

SHIFTING THE ATMOSPHERE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG
AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE DISCOURSE(S), CULTURALLY COMPETENT
EDUCATION, AND SOCIAL ACTION THROUGH THE BLACK CHURCH AGAINST
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

by

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This dissertation explores the relationship(s) between rural African-American women's discourses and social advocacy/action against the social ill of domestic violence in order to provide insights into existing knowledge about the relationships among womanist discourse(s) and cultural competence used in effective educational practices. In this dissertation, the term womanist discourse(s) means language that reflects the diverse cultural identities and experiences of Black women while also remaining conscious of and committed to recognizing the importance of all people, especially those who identify with experiences of oppression, marginalization, and inhospitality within their larger hegemonic societies, cultures, and institutions. Three themes created for use in this study by unifying motifs of womanism and Black Church Culture/Traditions are: collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status. In addition, narrowed for the purposes of this study, cultural competence refers to services and education that are respectful of and responsive to cultural and linguistic needs. Specifically, this study integrates the use of culturally-based educational materials produced by The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute during a

domestic violence awareness workshop led by the participant-observer researcher and attended by a group of African-American women of Christian faith who are interested in discussing, learning more about, and, ultimately, combating domestic violence within and/or beyond their rural communities with the support of their religious institution, The Church of God for All People in Windsor, North Carolina. This participant-observer field study, combined with rhetorical analysis of materials used in the study, identifies what emerges as culturally competent conduits for educating and promoting social action by a specific group of African-American women of faith in rural Northeastern North Carolina: sermons, songs, testimonies, and hospitable interaction.

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to survivors, advocates, truth preachers and teachers, prayer warriors, and – especially – my grandmas, Mary Gladys Watson & the late Missionary Lillie

Mae Barnes.

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“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21 (*Holy Bible*, King James Version) These verses of Scripture, among many others, filled me with strength, hope, and resolve to move forward during the process of completing this dissertation project. My belief in Almighty God’s love, creativity, patience, and sovereignty has been my fortress and ultimate inspiration.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, & REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This study seeks to contribute to multidisciplinary knowledge about the relationships among culturally competent and womanist discourses for domestic violence education; rural, Christian African-American women's cultural perceptions of domestic violence; and social action against domestic violence through the Black Church. By focusing on a population ordinarily overlooked for close investigation, this study aims to promote and widen the scope of research on underrepresented groups affected by domestic violence. Chapter One provides an overview of my motivations and researcher's stance for this study, as well as a discussion of the purpose and relevance of the study when explored in the larger contexts of existing research on domestic violence and its impacts on rural communities, the site of study for this project, and the source of the educational materials used in the study. I then provide background information on domestic violence in Bertie County, North Carolina, followed by an overview of how the Black Church has responded to domestic violence and calls for changes in its responses. The chapter then concludes with an introduction to the interpretive frameworks of Womanism and Black Church Culture and Traditions, which are fleshed out to create this study's Womanist Black Church Lens, which is used for rhetorical analysis later in the dissertation. Chapter Two provides further insight into the specific analytical lens used in to dissect and explore sermons, educational materials used during the workshop, and the data collected during the workshop. Also discussed in Chapter Two are the research site, the recruitment of participants, data collection and methods overview, and the member-checking meeting. I then, in Chapter Three, transition into a rhetorical analysis of sermons presented by the founder of the Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute (BCDVI), Rev. Aubra Love. After exploring the sermons through analysis to better understand the presence of Womanist Black Church Themes that also emerge

in the educational materials used for the study, I then use Chapter Four to present my rhetorical analysis of those materials. Chapter Five then reports my findings of the workshop data collections, observations, and member-checking meeting. Thereafter, Chapter Six provides a concluding discussion of my reflections, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Study

“For too long, scholarship and the church have ignored the lives and religious experiences of African-American women.” Z. Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters* (39)

What is revealed about culturally competent education methods to combat domestic violence when studied within the context of rural, African-American women in the Black Church? In other words, how do African-American women from rural communities who participate in the Black Church describe their learning experience and reactions when participating in a workshop that integrates womanist-influenced educational resources designed to be culturally competent and tailored for the purpose of promoting action against domestic violence by people of faith? To consider critically the significance of womanist-influenced education resources used in this study, an understanding womanism is necessary. Womanist discourse(s) is narrowed in this study by referring to language-in-use (Gee, 5) that reflects the cultural identities and experiences of African-American Christian women while also remaining conscious of and committed to recognizing the importance of all people, especially those who identify with experiences of oppression, marginalization, and inhospitality (Westfield) within their larger hegemonic societies, cultures, and institutions. Black Church Culture/Traditions will be discussed further later in the chapter. In that discussion and in subsequent rhetorical analysis conducted in Chapters Three and Four, Black Church Culture/Traditions means collective identity and engagement in sermon delivery; integration of scriptures, songs and spirituals; and

references to oppression and social activism within religious context. These traditions are important to this study in the contributions that they give to the themes that I created by unifying motifs of womanism and Black Church Culture/Traditions. The three themes that are used in this study are: collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status. I use collective ethos and action to refer to the shared, characteristic essence of a group, including its cultural symbols, customs, beliefs, as well as the engagement among members of the group in worship experiences, community service, communication, and multidisciplinary social action. I also used empowering womanist religious rhetoric to refer to the methods of communicating, living, and functioning within religious cultures that share – equally – power among genders and promote religious identity. In addition, I used socio-spiritual status to refer to the self- and socially-constructed identification one’s position(s) in society and institutions, as well as one’s identification of her spiritual closeness to a divine presence Who possesses the ability to engage in her earthly affairs. These themes will be discussed and applied in later chapters. In addition, narrowed for the purposes of this study, cultural competence refers to the educational materials’ ability to facilitate a learning experience that resonates well with the religious beliefs and cultural tools associated with the study’s participants, African-American women of Christian faith who are part of a rural community. What are effective, or ineffective, educational discursive practices for this study’s participants? What will be revealed through this study to better understand what relationships, if any, actually exist between the cultural group and the educational materials that, at least on the surface, are intended to reflect the group’s religious and social identities? How do educational materials designed from a womanist cultural and theological perspective appeal to, teach, motivate African-American women of faith from a rural community into movement activism against

domestic violence? Taking into consideration the interdisciplinary nature of this project, the overarching research question is as follows: How do rural, Southern African-American Christian women engage language as a social practice with culturally competent education and social action as its expected outcomes? There is a need for more knowledge on African-American women's discourse(s) used to educate and encourage rural African-American women of faith to combat domestic violence in their communities for the purpose of better understanding the relationship(s) among cultural competence and activist education methods. Currently, as reported in "A Black Experience-Based Approach to Gender-Based Violence" by Tricia Bent-Goodley, "Women of color face increased barriers to treatment and are less likely to obtain services that are culturally responsive and, hence, more targeted at the social and cultural contexts in which they live (285). Also, in "A Faith Community-Domestic Violence Partnership," Alison Jones and Sharee Fowler highlight the importance of integrating "culturally appropriate" language and materials when conducting domestic violence trainings in faith-based communities for various groups in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Additionally, in "Exploring the Perceptions of IPV Among African-American Women in Rural Communities," Teresa L. Quarker Smith states that her research on the perceptions of domestic violence by women in rural Alabama will be useful for researchers "in reinforcing the need for [...] additional research on culturally competent models of [Intimate Partner Violence] IPV prevention and best practice interventions that focus[sic] on rural communities" (101). Therefore, this study adds another population of interest to the research on culturally competent educational materials. Ultimately, this study will attempt, through the examination of a workshop held at The Church of God for All People and analysis of the educational materials used during the workshop, to provide

insights into about the relationships among Womanist discourse(s) and cultural competence used in effective educational practices.

Relevance of the Study

Studies have been conducted on African-American women's discourses and rhetoric(s) about social ills – education/literacy, social equality, sexuality, poverty, politics, religion, and health - for decades. However, studies about rural, Christian, Southern African-American women's responses to approaches of culturally competent education with the aim of promoting social action against domestic violence are not readily available. Domestic violence and sexual assault against women maintain a strong presence as serious, sometimes-fatal, multi-generational ills; therefore, social workers, clergy, domestic violence advocates, legislators/public policy makers, and law enforcement – just to name a few – need to learn more about how public education approaches aimed at specific cultural groups can generate collaborative, effective journeys toward improved lives for all persons who become intertwined in the system of abuse. According to Dorothy L. Pennington's "The Discourse of African-American Women," African-American women's religious and spiritual discourse needs more attention and study to "facilitate understanding of a set of rhetorical experiences scantily studied, especially in the fields of communication, English, and African-American studies (306). This project responds to Pennington's call for more research on African-American women's religious and spiritual discourses.

