online questionnaires are beneficial for the participants when compared to other self-administration formats. For instance, self-administered questionnaires are typically less expensive and quicker to complete. In addition, this format of delivery often offers participants additional privacy (Burkholder et al., 2016). There are advantages for researchers using this format. The data from the survey can be inputted directly into SPSS, minimizing entry errors. It is less time consuming for the researcher and expands the reach of accessing participants. In addition, it is cost efficient (see Burkholder et al., 2016). I found the use of a self-administered, self-report survey highly beneficial to the current study.

Participants received instructions on how to complete the online questionnaire. Additionally, I provided a shareable link for the survey via SurveyMonkey on the Facebook group page, Church on Sundays, Therapy on Mondays. Participants received a debriefing form that shared pertinent information related to the purpose and goal of the study, confidentiality, follow-up contact information as needed, and gratitude for their

participation in the study. In addition, participants were informed that their contribution to this study would offer additional insight into African American experiences in the Black Church. A copy of the debriefing form was placed in appendix B.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

I used a demographic questionnaire to obtain information on religious denomination, race, gender, size of congregation, membership status, and number of years of attendance as shown in appendix A. Understanding the characteristics of the participants and church were important to ensure that participants can contribute to the results of the study. The RPS, PAEGS, RSS—A, and RSSS were selected for this study and information pertaining to each tool is described below. The questionnaire can be found in appendix B.

Religious Proscription Scale

I evaluated gender discrimination using the RPS. This scale was designed to measure gender discrimination against women in the church. Penya et al. (2016) reported that the scale was initially developed by Duck and Hunsberger although modified to assess views on gender roles in the church. The RPS includes 7-items exploring views on women in leadership roles in the church using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*). Following the reverse scoring of items 1, 6, and 7, a Cronbach's alpha of .894 determined that this scale was high in internal consistency. Higher scores obtained on this measure indicate the level of perceptions of equal gender roles in the church.

Psychological Abuse Experienced in Groups Scale

I used the PAEGS to measure emotional manipulation and spiritual bullying. The PAEGS is a 31-item scale featuring six psychological abuse components related to groups. This instrument was deemed as reliable as the overall Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .94$ while most individual components of the scale exceeded a value of $\alpha = .70$. The overall internal consistency of the PAEGS reflected a Cronbach's alpha of .85 based on dissemination in clinical settings. The PAEGS examined abusive behaviors along with the duration of those behaviors in group settings (Saldana et al., 2017).

The Emotional Abuse component of the scale was comprised of 6-items and measured emotional manipulation. The Imposition of a Single and Extraordinary Authority component of the scale was comprised of 3-items and will be used to measure spiritual bullying. The PAEGS includes a response rating scale using a 5-point, Likert-type scale consisting of 0 = *not at all*, 1 = *slightly*, 2 = *quite a lot*, 3 = *a lot*, and 4 = *continually*. Saldana et al. (2017) indicated that the Imposition component was identified as the least severe form of psychological abuse when compared to the other components of the scale, although it had the highest frequency in the validation study. Furthermore, the PAEGS was useful for understanding the extent of psychological abuse experienced by an individual although the scale explores the degree of abuse from within the group (Saldana et al., 2017). The PAEGS was appropriate for this study as it focused on abuse experienced in the group while not specifically focusing on physical and sexual abuse along with a specific purpose attached to the group. A total of 16-items from two of the six group abuse components was used for this study.

Religious Support Scale--Adapted

The RSS-A assesses the level of perceived support from religious organizations components such as God, the congregation, and leaders of the church. The RSS-A included 21-items exploring support from the church using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*). The adapted version of this scale modified words to reflect individuals who attended a church although they were not necessarily a member of the congregation they were reporting on. Equally important, this scale was adapted for African American participants. The RSS focuses on congregation/clergy support for Factor 1 and God support for Factor 2 (Montgomery et al., 2016). Congregation/clergy support items from Factor 1, comprised of 14 items and will be used to measure spiritual neglect for this study. The Factor 1 scale was found to have internal reliability based on a Cronbach's alpha of .96 (Montgomery et al., 2016). Higher scores on this scale indicated higher levels of perceived support from the congregation and clergy.

Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale

Church hurt outcomes were measured using the RSSS. Religious and spiritual struggles typically occur when components of religiosity and spirituality become the foundation of a conflict, concern, or a negative thought or emotion. The measure was found to have predictive validity along with discriminant and convergent validity when related to mental health (Exline et al., 2014). The predictive ability of the scale to measure mental health outcomes is important to this study when considering possible mental health symptoms that may be associated with church hurt. This measure is

comprised of 26 items in total and rated using a 5-point, Likert type scale (1 = *not at all/does not apply*, 2 = *a little bit*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *quite a bit*, and 5 = *a great deal*). Scores for this measure are derived by averaging all 26 items (Exline et al., 2014).