While insightful research has focused on the various aspects of domestic violence and people who are a part of and/or impacted by the Black Church (Barnes; McCoy; Bent-Goodley), the research does not narrow its focus exclusively on the relationships among domestic violence, the Black Church, and African-Americans in rural communities. This research will focus on

African-American women in a rural, non-urban Black Church context and also highlight their responses to the educational materials and their ideas of activism against domestic violence, a perspective not highlighted in current research. There is a need for more knowledge on African-American women's discourse(s) used to educate and encourage rural African-American women of Christian faith to combat domestic violence in their communities for the purpose of better understanding the relationship(s) among cultural competence and activist education methods. In the recommendations stemming from her research, Smith presents the following suggestions relating to local churches and faith-based interventions (98-99):

In reaching and serving the rural African-American population, a good starting point is the local church. For years the church has served as the counseling, worshiping, learning and meeting place within the community. Women are also more accessible there than anywhere else in the community.

In "Black Church Culture and Community Action," Sandra L. Barnes discusses the presence of domestic abuse in African-American communities and closes her discussion by stating that that "[t]he next step in this query [regarding the relationship between cultural components and the subsequent strategies of action by the Black Church] is to examine actual 'discourse in action' relative to cultural tool kit content and its possible influence on community involvement" (987). Christopher G. Ellison and Kristin L. Anderson conclude "Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence among U.S. Couples" by recommending more research that focuses on the issues of domestic violence as it intersects with the religious involvement of individuals to "illuminate the influence of religious beliefs, practices, and communities (1) in reducing rates and levels of partner violence, and (2) in dealing with the devastating consequences of this public health crisis" (282). Even though this study is not a currently a long-term initiative, but an exploratory

study linked with the beginning of a church ministry that is focused on anti-domestic violence advocacy and action within its rural community, this study also reflects the call made in “Domestic Violence in the African-American Community: An Analysis of Social and Structural Factors” for community-based efforts within the context of the faith community, community centers, fraternal orders, sororities, book clubs, and Black media to prioritize reducing sexism and intimate violence in the African-American community (Hampton and Davis, 553). Smith’s “Exploring Perceptions of IPV” further explains the importance of serving rural African-American women as it relates to violence against women:

Women of color, particularly African-American women living in rural and poor areas are one of the most vulnerable, yet underserved populations (FCADV, 2000). The National Violence against Women Survey (NVAWS) found that African-American women reported higher rates of domestic violence than did women from other communities of color (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported that African-American women experienced domestic violence at a rate 35% higher than Caucasian women (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). [...] Poverty, lack of public transportation systems, shortages of healthcare providers, minimal insurance or lack of health insurance and decreased access to resources are many barriers faced by women living in rural communities (Johnson, 2000). (4)

In “Community Insights on Domestic Violence Among African-Americans: Conversations about Domestic Violence and Other Issues Facing Their Community,” researcher Linner Ward Griffin argues that solutions to domestic violence among African-Americans in eastern North Carolina must be comprehensive and culturally based. In her report, which was part of a national study on

domestic violence as part of a research initiative for the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community, she states:

Participants thought that the community must resolve domestic violence issues with the proper support and attitudes. Because it has traditionally been the social and spiritual leader in rural communities, the church occupies a critical role in addressing domestic violence and the very direct symptoms of racism and other problems that permeate the community. A stronger role for church ministries was proposed as a solution to domestic violence in eastern North Carolina. Education for ministers about domestic violence was seen as an essential strategy for affecting changes in the behavior of both men and women in the African-American community. (9)

Rhetorical analysis of educational materials that are used in this study will rely on the theoretical frameworks of Womanist Black Church cultural perspectives. More specifically, my analysis will focus on the use of language to bring awareness to the role of religion in influencing Christian women of faith who are battered and sexually abused. BCDVI uses language to encourage freedom of battered women from culturally constructed social and religious domination, clergy from church traditions, and secular practitioners from ignorance of the complex connection of religion to women's experiences in domestic violence. Through education of clergy, people of faith, and secular practitioners, BCDVI seeks to unmask dominant discourse and empower victims, batterers, and advocates to adopt freedom from domestic violence, regardless of their social, religious, and secular proximity to the violence.

In addition to rhetorical analysis of BCDVI's educational materials, this study will also adhere to standard ethnographic methods, including participant observation, field notes, audio

recording, transcription, collection of participants' writing during the workshop session, and a post-findings review meeting, all of which will be detailed in Chapter 2.

A Look Back: My Motivation for the Study

“Hello?”

“Praise the Lord. This is Mrs. Hines¹. May I speak to the pastor?”

“Yes, ma'am. Dad, Mrs. Hines.”

That was the routine for years. Mrs. Hines would call almost daily to speak with my dad, the pastor in whom she confided the myriad abuses that she endured daily in the earthly hell that she called her home. He was not her local pastor, for she lived several states away; however, she came to know my dad because she was the sister of one of the members of our church. Her sister, an ordained minister, was a bold, somewhat imposing figure, more like the character Madea depicted in Tyler Perry's stage plays and films – outspoken, fearless, and even maniacal and reckless when learning that someone in her family was in harm's way. However, Mrs. Hines, who quietly carried strength in her steely resolve, was a woman who spoke in whispered tones, a woman who firmly chose to stay and take vicious beatings, verbal assaults, vandalism of her home, and only-God-knows-what-else, from her husband. She refused to leave him and was unwavering in her position to stay until God made a way for the abuse to end. Her abuse ended when she died from illness. Her husband survived her. Of course, it seemed that that old saying once again rang true – “Mean people just won't die!”

I was a teenager during the years when Mrs. Hines would call to lay her burdens down over the phone with my dad, “the pastor”, as she always called him. In my adolescent impatience

¹ The name has been changed to protect the identity of the woman whose experience of domestic abuse is referenced in this brief narrative. The sister of the woman has also passed away. From my knowledge, in his effort to maintain integrity as a spiritual advisor and committed confidant, my father kept his promise to never tell the church member of his conversations with her sister.

for her situation, I did not understand why she would not leave a man who devalued her, abused her, and tormented her. I didn't even understand why my dad would so patiently sit and listen to her every time she called, sometimes being pulled away from dinner, his devotional time, or his rare moment of personal leisure time. I would sometimes overhear (sometimes intentionally eavesdropping) his reserved yet shocked tone when serving as an active listener of the atrocities that she would share during their conversations. I would also hear him ask her if she had solicited help from local enforcement or social agencies. Always he would pray with her at the end of each conversation. There were even times when the phone calls would seem to immediately transition into him praying for her.

Now I understand exactly why he listened so patiently. I know now why he would sacrifice his time for a seemingly hopeless situation. He knew that she needed someone to hear her. Through his experience with her, he learned that she did not want someone to judge her for staying in her abusive situation. He knew that his ear was the only mortal ear in which she felt safe depositing the horrors of what she endured. He also knew that she was a woman of sincere faith, a woman who was convinced that God would deliver her, even though she would not even consider her deliverance coming through her own orchestrated escape or legal intervention.

As a man, a pastor, who endured his own share of hurt stemming from verbal and physical violence that he saw his mother endure during his childhood and adolescence, he had much compassion. While he wanted Mrs. Hines to leave – he even asked her if she would consider it – he learned to respect her choice her stay, to provide a listening ear and prayer for her strength. To be perfectly honest, that's all she would allow. She may have stopped calling altogether if he had insisted that she leave her home or if he broke her trust by revealing to her sister the horrors that she shared with him in confidence.

Mrs. Hines made a lasting impression on me. I feel that her story and my observation of how my dad, “the pastor”, attempted to balance himself on a tightrope of faith-filled patience, emotional restraint, and respect for her decision to stay left me with questions about how African-American women of Christian faith, clergy, and communities communicate about domestic abuse – and how they trans(late)form the communication into action against domestic abuse.

This is just one piece in the puzzle of my observations as a woman, Christian, researcher, educator, activist, who grew up in the Black church that leads to my interest and passion for this project. There are more stories, more lives, which have moved me – and even haunted me to some degree – to search for a way to understand how discourse by women of faith connects to social action. This is more than a study. It is a coming together of years of my informal studying – listening and looking at the issue of domestic abuse in the African-American communities of Christian faith.

In doing this research I am fully aware that I am seeking to effectively follow in the tradition of scholars who “have been able to bring the expertise of their scholarly training and the commitment of their religious vocation both to the study of the Black Church and to their work in confronting issues such as racism, sexism, economic, and political disempowerment in Black churches and communities” (Thomas et. al, 104). More specifically, through this research, I am more fully embracing an awareness of myself as a developing organic intellectual educator (Tickle, 159) – critically engaged with personal and social issues – as Womanist scholar-researcher. My exploration of Womanist theory, pedagogy, and research has made me increasingly aware of how my spiritual, cultural, social, activist, and intellectual identities have led me to my work as a woman, a sister (in my collective community), a Sister (in my religious

community), an educator, and an advocate for communities that need more effective education, interventions, and representation in research and activism against domestic violence.