For this study, items from the Divine ($\alpha = .93$), Interpersonal ($\alpha = .85$), Ultimate Meaning ($\alpha = .89$), and Doubt ($\alpha = .90$) subscales comprising of a total of 18-items were used to measure church hurt outcomes. The Divine subscale examines negative emotions associated with a relationship with God. The Interpersonal subscale evaluates the inward focus of an individual's actions or thoughts. The Ultimate Meaning subscale focuses on an individual's inability to perceive their meaning in life. The Doubt subscale assesses questions held by individual's regarding their religious beliefs. The Divine and Ultimate Meaning subscales were able to predict distress (Exline et al., 2014). Furthermore, based on the validation study, the RSSS also predicted mental health components. Loneliness was predicted from by the Ultimate Meaning and Interpersonal subscales. In addition, the Ultimate Meaning in life subscale was the highest predictor of mental health while the Divine subscale predicted anger, anxiety, and depression (Exline et al., 2014).

I obtained written permission from the developer of the PAEGS to use this instrument for the proposed study. A copy of the permission form from the developer was placed in Appendix C. Permission was not required for the other three measures that were used in this study. I confirmed the copyright status of the measurements by reviewing the statement indicating that the test could be reproduced for educational purposes and non-commercial research without requesting written permission prior to including them in the proposal.

Data Analysis

I collected data from participants using online questionnaires. Incomplete questionnaires were not used in the study. Four instruments were reviewed and selected consisting of a total of 48 items rated on a 5-point, Likert type scale. The survey questions were essential in determining the significance of factors relating to outcomes associated with church hurt. Data was transferred from SurveyMonkey, inputted, and analyzed using the 27th version of the SPSS. I used a quantitative approach to evaluate the research question and a factorial ANOVA was employed to analyze the data. Statistical results are displayed using graphs and charts in Chapter 4.

Research Questions

There were four research questions identified in this study.

RQ1: What is the relationship between emotional manipulation and church hurt?

RQ2: What is the correlation between gender discrimination and church hurt?

RQ3: What is the relationship between spiritual bullying and church hurt?

RQ4: What is the correlation between spiritual neglect and church hurt?

H_0 1: There is no statistically significant relationship between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and outcomes associated with church hurt.

H_a 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and outcomes associated with church hurt.

Statistical Analysis

I used a factorial ANOVA to determine the significance of the relationship between factors and outcomes associated with church hurt for African Americans in the Black Church. A factorial ANOVA is used to evaluate the main effects and combined interactions between the independent variables on the dependent variable. It is appropriate for use in nonexperimental research designs that involve naturally occurring groups. A factorial ANOVA compares means across predictor variables and the interaction of the predictor variables to predict the value of the dependent variable (Warner, 2013). Four categorical factors, emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect were analyzed using a factorial ANOVA to examine the effects of outcomes associated with church hurt. The dependent variable was outcomes associated with church hurt and was continuous in nature.

There are three assumptions related to a factorial ANOVA. One assumption indicated that scores associated with the outcome variable are normally distributed and quantitative. The second assumption is that the obtained scores will result in independent observations. Another assumption is that scores are homogenous based on the variances (Warner, 2013). The Levene's Test was used to test the assumption for homogeneity. The parameter estimates, confidence intervals, and effect-sizes for each interaction or main effect were interpreted. This nonexperimental research design further served as validation for the use of the selected statistical analysis. In addition, the research questions and measures aligned with the assumptions and use of a factorial ANOVA. In Chapter 4, I

provide thorough results of the research based on the analyzed data along with tables and figures.

Threats to Validity

Research studies that have strong validity typically offer better quality. However, threats to validity reduce the quality of the study. Consequentially, researchers should develop a plan to address threats when possible (Burkholder et al., 2016). Changes to a measure may cause a threat to the internal validity. Therefore, I selected measures for this proposed study that were validated for a specific population based on the use of the complete measure. Using specific subscales of the measure may decrease the validity of the instrument (Burkholder et al., 2016). I also reviewed the individual subscales of each measure during the selection process to ensure that they were individually validated to maintain the internal validity of the instrument. The sampling selection method for participants may also present as a threat to internal validity (Burkholder et al., 2016). Participants were selected using snowball sampling through Facebook. However, recruitment using social media may prevent older individuals from participating in the study if they did not have a Facebook account. I attempted to recruit eligible participants on Facebook outside of the Church on Sundays, Therapy on Mondays, Facebook group to access additional participants as well.

External threats to validity were also considered to determine how the results of this study could potentially be generalized to other studies (Burkholder et al., 2016). I specifically focused on adult, African Americans in the Black Church. Therefore, it may be appropriate to generalize the results to a similar population. In the addition, the setting

associated with the delivery of the survey may also create threats to external validity (see Burkholder et al., 2016). The results of the study may differ from potential results received from more traditional settings, such as a physical church location. Hence, I used valid and reliable instruments to address this external threat to validity.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards and guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) were thoroughly reviewed considering the sensitivity of the topic of this study. The APA (2017) emphasizes the importance of receiving institutional approval prior to conducting research. I received approval from Walden University's IRB prior to collecting data from participants and the approval number was 01-15-21-0977593. Participants were informed that the questionnaires and data were anonymous. Researchers are required to maintain confidentiality and take measures to store and protect the data that is collected (APA, 2017). In addition, participant names were not collected as a part of the demographic information. Furthermore, electronic data will be stored for at least 5 years and deleted following that time.