As an active member of The Church of God for All People – a volunteer for many committees, auxiliaries, and outreach ministries of the church - I have had to opportunity to engage directly with other members through fellowship, community service, and worship experiences. Moreover, I have been able to observe, question, and problematize the issues and discourses within this community, which led me to consider critically the need for more research of this community of which I have been a member for over twenty-five years. As a part of the community that is currently underrepresented in research on discourses and domestic violence, the research conducted satisfies a scholarly interest and deeply personal concern for this community of which I am a part.

Domestic Violence in a Northeastern North Carolina Community: Bertie County

Referring to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, National Center for Victims of Crime, and WomensLaw.org, the United State Department of Justice define domestic violence as:

a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. (“What is Domestic Violence?”)

This definition includes descriptors that align well with other definitions of the term, which appear in various domestic violence awareness materials and research studies (National Center

on Domestic and Sexual Violence, National Coalition against Domestic Violence, North Carolina Coalition against Domestic Violence, Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community). In addition, North Carolina General Statute §50B-1 defines domestic violence as: attempting to cause bodily injury or placing a victim or a member of the victim's family in fear of serious bodily injury or continued harassment resulting in significant emotional distress. The definition also includes stalking, rape and sexual offenses (North Carolina Council for Women, North Carolina Department of Administration).

When considering these definitions of domestic violence, one also needs to consider how domestic abuse and domestic abuse services - that either aim to prevent or respond to domestic abuse - factor into communities' strategies for addressing this social issue. When a community does not have adequate resources to meet the needs of its citizens, implications are far-reaching and even potentially fatal. Rural communities become vulnerable populations as it relates to domestic violence when services are not in place and readily available. Though focusing on rural communities in Alabama in "Exploring the Perceptions of IPV Among African-American Women in Rural Communities," Smith describes the state of domestic violence resources for rural communities. Her description accurately reflects the conditions of communities in the northeastern North Carolina county of Bertie, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Smith explains:

Many rural areas are without safe houses, shelters and assistance programs (Grama, 2000). A single rural domestic violence program may cover multiple counties in the state (Throngren, 2003). These programs are often limited in funding, necessary auxiliary services and qualified personnel. Thus, members of the community may begin to feel helpless and frustrated when they cannot gain access to educational opportunities or

employment and live in communities unable to attract business, neglected by the involvement of the government, and characterized by high rates of crimes (Logan et al., 2005). (6)

Since I focus on rural, African-American women of Christian faith as study participants, it is worthwhile to clearly identify the site of the study as a rural community. Smith adheres to the following definition: *Rural* – places that meet the following demographic criteria: 1) less than 2,500 residents; 2) municipality not incorporated; 3) not designated by the U.S. Census; and 4) not an extension of a larger city (Smith, 12). The term is also defined by Melanie Marotta in “The Influence of Rural and Urban Areas on the Female Communities in the Works of Toni Cade Bambara, Gayl Jones, and Toni Morrison” as “a term which denotes sparsely populated grouping of humans in areas dominated by nature.” For the purpose of my study, I refer to the identification of the towns that comprise Bertie County as rural, specifically based on the populations of the towns. In 2010, Bertie County had a population of over 21,000 residents, which declined in 2011 to 20,874 (U.S. Census Bureau). With a female population of 50.3% and 62.2% African-American, Bertie County North Carolina is a rural community that needs consistent access to effective resources that can appropriately educate its citizenry and respond to needs associated with domestic violence within its widespread communities. Designated by the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center in its profile of the county, Bertie County has a documented total population of 21,282 residents (U.S. Census Bureau); however, upon closer investigation of the townships and communities within the county, a clearer portrait of the population numbers emerges.

Once broken down into the populations of the individual towns that comprise Bertie County, the population statistics reveal how small the communities are. The county seat,

Windsor, has the largest population and a significant hike in its documented population total due to a prison located in the town. In its description of the Bertie Correctional Institution (located in Windsor), the North Carolina Department of Public Safety states that the prison “has a standard operating capacity of 1,000 inmates” (Bertie County Correctional Facility). Since the United States Census Bureau counts incarcerated persons as part of a town/city’s population, Windsor’s documented population of 3,630 citizens for 2010 and the estimated population of 3,578 citizens for 2011 (U.S. Census) is higher than the actual number of Windsor’s citizenry who would be served by domestic violence organizations and service providers apart from the services provided for inmates within the NC Division of Prisons/Domestic Violence Education Program. Once the number of inmates housed in the Bertie Correctional Institution is deducted from Windsor’s total documented population, the actual number of Windsor’s residents is at most 150 people higher than the cut-off number of 2,500 people for the government’s rural population classification. The seven other towns that comprise Bertie County have significantly fewer residents – ranging from populations as low as 240 residents in Roxobel to the county’s second highest population of 895 residents in Aulander (U.S. Census Bureau). As residents of rural communities, Bertie County’s citizens have to contend with issues particular to such communities, as highlighted by Steven T. McFarland’s findings that “the lack of available services, geographic isolation, the economic structure, and strong socio-cultural pressures contribute to difficulties in accessing social services for victims of domestic violence, dating violence and child victimization, and rehabilitation for offenders” (“Faith-Based and Community Organizations”). To understand McFarland’s discussion of the complex issues associated with rural citizens and their experiences with domestic violence/domestic violence services, consider the following portrait of domestic violence in the northeastern North Carolina communities of Bertie County.

From 2008- 2011, Bertie County residents have utilized services provided by the North Carolina Council for Women. Since Bertie County does not have a resource within the county, residents rely on the shelter and support services provided by a neighboring county: Roanoke-Chowan Shelter for Abused Families with Emergencies (SAFE) (North Carolina Coalition against Domestic Violence). With one billboard posted in the county (surrounded by overgrown brush and trees and not easily visible unless motorists slow down enough 55 mph traffic to read and record the posted contact information), along a major highway that connects Bertie County to Hertford County, which is the site of Roanoke-Chowan SAFE, Bertie County does not provide close physical access to resources that may be needed for domestic-abuse issues.

As of January 2013, Bertie County posted an employment opportunity for a grant-funded, full-time Community Response Specialist. Unfortunately, the grant funding period ends June 2013, which will not guarantee the citizens of the county the much-needed services that would be provided by a qualified practitioner. Since the county does not have a shelter for displaced victims, or even its own sustainably funded, independent office to serve the needs of its citizens, the residents who need geographically-convenient access to professional services designed to promote domestic safety are under-served. Despite the lack of adequate in-county facilities, the data presented by the North Carolina Council for Women reveals that in 2008-2009, 1,134 documented services were provided for Bertie County residents; in 2009-2010, 983 documented services were provided for Bertie County residents; and in 2010-2011, 1,496 documented services were provided for Bertie County residents. The gender total breakdown reveals that services were provided predominantly for female clients (288 of 290 in 2008-2009, 127 of 130 in 2009-2010, and 138 of 155 in 2010-2011), and also predominantly for African-American clients each year (190 of 290 in 2008-2009, 108 of 130 in 2009-10, and 106 of 155 in 2010-2011).

According to the 2011-2012 report, total services provided for persons involved in domestic violence increased to 1,756 - 210 for female clients, 162 African American clients out of 220 clients total (North Carolina Council for Women County Statistics for Bertie County).

When considering the number of services requested by Bertie County residents for domestic violence-related issues, along with the limited in-county domestic violence services available for the residents, one might also consider the range of resources sought by victims and batterers. In the context of this study, the faith communities of African-Americans are especially significant. Specifically, the church in the lives of African-American Christians – historically and currently – is significant, as it is often the first place from where assistance – spiritual and otherwise – is sought.

The Black Church's Responses to Domestic Violence & Calls for Change

Domestic violence has negatively affected women, men, children, families, friendships, and communities. As a central institution and resource for African-American Christians, the church – clergy and laity – can function as a community-based and spiritually-relevant contact for those impacted by domestic abuse. Research has explained that faith communities have, in general, ineffectively responded to the needs of victims and abusers, before, during, and after unfortunate episodes of abuse. Lynda Marie Jordan explains that abuse victims are expected to endure their abuse with silence. In “Domestic Violence in the African-American Community: The Role of the Black Church,” Jordan explains that the ““yoke of silence”—in the name of racial solidarity—also weighs upon the Black Church community. The silence of the church regarding the “abuse of women” is in conspiracy against the total liberation of the African-American community. An African-American woman is expected to “suffer in silence” for the sake of others” (16). In a 2009 report for the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-

American Community, public health expert and researcher Tameka L. Gillum explains some churches and/or clergy have contributed to the problem of abusive relationships and inadequate responses to domestic abuse by promoting traditional marital roles and patriarchal authority in institutions of family and church (“Intersection of Spirituality”). For example, some clergy promote the idea of a man being *the head of the house* and a wife being a *submissive*, inferior being within the family structure; further, some clergy and church institutions have established and upheld restrictions on positions that can be held by women within a church’s organizational structure and/or during religious observances/worship services (Riggs; Thomas; Grant; Gilkes; Williams). Sexism against women in the black church organizational structure - in some denominations, restrictions from ordained ministry and/or leadership positions - sometimes also manifests itself in family relationships and becomes, unfortunately, justification for abusive relationships. Gillum further identifies problematic responses by the traditional Black church to domestic violence by pointing to practices of some clergy who assign blame/responsibility for abuse to the victims and/or advise victims to stay in abusive relationships while coping with prayer (Bent-Goodley and Fowler). Additionally, some clergy underscore their belief in the idea of *a strong a black woman* who will be able to withstand the hard realities of an abusive situation (Potter), leaving some victims without the religious-based support that they desire when facing domestic violence.

Moreover, social work expert, certified counselor, and minister, Carolyn T. Long emphasizes the need for African-American clergy to understand the importance of responding in a way to domestic abuse that does not further place victims at risk (“Domestic Violence and the Black Church”). This expressed position is significant because faith communities have been a major resource for African-Americans. In “The Black Church and Womanist Theology:

Implications for Refugee Women,” Beverlee Bruce explains the close relationship between African-Americans and the Black Church: “A symbiotic relationship exists between the African-American religious tradition, as embodied in the Black Church, and African-American life and culture. It is difficult, if not impossible, to talk about the latter without reference to the former” (1). Therefore, as clergy respond to the needs of victims that seek help, it is critical that their language, perspectives, and assistance do not reinforce conflicts that victims may perceive between their spiritual identities and their social/domestic realities.

Since such a close connection exists between many African-Americans and the African-American religious tradition, the education of the African-American faith community concerning the social ills of domestic violence and sexual assault is critical. In “Faith Community Session” of *Community Insights on Domestic Violence among African-Americans: Conversations about Domestic Violence and Other Issues Affecting Their Community*, Carolyn Tubbs explains that some feel “that failing to educate individual congregants and the church community about spiritual teachings on anger leads to guilt, shame, and spiritual ignorance” (21). She further argues that:

specialized teaching and education in general must be given to religious and spiritual leaders about the pervasiveness of domestic violence in families, in addition to the sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and the abuse of power that exists in the church. (21)

Motivated by research on the impacts of faith communities’ involvement with social issues in their respective communities, researchers, clergy, sociologists, and social workers recognize that the issue of domestic violence can potentially be diminished through improved education and cultural effectiveness in addressing the issue. Studies of cultural traditions and discourses of The Black Church have suggested that more research should be conducted involving African-

American female religious and spiritual discourse(s) in action. For example, in “Violence in the African-American Community: An Analysis of Social and Structural Factors,” Robert Hampton, William Oliver, and Lucia Magarian include the faith community in their list of contexts in which community-based efforts to challenge intimate partner violence in African-American communities should occur. Further, Patillo McCoy concludes “Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community” by noting that study of cultural strategies of action in various groups would extend new interest in integrating the sociology of culture with social movement research (782). When the stakes are so high – literally, life, death, community wellness, and spiritual wellness – institutions must more effectively respond to the issues plaguing their communities; investigation of methods that are used and/or considered for use in culturally specific contexts is vital to potentially maximizing social agents’ attempts to engage in social movements that reflect and respect the culturally specific identities and rhetorics of the communities impacted by those methods. Moreover, studies have suggested that additional research should be conducted to gain understanding of cultural tools used by the Black Church to influence social action against domestic violence in the African-American community. While some churches have engaged in social movement initiatives/action against domestic abuse – through sermons, services/programs raising awareness of domestic violence, donation drives for shelters, counseling for victims and/or batterers, support groups, etc. - still other churches that serve African-American parishioners have not maximized the possibilities for effective, culturally-responsive social action against the social evil.

Perhaps, part of the reason some churches are not engaging in effective social action is because they are not aware of the *how* to engage and/or are not aware of the alarming statistics surrounding the issue of domestic violence that affects – sometimes inconspicuously and silently

– the very people that they seek to serve. Hence, efforts of culturally-aware anti-domestic violence organizations and advocates, such as The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute, the Faith Trust Institute, and the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community function as educational resources for faith leaders and institutions seeking to transition from ineffectiveness to effectiveness in efforts to combat domestic abuse.

The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute (BCDVI)

On the heels of a widely publicized case of domestic violence involving two celebrity clergy in 2007, Prophetess Juanita Bynum and her then-husband, Bishop Thomas J. Weeks, *The Atlanta Constitution Journal* posted an article in *Religion News Blog*. In addition to providing details about the controversial alleged abuse against the popular evangelist, known for her highly charismatic, women-empowering sermons, the article also indicates that Bynum post-abuse identified herself as the new face of domestic violence. The article also cited Rev. Aubra Love, who highlighted the pervasiveness of domestic abuse in American [U.S.] society by stating that violence was occurring across the country, in concert with the publicized abuse that occurred between the two national and internationally popular clergy. Rev. Love's role as executive director of The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute (BCDVI) was also indicated in the article.

BCDVI's website identifies it as part of anti-domestic violence communities, especially those that seek to provide information and support for African-American communities of Christian faith. BCDVI is a non-profit socio-religious anti-domestic violence advocacy organization; the goals of the education-focused organization are to 1) increase awareness of domestic violence against women of Christian faith who are part of the Black Church and 2)

promote social action by those who may or may not identify themselves as part of the Black Church, against domestic violence through combined sacred and secular efforts and partnerships.

It merges womanist perspectives with the cultural traditions of the Black Church to educate persons from sacred and secular institutions to combat domestic violence against women. Through education of clergy, people of faith, and secular advocates, BCVDI seeks to unmask dominant discourses and to empower victims, batterers, and advocates securing freedom from domestic violence, regardless of their social, religious, and secular relationship(s).

Rev. Love and BCDVI have been noted by activists, religious anti-domestic organizations (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community, Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community), clergy (The African-American Lectionary: A Collaborative Effort of the African-American Pulpit and American Baptist College of Nashville), and researchers (The Florida State University Institute for Family Violence). BCDVI and Rev. Love have also been identified, quote, and discussed in articles, ranging from a congregational resource guide by Rev. Monica Coleman, founder of the Dinah Project (an faith-based initiative and handbook for church communities to respond to sexual assault), to research-based publications dealing with sociological and religious issues, such as Lori Robinson's *I Will Survive*. In "Risk Reduction/Prevention for Adults" of *I Will Survive*, Johnetta Betsch-Cole explains that "sometimes people are more comfortable working on their own challenges in culturally specific ways" (xxv) and later recommends BCDVI in her discussion of ways in which people can actively respond to the issues of sexual and domestic violence in their communities: "In addition to group workshops, The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute will provide your congregation with a Sunday sermon. It also hosts a national conference on violence against

women, *This Far By Faith*, which is open to people of all faiths each February” (182). Betsch-Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (*Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women’s Equality in African-American Communities*) share the testimonial of Rev. Aubra Love, the Founding Executive Director of BDCVI, describing her activism against domestic violence and the conception of BCDVI. As presented by Betsch-Cole, Love’s dynamic testimony of survival and social action reflects her consciousness of a need for culturally-competent education – education that is simultaneously effective in presenting information while connecting to cultural learners’ beliefs, norms, behaviors, and language - for persons within the African-American Christian tradition. Love recounts:

Initially I was pastoring at a white church, but I was compelled to [engage] historically Black churches and teach this work around domestic violence. I wanted to stay in community with other black people to talk about the experience of my own healing and recovery, to break the silence for women in the pews who felt nobody would listen to what they were talking about. And I started to go to other churches. I’d get invited to speak on Mother’s Day and I’d preach about domestic violence. We’d have a mother/daughter banquet, and I’d talk about domestic violence. And eventually I got some press coverage and met Marie Fortune [founder of Faith Trust Institute – an educational ministry for domestic violence awareness across multiple faiths], who had assembled a national group of African-Americans around domestic violence. I was invited to come to Seattle and work with her in a program that was funded through the Ford Foundation. I did that for a year and a half, and later applied for separate non-profit status for the newly founded Black Church & Domestic Violence Institute, because what

was apparent to me was that this work must be defined within our own [African-American] communities. (68)

What was apparent to Love was that the work of sharing the gospel while educating people about the issues of domestic violence within the African-American Christian community was important, hence she dedicated herself to “breaking the silence for women in the pews who felt nobody would listen to what they were talking about” (68). This mission of educating audiences within the construct(ion) of Black churches led to Love’s work with faith-based education of the issue through a culturally-sensitive lens and ultimately the conception of BCDVI, which specializes in providing culturally aware and competent education for the purpose of improved efforts toward social justice and activism against domestic abuse in its varied manifestations. Moreover, the educational ministry of The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute projects the voices of women, especially those of women of Christian faith, seeking to affect change that promotes collective peace, justice and spiritual wellness, and community strength in the fight against domestic abuse and sexual assault.