I ensured that participants received electronic consent forms during the recruitment phase of the research study. The APA (2017) also provides standards on informed consent for research participants. It is recommended that informed consent forms include information on the purpose, length of data collection and process timeline, procedures, and rights to withdraw or decline to participate in the study following the initiation of the research process. In addition, informed consent forms should review the

limits of confidentiality, potential risks, and contact information for the researcher in the event participants have questions about their rights or the study (APA, 2017).

Participants were informed about the nature of the study. Participants were also informed that they were eligible to withdraw from the study at any time without question as their participation was voluntary. The APA Code of Ethics (2017) provides standards on debriefing participants. Information regarding the nature of the study, results, and conclusions should be shared promptly following the conclusion of the research. In addition, harm reduction should occur in the event participants experience harm because of their participation in the study (APA, 2017). Participants did not receive monetary incentives or gifts in exchange for their participation in the study. Furthermore, participants were informed that their contribution to this study contributed to the research promoting social change for African American experiences in the Black Church.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the significance of emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on outcomes associated with church hurt. I used a quantitative methodology with a correlational design. The sample included self-reported African American adults over 18 years of age with a Facebook account who currently or previously attended a Black Church. Snowball sampling was used to recruit eligible participants. Once recruited, participants reviewed the informed consent form prior to participating in the study.

Participants received a link for the questionnaire via SurveyMonkey following their consent for participation. I collected demographic information from each participant

and used the RPS, PAEGS, RSS-A, and RSSS to test the hypotheses. Data was inputted into SPSS directly from SurveyMonkey and analyzed using a factorial ANOVA. In Chapter 4, I review the findings and provide an interpretation of the statistical analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The Black Church has been a staple in the African American community. It has served as a protective factor and haven for countless African Americans who have experienced oppression and hatred from the surrounding world (Barnes, 2015; Hays, 2015). However, not all African Americans have experienced a sense of belonging, support, or safety resulting from their affiliation with the Black Church. For some, the Black Church has been identified as source of disappointment, hurt, and trauma (Streets, 2015). The purpose of this study was to expound upon the existing literature pertaining to the Black Church and offer insight on ways church hurt occurs and effects the lives of African Americans within the Black Church. I investigated the effects between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on outcomes associated with church hurt.

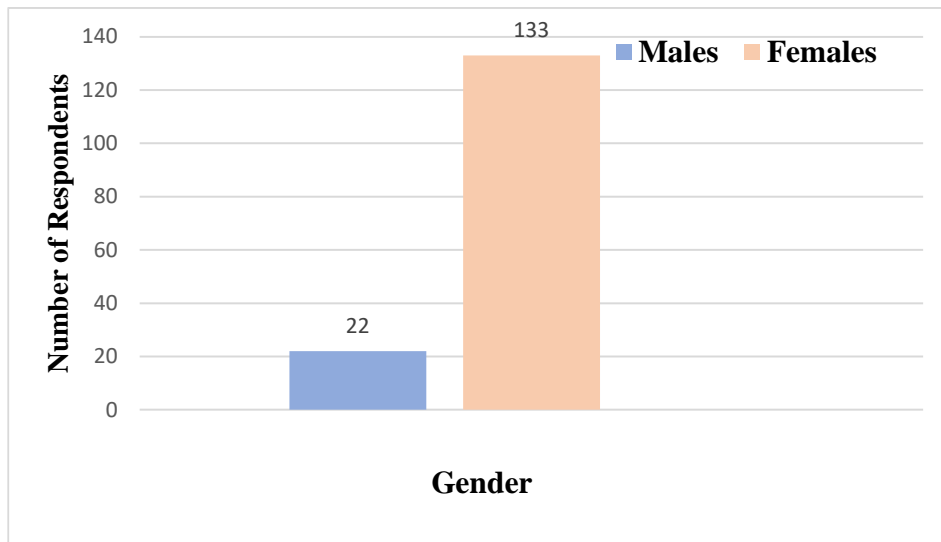
I used a nonexperimental quantitative approach and correlational, survey design to address the identified research questions and alternative hypothesis. The research questions were as follows: What is the relationship between emotional manipulation and church hurt? What is the correlation between gender discrimination and church hurt? What is the relationship between spiritual bullying and church hurt? What is the correlation between spiritual neglect and church hurt? The alternative hypothesis was as follows: There is a statistically significant relationship between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and outcomes associated with church hurt. The variables were measured using the RPS, PAEGS, RSS-A, and

RSSS. In this chapter, I review the data collection process, statistical analysis, and results, and I summarize the findings based on the relationship to the research questions and hypothesis in the following sections.