Cultural Competence: The Connection to This Study

For the purpose of this study, cultural competence has become a point of focus due to the articulated educational mission of BCDVI to provide “culturally competent” education to persons on domestic violence as a part of the Black Church and those who practice their faith within the construction of it. Further, cultural competency is a term used by various domestic violence organizations and researchers, due to the importance of providing clear, effective, and culturally sensitive services and education on the issue. Signifying the importance of cultural competency as it relates to domestic violence education, training, and services, the North Carolina Victim Assistance Network includes cultural competency in its curriculum established

for the NC Victims Assistance Network Academy. The academy is designed to provide instruction for those who serve victims of violence in North Carolina, and it also aims to “unite” these persons in the services that are provided, hence, improving the quality of statewide services for NC residents who are involved in instances of domestic and intimate partner violence (North Carolina Victims Assistance Network). Culturally competent education is, indeed, an interdisciplinary term that ranges in coverage from social work, sociology, composition and rhetoric, psychiatry, health professions, business, education – all levels, and varied disciplines within beyond those just listed. Cultural competence ultimately reflects a concerted focus on recognizing one’s own cultural make-up and reflecting on that cultural composition while considering critically the cultural composition – similarities, differences, expectations, and needs – of others with whom interaction will occur. Moreover, cultural competency is particularly important when seeking to engage with people within the context of an integral part of their existence, their spirituality/religion. In “Cultural Competency: Why Faith is Fundamental,” Rev. Dr. Sharon Ellis and Julie Owens support the following position: “Cultural competency is vital for effective intervention in addressing domestic violence. An understanding of religious issues as they intersect with culture and ethnicity is equally vital. We need an understanding of why we cannot ignore culture, ethnicity or faith in the experience of victims or perpetrators of abuse” (Faith Trust Institute Webinar). This position is especially significant for individuals, such as the participants of this research study, to understand since they were engaging with an educational opportunity that would give them opportunities to think about domestic violence and its impacts within their own faith communities. In essence, the study participants should become the “we” in Ellis and Owen’s statement, becoming the ones who would be simultaneously a part of the

community impacted by abuse but also part of the community seeking to adequately respond to the needs created by domestic abuse.

At various points in the study, I refer to cultural competence interchangeably as culturally relevant or specific (as it applies to the experience of the study participants) and culturally competent (as it is articulated by the organization in its educational materials). Ultimately, within the context of the group that is studied for this dissertation project (African-American Christian women who are part of a rural community), cultural competence reflects an awareness of the predominant cultural attributes of the audience, and, in the specific case of this study, awareness of the religious beliefs associated with the audience. It is important for service providers, clergy, and educators alike to understand that cultural competence can be (and, arguably, should be) a deep-seated principle for ethical practice and not merely a shallow attempt to appear to be “politically correct or toler[ant of] diversity” (*Domestic Violence: Intersectionality and Culturally Competent Practice*).

In “Perceptions of Domestic Violence: A Dialogue with African-American Women,” Bent-Goodley provides more research that highlights the importance of cultural competence as it relates to service providers and public education about domestic violence. “One of the findings of the study revealed a need to find culturally competent methods of addressing the inaccessibility of domestic violence services, to increase culturally appropriate public education” (15). Also, Bent-Goodley finds:

Public information about domestic violence must take place using a culturally competent approach and multigenerational methods. [Study] participants made it clear that public education should take place in churches, barbershops, and beauty salons. The message should provide a sense of what a healthy relationship

is, providing a more balanced and positive perspective of African-Americans.

Public education initiatives should also be age appropriate, implying that teachers become better educated about domestic violence and more ready to serve as a resource. Church clergy must be prepared to speak and act from a violence-free perspective that promotes equality in relationships. In essence, one cannot educate the community without also educating those leaders who influence their daily lives. (15)

While Bent-Goodley's study does address cultural competence, it focuses on the perspectives of African-American women in New York, not necessarily a group that is comparable to African-American women who identify with Christianity from rural Southern communities. The participants of this study are part of a southern, rural community in North Carolina, which can add depth to the existing body of research on the relationship between African-American female discourse, cultural competence in educating this group, and social action against domestic violence in rural America.

Interpretive Framework of Womanism: Defined, Connected to the Black Church, and Discussed in Relevant Literature on Discourse Analysis

In addition to studies about cultural influences and relationships among to African-American communities, domestic violence, social action, and religious cultures, years of study on African-American rhetoric, literacies, and discourse(s) have revealed a complex, dynamic mosaic of communication that has consistently translated into social action. When considering much of the language that has been used by African-American women in attempts to further their social, educational, political, economic, and artistic goals, one must not ignore the influence of womanist theory. In order to gain an adequate understanding of the history behind the development of the concept of Womanism, one must recognize the seminal contribution of Alice

Walker's presentation of the term in her groundbreaking *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, which presents a womanist as (xi-xii):

A black feminist or feminist of color... a woman who loves other women [... one who] appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength [; one who is] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female [; one who] loves music [,] the spirit[,] love and food and roundness[,] struggle[,] the folk[, and] herself. *Regardless.*

This definition of womanism, which comprises cultural identities, social location, discourses, literacies, creativity in various artistic forms, education, and religious/spiritual experiences, became a part of theological, sociological, rhetorical, and linguistic exploration. Contextualizing Walker's revolutionary definition of womanism within theology, religious scholars weighed in on the centrality of Womanism in theology, religious life, and community action (Cannon; Townes; J. Williams; Gilkes). For example, the experiences – or, in some cases, restrictions against - preaching, activism, and organizational leadership by women are discussed with the perspectives of women at the fore, instead of thinking primarily of the experiences of “men” as leaders and contributors to the religious cultures of the traditional Black Church (Cannon; Townes; J. Williams; Gilkes, D. Williams). In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins presents an interesting view of womanism, which provides African-Americans and others a framework in which to contemplate, question, explore, and articulate the existence and plight of African-American women. As part of her established theory, Collins explains that within the womanist view, African-American women should: place themselves in the center of analysis, resist conforming to the dominant view of intellectual use of language, and favor polyvocality in language use. Several African-American women have employed her theory in their language

use. An interesting example emerges in Janice Hamlet's article, "Assessing Womanist Thought." This article focuses on the use of language and Womanist thought by an important figure in the contemporary African-American society, Susan L. Taylor, who is the former editor of *Essence* magazine and the author of the widely embraced "In the Spirit" column of that magazine. Hamlet argues that by focusing on the existence and the spirit of African-American women in all of her writing for the "In the Spirit" column, Taylor demonstrates that language used by African-American women can be employed to center the African-American woman in every context, opposing her otherwise marginalized status in mainstream society. Also providing an interesting example of a Womanist use of language, Evangeline Grant Redding's *nothing: the mentality of the black woman* places and maintains the Black woman as the central focus in order to criticize, evaluate, and respond to issues within the African-American community during the 1970's. In addition, Redding's *nothing* highlighted Collins's turn-of-the-century idea of womanism as taking control of language for its own benefit as a living expression of human cultural experience.

Currently, black women integrate African-American Vernacular English into their use of language for political and social ends. Prime examples include the language of famous rap artists Queen Latifah, Sister Souljah, and Lauryn Hill. Elaine Richardson and Ronald Jackson, as well as Keith Gilyard explain that the language in these artists' lyrics reflects their social climates and cultural realities. Just as the language of eighteenth and nineteenth century activists appealed to their audiences, so does modern use of language accommodate the current audiences. The most obvious similarity among the uses of language across the centuries by African-American activists is that the language has managed to effectively compel people to action. In a socio-religious context, BCDVI adopts womanist theology, African American Vernacular

English (AAVE), and views to compel people take action in their churches and communities in response to issues that directly affects African-American women, domestic violence. Using the medium of The Black Church, its clergy, parishioners, and associations, BCDVI promotes the idea of womanizing the church and its discourses to prepare to make appropriate and healthy responses to the problem of domestic violence, which impacts, arguably, the greatest commodity of The Black Church, its women.

One such method of womanizing the church is through oration. Oration has a long history of language for social and political ends. Speechmaking and oral performances by African-American women have captured audiences, regardless of whether those audiences were in homes of abolitionists, street corners, churches, auditoriums, classrooms, welfare offices (Rhonda Y. Williams *The Politics of Urban Housing*), the workplace, or beauty shops. As such, the sharing of the oral performance – the sermons – presented in the educational materials of BCDVI during the workshop will provide study participants opportunities to react and comment on their connection(s) with the oral performances and the impact of those performances on their learning about domestic violence/sexual assault, as well as their perspectives/decisions to take action against domestic/sexual violence against women.

Concealed gatherings, discussed at length in N. Lynne Westfield's *Dear Sisters: Womanist Practice of Hospitality*, can be described as communal meetings where the “gathering [...] and the hospitality offered as an act of resilience in the gathering are acts of freedom, gestures of resistance and hope, and a practice of resilience” (34). Since concealed gatherings are exclusive, private gatherings of people to ultimately “hone resilience” in a society that does not allow total unmasking or freedom of this group without criticism, marginalization, or “inhospitality,” exploration of the communication and outcomes of the BCDVI-guided workshop

conducted as part of this dissertation study are especially worthwhile. In the case of this study, African-American women who worship and share roots in a rural, Southern Christian community engage in a concealed gathering to hone resilience in a culture, be it a religious culture, rife with domestic abuse and in need of more effective faith-based resources and interventions. The participants' perceptions of the womanist-influence workshop experience and educational materials and will be explored further in Chapters Five and Six.

The significance of Womanist theology to this research project emerges from the use of the womanist theological perspective by Rev. Love, the organization's founding executive director. Rhetorical analysis of specific texts by Rev. Love will be conducted in an effort to understand the non-profit organization/educational ministry and its educational goals through her words in order to lay a foundation for understanding the organization, its educational mission, and its approach to providing culturally competent education designed to promote social action against domestic violence. Texts delivered (spoken and written) by Rev. Love, Founder of BCDVI, will provide insight into the relationship(s) among the founder, the organization's identity, and womanist theology, which are all connected to the identification of BCDVI as a national educational ministry that focuses on training faith communities to appropriate[ly] respond to domestic violence (BCVDI, "The Reverend Aubra Love"). As will be revealed through careful analysis, Rev. Love's sermons and the content of BCDVI's educational materials employ language to encourage freedom of battered women from culturally constructed social and religious domination, clergy from church traditions, and secular practitioners from ignorance of the complex connection of religion to women's experiences in domestic violence. Love's language is purposefully critical. Her sermons discursively resist abusive power and in many ways function as a kind of critical discourse analysis. According to Teun Van Dijk, "critical

discourse analysis is specifically interested in power abuse, that is, in breaches of laws, rules and principles of democracy, equality and justice by those who wield power. He further explains that “[o]ne major function of dominant discourse is precisely to manufacture such consensus, acceptance and legitimacy of dominance” (*Critical Discourse Analysis*, 302). I submit the view that the goals of the sermons and the educational materials are similar to the goals of critical discourse analysis of sacred scriptures, gospel songs and spirituals, and social structures, problematizing the issue of domestic abuse and sexual assault, along with injustices that filter through social and religious institutions. Through education of clergy, people of faith, and secular advocates of the dominant discourses perpetuated in society and the traditional Black Church concerning domestic violence, as well as the traditionally lower-ranking (e.g., positions of leadership and institutional power) of African-American women of Christian denominations, BCVDI seeks to unmask dominant discourse and empower audiences.

In this study, three specific Womanist Black Church themes are used as lenses to analyze sermons by Rev. Love, as well as the sermons and educational materials presented to study participants. The selected themes, which combine themes of womanism and African-American Christianity Traditions/Black Church Culture include (discussed later in this chapter): collective community; social ministry; social location of women; the importance of clergy in maintaining compassionate awareness of victims and their needs; empowerment through words; and multidisciplinary approach to serving victims of abuse. These six themes will be used through a streamlined analytical filter that I have created for this study: collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status. These filters will be described and employed for analysis in more detail in the following chapter.

In addition to considering the benefits of using thematic filters to rhetorically analyze the texts associated with this study, I also referred to theories and methods of discourse analysis when choosing effective strategies for exploring this study's texts. The identification of specific themes for analysis suggests expectations for the overarching contexts, as well as the smaller, seemingly insignificant interactions that occur during the educational workshop. Take, for example, the analytical filter of collective ethos and action. In this study, a portion of my definition for this theme refers to the shared, characteristic essence of a group, including its cultural symbols, customs, beliefs, as well as the engagement among members of the group in worship experiences, community service, communication, and multidisciplinary social action. This theme is particularly significant when reviewing the sermonic discourses that emerge on the educational DVD, the audience's responses to it, and the discourses among participants during workshop.

Without question, discourse can function as an identity kit with instructions on how we communicate verbally and non-verbally in order to be recognizable to others. When considering the emphasis that Aristotle places on ethos as a rhetorical proof that can be used to find available means in any given situation to persuade an audience, Paul James Gee's idea of creating a recognizable figure of authority to participate in communicative exchange makes perfect sense (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*). Part of constructing an effective ethos includes considering what the audience will perceive as a credible authority worthy of inclusion in discursive activity. Since an audience evaluates one's discourse via the diction, tone, style, gestures/body language, patterns of discourse, dress, dialect, and general self-presentation, users of a particular discourse for the purpose of functioning within a particular social, institutional, or cultural system will most often approach the specific audience with a constructed discursive

identity that will meet the needs of the group. In *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*, Gee refers to this as constructed ethos. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, the study participants' responses to questions on the effectiveness of the educational materials suggest that a collective ethos was significant in the development of a shared identity between the participants and the preachers. Moreover, as an impetus for increased thinking on social action against domestic violence, the content of the educational DVD – specifically the preachers' sermons and the facts about domestic violence – created a collective ethos, or shared identity, among the study's participants and the larger community of anti-domestic violence advocates who recognize its presence in communities associated with the Black Church. "The Identities Building Tool" in *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* asks researchers to consider "what socially recognizable identity or identities the speaker is trying to enact or to get others to recognize" [e.g., in this study, an ethical identity of a spiritual authority with a vested interest in reifying shared beliefs and interest in religious and social causes]. In the educational materials, three clergy deliver sermons to two audiences – one visible, synchronous audience, present during the taping of a conference during which the "live" presentation of sermons were delivered, and another invisible, envisioned, asynchronous audience, mediated through digital recording of the sermons. These clergy, as discursive agents in "real-time" and "on-demand," use language for social practices, assumedly aware that their language was what Teun Van Dijk calls a "text in a context," (*The Sociolinguistics Reader*). For this study, the text is a religious sermon in a context of advocacy for domestic violence and sexual assault causes.

These clergy, as other rhetoricians or discursive agents, would be expected to study or read their audiences to decipher how their messages should be delivered to be recognizable and persuasive. In the case of the asynchronous audiences, the clergy would need to envision the

audiences, intended and actual. Clergy-rhetoricians would also need to consider the discursive aims of making their respective messages clear while delivering their content, content that can be analyzed using Gee's "Tool #17: The Relationship Building Tool," which "asks how words and various grammatical devices are being used to build and sustain or change relationships of various sorts among the speaker, other people, social groups, cultures, and/or institutions" (*How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Tool Kit*). This tool links with my study and the thematic filters used for rhetorical analyses of the educational materials through its analytical aim of identifying how the language can change relationships among "social groups" [e.g., rural, Southern, African-American Christian women] and "cultures and/or institutions" [e.g., perceptions of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and oppression of women in various forms, as well as the role of The Black Church in the support of and/or fight against it]. The specific rhetorical theme to which Gee's tool links is my Womanist Black Church theme of socio-spiritual status; this theme refers to the self- and socially-constructed identification one's position(s) in society and institutions, as well as one's identification of her spiritual closeness to a divine presence. Specifically, language in the sermons identifies the attempts of clergy in the educational DVD (and BCDVI, the creator of the educational text) to create an awareness of relationships among the audiences of the sermons, persons affected by domestic violence and sexual abuse, and various sacred and secular institutions.

Gee's discussion of this analytical tool, as well as twenty-six other analytical tools which can be used to question and examine any text, stems from the idea that language exists, lives within social constructions. Discourse analysis teems with opportunities for critical exploration when one considers the position that social and cultural groups assign meaning to language. Without the socially and culturally constructed meanings assigned to words, the words will have

no power. Simply put, when the semantics, or meanings, of language and/or discourse do not exist, then the language and/or discourse do not exist. For a discourse [e.g., a sermon, a call to action against domestic violence] to live, there must be a social context in which it functions. Interestingly, the same word can have a meaning for one social group and another meaning for another group, even if those groups are in close geographical and societal proximity. For example, sociolinguists study slang words that certain social/cultural groups (re)create to function as derogatory terms, intended to be injurious to another group (normally of a different racial, ethnic, class, sexual orientation, or gender group). Once taken out of that group's system of language or discourse, the words will not automatically live because they are beyond what Mikhail Bakhtin identifies as the "social situation or the fate of a given word in life" (*The Dialogic Imagination*). Moreover, the groups to which the terms are designed to be injurious can then choose to take those terms as re-assign meaning to meet their own discursive, cultural, and social values. They use the language as what Judith Butler calls instruments of subversion (*Excitable Speech*). They use their new meanings as tools of power, reconstructing the discourse to take social action (Foucault) and to "self-represent" themselves in their attempt to free themselves from dominance (Habermas). Norman Fairclough makes a particularly interesting point in his discussion of Harbermas' view of strategic discourse as "discourse oriented to instrumental goals to getting results" (*Language, and Power*, 164); this links directly to the goal of the language used in the educational materials and the workshop itself, a goal of actions taken by audience/study participants through development of a community action plan and increased engagement with domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy both sacred(church, religious) and secular (community agencies, groups) methods.