Data Collection

I began the data collection process at the end of the third week in January 2021 using a Facebook created group entitled Church on Sundays, Therapy on Mondays following approval from Walden's IRB. A minimum of 100 qualifying respondents were needed to ensure that the results of the study were valid and reliable as determined by previous research studies using parametric tests. Within 3 days of posting, I collected 198 questionnaires. However, only 155 respondents met all the selection criteria and provided demographic information relevant to the qualified sample. The study sample consisted of African Americans adults over the age of 18 who previously or currently identified as a Christian and a previous or current attendant of a traditional Black Church. Respondents were also Facebook users and completed the questionnaire online.

Descriptive statistics for participants based on gender is found in Figure 1. Majority of the respondents were middle aged adults, while there were less young and older adult participants as shown in Table 1. More than half of the participants (54.1%) were affiliated with the COGIC/Pentecostal-Holiness denomination while the remaining denominations accounted for fewer participants. Approximately 14% of respondents did not choose a specific denomination, as presented in Table 2. In addition, 95% of respondents indicated that they were affiliated with a Black Church for 5 years or more.

Figure 1*Respondent's Gender Based on Number of Participants***Table 1***Respondent Age Groups*

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	18-24	4	2.6
	25-34	37	23.9
	35-44	52	33.5
	45-54	34	21.9
	55-64	22	14.2
	65+	6	3.9
Total		155	100.0

Table 2*Traditional Denominations in the Black Church*

	Frequency	Percent
Church of God in Christ (COGIC)/Pentecostal-Holiness	72	46.5
National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. (NBC)	35	22.6
Christian Methodists Episcopal	4	2.6
National Baptist Convention of American (NBCA)	9	5.8
African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.Z.)	3	1.9
Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC)	3	1.9
African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.)	7	4.5
Valid	133	85.8
Missing	22	14.2
Total	155	100.0

Statistical Analysis

I used a four-way factorial ANOVA to determine the degree to which emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect effected outcomes associated with church hurt for African Americans in the Black Church. Researchers use a factorial ANOVA to assess if multiple factors influence a change based on what is observed (Crump et al., 2019). This analysis is also appropriate in providing insight on the main effects between the outcome variable and predictor variables along with the combined interactions between predictors (Warner, 2003).

A four-way factorial ANOVA was conducted using the data collected from the Church Hurt questionnaire to assess whether a respondent's degree of church hurt outcomes were affected by emotional manipulation (*A*), gender discrimination (*B*), spiritual bullying (*C*), and spiritual neglect (*D*). The interaction between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect (*AxBxCxD*) on a respondent's degree of church hurt outcomes were also assessed. The output from

the Levene's test ($F(27, 87) = 1.824, p = 0.019$) was used to assess for a violation of homogeneity, as displayed in Table 3. The homogeneity of variance was unequal across groups and the design was nonorthogonal. Therefore, I failed to reject the null hypothesis ($p < .05$). All other assumptions of the factorial ANOVA were met.

Table 3

Test of Equal Variances for a Factorial ANOVA

		Levene	df1	df2	Sig.
		Statistic			
Church	Based on	1.824	27	87	0.019
Hurt	Mean				

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent

Results

A factorial ANOVA was conducted to compare the main effects of emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect as well as the effects of the interactions between factors on a respondent's degree of church hurt outcomes. The four-way interaction effects between all factors were not statistically significant ($p > .05$), indicating that there was not a combined effect for emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on a respondent's degree of church hurt outcomes. In addition, three-way and two-way interaction effects between factors and church hurt outcomes were not statistically significant ($p > .05$). Also, main effects for each factor were not determined to be statistically significant based on the output of the factorial ANOVA, as shown in Table 4. The results of the factorial ANOVA were not significant, and, therefore, I failed to reject the null hypothesis stating that there was not a statistically significant relationship

between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and outcomes associated with church hurt.

The univariate tests indicated that emotional manipulation ($F(4, 87) = 4.560, p < .01$) and spiritual bullying ($F(4, 87) = 3.189, p < .05$), had a significant effect on church hurt based on linearly independent pairwise comparisons. However, the effect size for emotional manipulation ($\eta^2 = .173$) and spiritual bullying ($\eta^2 = .128$) was relatively weak at the 95% confidence level. These independent factors accounted for 17% and 13%, respectively, of the variance in a respondent's degree of church hurt outcomes experienced when entered in the model without additional factors.

Table 4

Four-Way Factorial ANOVA

Dependent Variable: Church Hurt						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
EmotManip	4.531	4	1.133	1.826	0.131	0.077
GenDiscrim	0.790	3	0.263	0.424	0.736	0.014
SpiritBully	1.283	4	0.321	0.517	0.723	0.023
SpiritNeglect	2.968	3	0.989	1.595	0.196	0.052
EmotManip * GenDiscrim	3.711	5	0.742	1.197	0.318	0.064
EmotManip * SpiritBully	4.911	4	1.228	1.979	0.105	0.083
EmotManip * SpiritNeglect	0.567	2	0.283	0.457	0.635	0.010
GenDiscrim * SpiritBully	2.528	5	0.506	0.815	0.542	0.045
GenDiscrim * SpiritNeglect	3.196	5	0.639	1.030	0.405	0.056
SpiritBully * SpiritNeglect	1.978	3	0.659	1.063	0.369	0.035
EmotManip * GenDiscrim * SpiritBully	3.479	3	1.160	1.869	0.141	0.061
EmotManip * GenDiscrim * SpiritNeglect	2.794	2	1.397	2.252	0.111	0.049
EmotManip * SpiritBully * SpiritNeglect	0.039	1	0.039	0.063	0.802	0.001
GenDiscrim * SpiritBully * SpiritNeglect	0.949	1	0.949	1.530	0.219	0.017
EmotManip * GenDiscrim * SpiritBully * SpiritNeglect	0.000	0				0.000
Error	53.971	87	0.620			
Total	747.000	155				
Corrected Total	122.994	154				

a. R Squared = .561 (Adjusted R Squared = .223)

Note. * Represents the interactions between factors.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a statistically significant effect between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect and outcomes associated with church hurt. I addressed the research questions as the results from the factorial ANOVA analysis suggested that there were no statistically significant effects between these factors and church hurt. However, the analysis revealed that emotional manipulation and spiritual bullying had an independent effect on church hurt outcomes when not included in the factorial ANOVA. Furthermore, most assumptions were met for the analysis, although the Levene's test of equality of variance indicated that the data were not equally distributed. Even though this resulted in a nonorthogonal design, the ANOVA is a robust analysis and may still be appropriate following a violation of an assumption (Warner, 2013). In Chapter 5, I evaluate the results of the study in comparison to previous research pertaining to church hurt, review the implications, and provide implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this nonexperimental, quantitative study was to determine the effect between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on outcomes associated with church hurt. The goal of this study was to collect data from respondents using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was disseminated in the Facebook group Church on Sundays, Therapy on Mondays, and data reflected experiences pertaining to church hurt in the Black Church. Demographic questions relating to denomination, years of affiliation with the Black Church, and size of the church were used along with the RPS, PAEGS, and RSS-A to gather data for each of the factors. The RSSS was used to gather data on church hurt outcomes. I performed this study due to the limited research conducted on understanding how abuse and trauma occurs within the Black Church. This study was necessary as the Black Church serves as protective factor for many African Americans and it is important to identify ways to fortify this organization.

The key findings of this study revealed that there were no statistically significant effects between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on church hurt outcomes. Specifically, the results of the study indicated that respondents did not perceive themselves as victims of church hurt based on their affiliation with the Black Church. In addition, the results suggested that interactions between previously identified factors associated with church hurt did not play a significant role in influencing church hurt outcomes. However, these results may be

specific to the study sample and may not represent the overall African American population within the Black Church. In contrast, results of a univariate test demonstrated a significant independent relationship between emotional manipulation and church hurt as well as spiritual bullying and church hurt. However, emotional manipulation and spiritual bullying were not statistically significant as main effects when determining the impact on church hurt outcomes along with gender discrimination and spiritual neglect.

Interpretation of the Findings

Although the results of the study were not statistically significant, I found that there were additional findings based on participant responses relating to emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, spiritual neglect, and church hurt.

Emotional Manipulation

Previous researchers identified the potential for congregants to be manipulated by their leader, further leading to instances of abuse, hurt, betrayal, and toxic relationships (Mahlangu, 2020; McDermott, 2020). In addition, manipulation has created detrimental outcomes for followers (Shaw et al., 2020). The results of this study revealed that there is an independent relationship between emotional manipulation and church hurt. However, almost half of the respondents denied experiencing emotional manipulation based on combined responses from the emotional manipulation subscale. Some respondents reported that they *slightly agreed* to experiencing emotional manipulation while only a few respondents reported that it occurred *continually*. The findings were inconsistent with the literature and may suggest that respondents were unaware that they had been manipulated. Spiritual leaders may use scriptures to justify irrational needs and other

methods to take advantage of their congregants (Shaw et al., 2020). The use of spiritual tactics may have made it more difficult for respondents to recognize instances of manipulation. Furthermore, congregants may not know how to address these issues once they recognize it has occurred.

Gender Discrimination

The Black Church is known for gender discrimination against women (Barber, 2015). Additionally, women have a history of underrepresentation in leadership roles within the Black Church. This is particularly evident in the Baptist denomination (Parker-McCullough, 2020). Most of the participants in the study were women with previous or current affiliation in the COGIC (Pentecostal/Holiness) denomination. There was also significant representation from women from all three Baptist denominations combined based on the sample.

Responses to the gender discrimination subscales indicated that respondents mostly *disagreed* with experiencing gender discrimination within the Black Church. This finding was inconsistent with results from previous research on gender discrimination and African American women. Moreover, the outcome of this subscale may reflect traditional and spiritual views related to how women perceive their role in leadership and the church. In some instances, the women in the sample may prefer as well as be more comfortable with assuming a submissive role in the church. Barnes (2016) found that women are more likely to serve as administrators, singers, teachers, and leaders of auxiliary boards rather than pastors. Their views may align with the research and suggest that women are comfortable with fulfilling alternative roles in the church. Their views

may also suggest an absence of contending for roles of higher responsibility in the Black Church.