How does language used as tools of power and self-representation link to this study? The sermonic discourses take language, specifically scriptures, to empower oppressed persons – domestic abuse victims, Christian women subordinated in patriarchal denominations, and fatigued, frustrated domestic violence advocates alike. Analyses in Chapters Three and Four of educational materials present the integration of discourse that takes control [and encourages the audience(s) to take control] of the very scriptures used to hold people captive to their social, emotional, and cultural circumstances. Examples, which will be discussed in later chapters, include the clergy rhetoricians indicating texts to take, speak, and own as personal, empowering texts [e.g., various divisions of *Psalms*, *Holy Bible*]. Further, the clergy rhetoricians also demonstrate [by impassioned, demonstrative reading and recitations of selected Old Testament and New Testament scriptures from *Holy Bible*] how to engage with the scriptural texts to self-empower and to re-assign meaning for purposes of empowerment and self-representation.

Discourse analysis studies on rural African-American women are few; they range from explorations of growing-up narratives on gender socialization and identity (Gubrium) and discourse analysis of women's post-colonial Caribbean literature (Ramlagan) to health-related studies on rural African-American women, including Doris Boutain's qualitative study on signifiers of high blood pressure on rural dwelling African-Americans, and an education-focused study about Southern African-American and rural women's barriers to academic achievement (Hammons-Bryner). The closest discourse analysis-related study to my research project is April Few's "The Voices of Black and White Rural Battered Women Domestic Violence Shelters," which focuses primarily on the experiences of women in shelters, but not necessarily on their discourses associated with activism against domestic abuse through faith-based institutions.

Interpretive Framework of African-American Christianity Traditions/Black Church Cultural Tool Kit

Marcia Riggs's discussion of community reflects this study's use of collective ethos and action as an analytical filter. In *Plenty Good Room*, Riggs discusses the church as a human community that fulfills the following functions: natural (addressing physical and social needs), political (an order to execute its purpose), language (distinguishing from outside community), interpretation (symbols and meanings reflective distinctive beliefs of the community), memory and understanding (of important events that are retold and relived), and belief and action (loyalty expressed through actions). In this study, the specific functions that connect to the analytical theme include language, interpretation, memory and understanding, and belief and action. Discussion of these elements will emerge in the rhetorical analysis conducted in later chapters. In *African-American Christian Worship*, Melva Wilson Costen explains the history of African-American traditions, summarizing well the complexity of traditions and cultural composition of the historical Black Church when created as a culturally unique contrast to church culture and tradition of European and American Christians. She explains the traditions by identifying the theology created by Africans, which eventually influenced the "early shapers of [the] Black folk religion [that] forged a Christian world view" (3).

Under the power of the Holy Spirit, a new theology was forged and flamed while the church worshiped. The methodology used was honed from "folk methods" common to African and transported wherever Africans are in the diaspora. Music, song, and storytelling by the *griot* [...] became the major means of shaping, documenting, and distributing folk theology. This common heritage continues to be a channel through which God edifies and empower the body of Christ. Gathered and scattered as African-

American Christians in the present age, believers are provided sustenance by this rich heritage that propels believers, with hope, into the future (3).

Further, in her discussion of elements of worship that are documented in various historical artifacts from the period of slavery in America, Costen explores what the “basic elements” of worship in the Black Church, which included: “praying, singing, preaching of the Word, shouting, and communal fellowship [, along with] calls to worship, community concerns, conversion, testimonies, and confessions of sins in many gatherings” (29). These elements of worship are analyzed in the empowering womanist religious rhetorics considered for this study. Other religious elements discussed in Melvin Williams’ *Community in a Black Pentecostal Church* reflect the socio-spiritual status theme. In his three-year anthropological study of a Pittsburgh congregation, Melvin observed the congregation’s view of God as a “personal friend” and as a “flexible phenomenon, changing with [one’s] needs and [one’s] problems (111). While Costen and Williams provide direct links to the themes that I eventually use as elements in for analysis in this study, one should not fall into a trap of stereotyping all Christians who practice their religion in the Black Church into one thematic lump. Though linked through a common heritage, African-American Christianity Traditions/Black Church Cultural Tool Kit is not monolithic by any stretch of the imagination; however, the foundation for understanding the now myriad expressions of worship and practices reflected in many contemporary churches flowing from the traditions do reveal “cultural sensibilities” of a complex, large African-American community (Floyd-Thomas et. al, xxvii). To highlight the historical roots of the traditions, one can consider the three primary expressions identified by Stacey Floyd-Thomas in *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*:

The ecclesial formation has three primary expressions: (a) independent Black, Methodist, and Holiness-Pentecostal denominations; (b) Black congregations and fellowship in predominantly white denominations such as Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians; and (c) more recently, non-denominational Christian churches that have multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic membership but the ministerial leadership and cultural identity is African-American in nature. (xxiv)

Due to the complexity of the history and diversity of the church in its contemporary identity, this dissertation will adhere to a view of African-American Christianity/Black Church Cultural Tool Kit as a “tradition” and not a fixed, concrete, inflexible entity. I subscribe to Floyd Thomas’ discussion of tradition in *Black Church Studies* as meaning a way of Christian education pedagogy that “connects the present challenges with the actions of past generations” (172) while fostering “creativity, nurturing critical thinking, and encouraging questioning” (172) in order to promote worship and living as Christians in an evolving world. Mindful of the diversity African-American Christianity/Black Church Cultural Tool Kit constructions, as well as the broader “Black Church” label of BCDVI and its constructed educational materials, Chapter 4 will analyze the texts – sermons and educational materials used during the workshop - using a constructed Womanist Black Church lens that combines themes of African-American Christian Traditions/Black Church Cultural Tool Kit and Womanism. The Womanist Black Church lens will be used to examine the sermons by the founding executive director of the BCDVI, analysis of the sermons and study guide that were used as part of the educational resources used for this study, and the identification of traditional cultural tools that are part of the African-American Christian tradition. This lens also will be used in the analysis of the domestic violence awareness workshop that was conducted as part of this study.

Costen explains that “[t]he Word of God has power to speak to the whole person and the entire community, taking account of personal feelings, perceptions, and the realities of human experiences” (105) and to provide in the worship experience “divine power for actions of justice” (108). These outcomes of an empowering worship experience reflect directly the theme of empowering womanist religious rhetorics, specifically worship elements discussed in Costen’s work, such as singing, preaching [of sermons], prayer, and community.

Womanist Black Church Lens – A Merging of Womanist and Black Church Cultural Tools/African-American Christian Traditions

To better understand the perspectives and educational endeavors of BCDVI, I will study sermons and workshop materials through a lens that blends key characteristics of womanism and Black Church Cultural Tools and Traditions. As explained earlier in this chapter, the Womanist Black Church lens that has been created by focusing on related themes from both areas that emerge in the educational materials used as part of this study: collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status. This analytical framework will be discussed further and applied in the following chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter introduces the project’s purpose and relevance within its interdisciplinary scope, identifying its overarching research question: How do rural, Southern African-American Christian women engage language as a social practice with culturally competent education and social action as its expected outcomes? This chapter also provides background information on domestic violence, specifically focusing on domestic violence in a northeastern North Carolina community, Bertie County. After discussing the Black Church’s responses to domestic violence and calls for change in those responses, this chapter presents a review of the theoretical underpinnings that shape the methods and analysis explored in remaining chapters of this

dissertation. Since this dissertation ultimately explores relationships among rural Christian African-American women, womanist discourse analysis theory, culturally competent education, and social action through the Black Church against domestic violence, this chapter has provided background information on cultural competence and how it relates to this research project. The chapter ends with an identification and explanation of womanism and African-American Christianity/Black Church Cultural Tools as they are relevant to this study. The following chapter details the methods utilized in this study.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

“Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. [...] It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit.” Henri Nouwen quoted in N. Lynne Westfield’s *Dear Sisters* (46)

Ellen Cushman asks an interesting question in “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change” as she concludes the article on scholarly research and engagement beyond the ivory tower: “How can we study ideologies, hegemonies, power structures, and the effects of discursive practices when we overlook community discursive dispositions – the place where these language practices are first inculcated, generated and consequently reproduced in the social habitus” (24)? This question, which I encountered during my first semester of doctoral study, influenced my decision to engage in research methods that integrate my presence and participation within the communities that I choose to study for the promotion of language, literacy, and social improvement.