Spiritual Bullying

Spiritual bullying may prevent congregants from embracing and functioning within their own identity. Congregants may also feel pressured to meet the expectations of their leader to avoid isolation or removal from the religious institution (Ward, 2011). There was a significant, linear relationship between spiritual bullying and church hurt. Although there was a higher frequency of respondents who denied experiencing spiritual bullying, there was a significant number of overall respondents who indicated that they experienced spiritual bullying within the Black Church. The spiritual bullying subscale was comprised of the least number of items and may have accounted for more accurate responses by respondents. The main effect for spiritual bullying was not significant. However, based on responses to the questionnaire, it was evident that several respondents experienced some level of bullying while affiliated with the Black Church.

Spiritual Neglect

Researchers have found that spiritual neglect can lead to significant pain and rejection (Ward, 2011). It may also cause other congregants to turn against each other and further perpetuate the cycle of abuse, betrayal, and trauma (see Meichenbaum, n.d.) as consistent with aspects of BTT (see Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Spiritual neglect is even more critical for African Americans in the Black Church because many of them rely on help from clergy and the church before they seek outside resources (Meichenbaum, n.d.). Most respondents agreed to experiencing spiritual neglect within the Black Church. This

is consistent with the research indicating that spiritual neglect occurs within the religious context.

Church Hurt

Church hurt occurs because of religious and spiritual trauma or abuse that has occurred within a religious context. Outcomes may include denial, lapses in memory, and dissociation. In addition, it may lead to stigmatization, removal, or departure from the religious organization (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). Majority of respondents reported that they *rarely* experienced church hurt or denied experiencing it at all. Responses to this subscale may support the research indicating that individuals who experience church hurt are in denial and unable to recognize outcomes associated with this form of betrayal and trauma. In addition, responses to this subscale may also reflect interests of protecting the Black Church from negative attention.

Limitations of the Study

A possible limitation of the study may have been associated with the questionnaire. The questionnaire did not include responses from respondents from nondenominational organizations. Although there were 155 qualified participants, 22 respondents did not report affiliation with a specific denomination. There were several participants who disclosed that they were unable to complete the survey because they attended a predominantly African American church outside a traditional denomination. Another limitation may have been related to the nature of the study and sensitivity of the topic. Although potential respondents were informed that the study was anonymous, several participants inquired about the potential of their identity being revealed and how

the results would reflect the Black Church. Fears pertaining to perceived identity exposure and stereotypes related to the Black Church may have prevented participants from responding accurately. The narrow focus of the study related to race was also a potential limitation to the study. There were two participants who did not meet the exclusion criteria due to race although they belonged to a traditional Black Church. Considering the limitations of the study, the results may be generalizable to the sample only.

An additional limitation involved soliciting participants through a Facebook group. The sample size may have been larger if participants were also recruited from local churches. However, many churches have switched to a virtual platform because of the worldwide pandemic, making it difficult to collect data in person. Another limitation involved the items on the questionnaire. There were initially 198 participant submissions, although only 155 questionnaires were completed. There were several surveys that were not completed beyond the first few questions or had a significant number of missing responses. Also, the limited number of male participants in the study may have been another limitation although lack of male participation was consistent with the make-up of the Black Church, which is comprised primarily of women.

Recommendations for Further Research

Previous studies recommended that future research focus on examining factors that predict church hurt and determine how potential outcomes specifically affect African Americans within the Black Church (Hays, 2015; Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018). In addition, recommendations for further research from previous studies emphasized the

importance of using a quantitative approach. This study used a quantitative approach, and I investigated factors associated with church hurt to determine the effects on church hurt outcomes. This study also highlighted aspects of church hurt that were relevant to African Americans within the Black Church. The results of this study indicated that the interactions between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect did not have a significant effect on church hurt outcomes. Therefore, further research is recommended.

A recommendation would include collecting data from a more diverse population. This study focused on African Americans from traditional, denominations affiliated with the Black Church; however, there were several respondents who were affiliated with a nondenominational Black Church who could have provided relevant insight. It may be valuable to investigate African Americans who attend nondenominational Black Churches in the future. Also, a larger sample would have provided more representation from African Americans affiliated with the Black Church and have led to more conclusive results. Another recommendation for future research is to identify alternative measures to assess factors related to church hurt. Respondents expressed that some of the items were not applicable to them, and they were unsure on how to respond to them, likely contributing to missing data. For instance, they had difficulty applying the questions from the PAEGS in a religious context. Although the questions were adaptable to a religious context, respondents had difficulty relating to the questions to their experiences. Adapting the survey questions may be beneficial in helping respondents to better conceptualize the questions.

Another recommendation may include considerations of how denial may influence responses to the questionnaire and results. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) asserted that denial is an outcome associated with church hurt. This is consistent with the research suggesting congregants may have been aware that they were victims of church hurt although they were able to compartmentalize their experiences to remain in the environment. Moreover, they may mentally detach from the trauma or manipulation that occurred and become desensitized. Denial may have also played a key role in the outcome of the statistical significance of the study. On the other hand, respondent views may have been accurate as indicated, and their experiences within the Black Church were not associated with manipulation.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for Black Churches. Although the results indicated that there was not a statistically significant effect between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on church hurt outcomes, several other important considerations were noted. This study offered awareness of possible factors associated with church hurt that have been previously disregarded or unrecognizable by African Americans attending the Black Church. For example, respondents may have been exposed to some aspects of church hurt yet, struggled to label their encounters or were in denial about being victimized. Recognizing the existence of church hurt is a crucial aspect in reduction and prevention. Additionally, the results of this study could be used to educate African Americans within the Black Church on potential signs of church hurt as well. This is particularly important for

individuals who suspect that they have experienced some form of mistreatment although they are unable to label it.

This study highlighted issues surrounding gender discrimination in the Black Church, as the results hinted at the possibility of a continuation of traditional and some spiritual views held by women pertaining to roles of leadership. Responses related to gender discrimination may provide further insight into a deeper issue relating to how women perceive themselves in leadership roles beyond the Black Church. In addition, many respondents agreed to experiencing spiritual neglect. Spiritual neglect has been associated with toxic and narcissistic leadership traits and may represent the occurrence of betrayal in relationships between the leaders and congregants (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018; Ward, 2011). Participant responses may suggest probable implications involving the relational dynamics between African Americans and their leaders within the Black Church. The results also suggested that spiritual neglect is a problematic area for many African Americans attending the Black Church.

Positive Social Change

This study also provides implications for positive social change. The results can be used to educate clergy and leaders on qualities that may be useful in building healthy and balanced relationships with congregants and reducing occurrences of church hurt. Specifically, this study has the potential to promote social change by encouraging leaders in the Black Church to execute influence and charisma in a healthy way while remaining accountable to their congregants. This study can be used to generate dialogue with leaders within the Black Church to identify signs of church hurt while improving the

quality of their leadership. Improvements in leadership quality and educating members of church hurt will support the Black Church with being a stronger system of support for African Americans.

Theoretical Implications

BTT was used to explain potential experiences and outcomes associated with church hurt. A major tenant of this theory is betrayal blindness. Betrayal blindness prevents victims of trauma and abuse from identifying it and interferes with their psychological and behavioral responses (Gagnon et al., 2017). It can be used as a self-preservation tactic and may lead to repeat victimization of trauma (Zimmerman et al., 2017). This theory can be used to explain the reoccurrence of trauma and abuse, especially for individuals who are unable to recognize that they were victimized or in denial about the existence of church hurt. Based on BTT and respondent responses, several individuals experienced church hurt and were unable to recognize that it occurred. In addition, some individuals may have been guarded about their experiences to protect the reputation of the Black Church. Consequentially, these individuals were more likely to experience several outcomes associated with church hurt along with ongoing exposure to trauma.

Clinical Implications

Therapists who work with individuals from the Black Church should be mindful of views and values that may be salient to this population. It is important that therapists understand that some individuals may not be willing to separate from the organization even if they have experienced church hurt. These individuals may not be seeking help to

leave their church or change their religious views and values. However, individuals may desire to use therapy to gain support with living beyond the betrayal that has occurred within their current environment. Cashwell and Swindle (2018) indicated that individuals may experience symptoms comparable to grief following an experience related to betrayal. Furthermore, the results of the survey may serve as a prediction to the limited number of individuals that will likely seek mental health treatment. Their interest in seeking therapy may be underwhelming considering their significant reliance on leaders in the Black Church for support (Hays, 2015). Hence, it is critical that therapists have some insight into the dynamics of this population and are culturally sensitive.

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that some African Americans experience aspects of church hurt within the Black Church. In fact, many respondents held strong views specifically relating to their experiences of spiritual neglect. However, main effects and interactions between emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect were not found to have a significant effect on church hurt outcomes. It is likely that respondents were unaware that they were victimized or that trauma, betrayal, or abuse occurred within the Black Church. Individuals who were aware of the occurrence of trauma may have been in denial as posited by BTT (Cashwell & Swindle, 2018). In addition, respondents may hold the church in high regard and refuse to disclose information regarding their traumatic experiences for fear of removal, isolation, stigmatization, or further hurt. It is important to continue to increase awareness surrounding issues related to church hurt within the Black Church. It is also important for

leaders and clergy of the Black Church to be aware of factors associated with church hurt and work to reduce and prevent further betrayal, abuse, and trauma to fortify this religious institution.

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Appendix A: Debriefing Form

Participant Debriefing Form

Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating as a research participant in the present study concerning your view of the African American experience in the Black Church. The present study evaluates the significance of emotional manipulation, gender discrimination, spiritual bullying, and spiritual neglect on outcomes associated with church hurt.

Again, thank you for your participation in this study. If you know of any friends or acquaintances that are eligible to participate in this study, we request that you not discuss it with them until after they have had the opportunity to participate. Prior knowledge of questions asked during the study can invalidate the results. We greatly appreciate your cooperation.

If you have any questions or concerns, please keep a copy of this Debriefing Form for future reference. You may also contact the researcher if you would like to learn more about available mental health resources to address outcomes associated with church hurt.

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study or a summary of the findings when it is complete, please feel free to contact the researcher. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Walden University Institutional Review Board. In the event you feel that you have experienced adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, please contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) treatment referral helpline at 1-877-726-4727 for a list of treatment providers in your local area.

Thanks again for your participation.

Appendix B: Demographic Questions

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

- Male
 Female

2. Do you identify as an African American?

- Yes
 No

3. Do you currently or did you previously identify as a Christian?

- Yes
 No

4. Which category below includes your age?

- 18-24
 25-34
 35-44
 45-54
 55-64
 65+

5. Which Black Church denomination were you previously or currently affiliated with?

- Church of God in Christ (COGIC)/Pentecostal-Holiness
 National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. (NBC)
 Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.)
 National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA)
 African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.Z.)
 Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC)
 African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.)

6. Number of years affiliated with a Black Church

- Less than 1 year
 1-2 years
 3-4 years
 5 years or more

7. What is the size of your church or previous church?

- Small (50 attendees or less)
 Medium (51-300 attendees)
 Large (301-2,000 attendees)
 Mega (2,000 attendees or more)

Appendix C: Church Hurt Questionnaire

Survey Measures

RPS

8. My congregation tries hard to make all people feel welcome in leadership positions in church, regardless of a person's gender.

- Strongly Disagree
 Disagree
 Neither Disagree/Agree
 Agree
 Strongly Agree

9. If a woman became a leader in my congregation, then some members would switch to a different congregation.

- Strongly Disagree
 Disagree
 Neither Disagree/Agree
 Agree
 Strongly Agree

10. The elders in my congregation would feel uncomfortable asking a women to lead a communion prayer.

- Strongly Disagree
 Disagree
 Neither Disagree/Agree
 Agree
 Strongly Agree

11. If a woman in my congregation told other members she believed women should be in leadership positions in church, then some members would try to avoid or correct her.

- Somewhat Disagree
 Disagree
 Neither Disagree/Agree
 Agree
 Strongly Agree

12. It would be difficult for a woman to be in a position of authority in my congregation.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Disagree/Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

13. In church, I was taught that a person should be able to serve or lead in any way in church, regardless of gender.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Disagree/Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

14. Someone who promotes gender equality in churches would be welcomed as a guest speaker in my congregation.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Disagree/Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

PAEGS

15. They made me feel that I would face considerable danger if I left the group.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

16. I was expected to confess any action or feeling that might not have conformed to the philosophy of the group.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

17. They made me feel guilty about small and unimportant things.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

18. The same authority that punished me could withdraw the punishment and forgive me at will.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

19. When they considered that I had disobeyed some of the group's recommendations, they treated me with contempt.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

20. They led me to believe that everything inside the group was good and everything outside the group was bad.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

21. The authority of the group's leader was presented to me as unquestionable.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

22. They made me see the figure of the leader as an indisputable authority who had to be obeyed.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

23. They made me see the leader of the group as someone with very special and clearly superior characteristics.

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a lot
- A lot
- Continually

RSS--A

24. You can turn to members of a congregation for advice when you have problems.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

25. Members of a congregation care about your life and situation.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

26. You do not feel close to members of a congregation.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

27. Members of a congregation give you the sense that you belong.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

28. You feel appreciated by members of a congregation.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

29. If something went wrong, members of a congregation would give you assistance.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

30. You have worth in the eyes of members of a congregation.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

31. If something went wrong, church leaders would give you assistance.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

32. You have worth in the eyes of church leaders.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

33. You can turn to church leadership for advice when you have problems.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

34. Church leaders care about your life and situation.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

35. You do not feel close to church leaders.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

36. Church leaders give you the sense that you belong.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

37. You feel appreciated by church leaders.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

38. Felt as though God had let me down.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

39. Felt angry at God.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

40. Felt as though God had abandoned me.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

41. Felt as though God was punishing me.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

42. Questioned God's love for me.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

43. Felt hurt, mistreated, or offended by religious/spiritual people.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

44. Felt rejected or misunderstood by religious/spiritual people.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

45. Felt as though others were looking down on me because of my religious/spiritual beliefs.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

46. Had conflicts with other people about religious/spiritual matters

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

47. Felt angry at organized religion.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

48. Questioned whether life really matters.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

49. Felt as though my life had no deeper meaning.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

50. Questioned whether my life will really make any difference in the world.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

51. Had concerns about whether there is any ultimate purpose to life or existence .

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

52. Struggled to figure out what I really believe about religion/spirituality.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

53. Felt confused about my religious/spiritual beliefs.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

54. Felt troubled by doubts or questions about religion or spirituality.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

55. Worried about whether my beliefs about religion/spirituality were correct.

- Not at all/Does not apply
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- A great deal

Appendix D: PAEGS Permission



UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA



Dear Researcher,

We are pleased to grant you permission to use the Psychological Abuse Experienced in Groups Scale (PAEGS) in your research. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any question regarding the scale.

Sincerely,

Test Author
Invictus Investigación
Departamento de Psicología Social y Psicología Cuantitativa
Facultad de Psicología
Universidad de Barcelona