To maintain integrity in the research methods used for this project, I used multiple methods to successfully fulfill ethical, scholarly expectations. Using three kinds of qualitative data – interviewing, observation, and document analysis –this research project fits into the strategies integrated in most fieldwork (Patton 4, 556). Moreover, since this study has a link to education, due to its focus on the educational effectiveness of the workshop and the educational materials used during the workshop, I used qualitative education-research methods. This study includes a participant-observer focus group as part of its methods. As Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey note in *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, focus groups are composed of participants who are similar to each other in a way that is important to the researcher (10). The participants’ demographics will be discussed later in this chapter; however, the usefulness of the participants’ interaction with each other and the educational materials

provides worthwhile data since “the intent of focus groups is not to infer but to understand, [...] and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people in the groups perceive a situation” (Krueger, 83). In this chapter, I describe the research site from which workshops participants were recruited, the recruitment of participants, the workshop, and the member-checking meeting. This chapter also provides details of my data collection methods and analysis procedures. Specifically, this project studies a group of women from The Church of God for All People as they observe, respond, and participate in a workshop focused on a the social issue of domestic violence against women. This section will include a description of The Church of God for All People. Details about data collection and preservation of data for analysis are also provided in the methods section of this chapter. In addition, this chapter explains the use of rhetorical analysis as a method for exploring texts utilized for instruction during the workshop conducted as part of this study.

Rhetorical Analysis: Womanist Black Church Rhetorical Analysis

In “The Discourse of African-American Women,” Dorothy Pennington states, “With the view that African-American culture in general is essentially spiritual, African-American women are noted as being particularly inclined toward the spiritual” (299). Spirituality and religious identification are regarded highly and used as filters for understanding culture of African-American Christians; therefore, themes that focus on religious and spiritual identification are a foundational premise for analyzing the data collected from the study participants, the analytical lenses that are used in this study – empowering womanist religious rhetorics, socio-spiritual status, and collective ethos and action. I consider Pennington’s observation as particularly relevant to the study participants and what I anticipated to be their religious and spiritual characteristics/expectations as the educational materials’ audience. Since womanism and

African-American Christianity/Black Church Cultural Tools are diverse, a rhetorical analysis using them all as themes would not be expected for this single study; based on relevant literature and ideas that are emphasized in the sermons and educational materials used in the study, only selected themes will be used to examine the texts through one merged lens (Womanist Black Church): collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status. To better understand the perspectives and educational endeavors of BCDVI, I will study sermons and workshop materials through a lens that blends key characteristics of womanism and Black Church Cultural Tools and Traditions. This lens, which I call a Womanist Black Church lens, is comprised of the following themes: collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status.

Discussed briefly in the previous chapter, the definitions for the three themes used in this study seek to represent aspects of womanism and Black Church Cultural Traditions/Tools that are relevant within the context of the educational materials used during the workshop. The first theme, collective ethos and action means the shared, characteristic essence of a group, including its cultural symbols, customs, beliefs, as well as the engagement among members of the group in worship experiences, community service, communication, and multidisciplinary social action; it reflects the womanist concepts of collective community and multidisciplinary approaches to serving victims; it also includes traditional Black Church cultural practices of call-and-response – literally and figuratively - as well as collective ethos that reifies bonds among clergy and congregants in a church family/community. The second theme, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, means methods of communicating, living, and functioning within religious cultures that share – equally – power among genders and promote religious identity; empowering womanist religious rhetorics draws from womanist themes of empowerment through words, as

well as Black Church cultural themes of prayer, sermons encouraging social action, and songs and spirituals that connect history and social action. Finally, the third theme, socio-spiritual status means the self- and socially-constructed identification one's position(s) in society and institutions, as well as one's identification of her spiritual closeness to a divine presence Who possesses the ability to engage in her earthly affairs. The womanist theme of "social location" and the Black Church Cultural theme of "presence of God in earthly affairs" inform my view of what "socio-spiritual status" means.

While not exhaustive, the selected themes reflect overlapping significant threads in both womanism and Black Church Culture/Traditions; they also reflect thematic concepts in the questions used for written and/or oral feedback from participants during the workshop. Since the study focuses on womanist discourses within the culture of the Black Church and in the educational materials used in the study, the integration of questions with coordinating thematic threads will help in identifying if/how well the content of the educational materials effectively promotes learning and, ultimately action, within the cultural identities of the study's participants. The methods used for the workshop component of the study will be discussed later in this chapter.

Research Site: The Church of God for All People

The Church of God for All People is a non-denominational church that was founded by Pastor Joseph Watson on June 8, 1987. Starting with seven members, the church held worship services in the Home Demonstration Building of Windsor, NC. After transitioning from that building to another building in Windsor, [North Carolina,] the growing congregation eventually moved into a newly constructed church in 1992. After completing payments for the construction and furnishings of that facility and outgrowing the space, the congregants moved into the newest

construction in 2003. At the center of the church has been its focus on spiritual development and community outreach. Through a variety of activities and programs, Church of God for All People has persistently sought to positively impact the lives of its community. After serving [its community] for over twenty years, [Church of God for All People] church now desires to expand its offerings to the community by providing adequate facilities and relevant programs for spiritual wellness, physical fitness, balanced nutrition, educational development, and social/cultural awareness for all members of its community at every stage of life (Church of God for All People).

“Don’t Let Anything Disturb Your Peace!” is the motto of Church of God for All People in Windsor, NC. This motto is shouted collectively and energetically at the end of Sunday Morning worship services without fail and also prominently featured on church correspondence, bulletins, and apparel. The congregation meets weekly for Sunday Morning Worship services and is predominantly attended by women, as are most churches in the Black Church community (Gilkes). Even though the congregation has over four-hundred members on its roster, Sunday Morning Worship services usually average 100-115 attendees. Most of the parishioners are residents of Bertie County, North Carolina. However, some reside in neighboring eastern and northeastern counties that require a commute of 1-1 ½ hours. As presented in its by-laws, the mission of Church of God for All People is to:

fulfill God’s will for our families, our communities, and His kingdom. We seek to follow His instructions as given by His son, Jesus, to “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (St. Matthew 28:17) The purpose of the church is to minister to the needs of the unsaved, the sick, the poor, the shut-in, and to provide leadership to individuals regardless of race,

creed, or color. The current goals of the church are as follows: 1. Soul Winning, 2. Community Outreach, [and] 3. Church Growth and Fellowship. (Church of God for All People)

Interestingly – rather, unfortunately – two months before this study was conducted at Church of God for All People, one of the families of the church experienced a traumatic experience with domestic violence that is currently under litigation and has changed the family structure of those involved. The female victim, who survived a brutal, nearly fatal attack, is recovering and receiving care from the adult children of the family; the male batterer is now incarcerated and awaiting trial, likely facing the rest of his life in prison as a result of the brutal attack against his wife. The couple is also in the process of divorce. Without question, the community of church members has been impacted and prompted to consider the issue of domestic abuse within the context of the family known and loved by the church community. While Sunday Morning sermons, Bible Studies, and Adult Sunday School lessons at Church of God for All People have highlighted scriptural views on healthy Christian family relationships, Church of God for All People had not participated in Domestic Violence Sabbath Observances, domestic violence awareness workshops, or educational trainings related to addressing domestic abuse. As a church that is situated within – and a church that serves – a rural community, Church of God for All People provided a rich site for research to contribute to the small but growing body of research on domestic violence in rural communities in the United States.

Recruitment of the Participants

The study participants were self-selected. Moreover, they did not have to be victims/survivors or domestic abuse or sexual assault. Participants needed to be women of/over the age of 18 who have attended worship services and/or events at The Church of God for All

People. They were informed that possible benefits of participating included the following: gaining knowledge about current domestic violence statistics; acquiring contact information for local, state, and national domestic violence and sexual assault resources; brainstorming and discussing methods through which the church can respond to the problem of sexual and domestic violence; engaging in social interaction during the workshop; and having the option of lunch with participants following the workshop.

Study participants were invited to join the study during the announcements portions of Sunday morning worship services and provided informed consent forms when they indicated to me (the researcher) that they were interested in potentially attending the workshop. Informed consent forms were reviewed with interested persons after worship services and immediately before the beginning of the workshop to make sure that all interested participants were fully informed of the benefits and potential harms/risks of participating in the study.

A month before the conducting a workshop for research purposes, I conducted a domestic violence awareness workshop to explore the issue of domestic abuse and possible interventions that could be created, supported, and implemented by the church community. This workshop was not used for the research purposes of this project. After that workshop, I moved ahead with my research plans and completed the Institutional Review Board approval process to conduct another workshop as a research project. Since one workshop using the BCDVI educational materials was conducted previously for a group of interested women - who attend services at Church of God for All People - a month prior to the study, participants were informed that they had to be individuals who had not participated in the previous workshop. It was important that they had not been introduced to the materials, since one of the goals of the study is to explore the effectiveness of the educational materials for the study's participants.

A total of ten women participated in the study. A discussion of the demographics of this group will be presented in the Chapter Five.

Methods and Data Collection Overview

Research methods employed during the workshop began with completing the IRB Approved Informed Consent acquisition prior to the workshop. Study participants were invited to discuss their interest in participating, and any questions or concerns about the study, as part of the informed consent process. Also, before the actual workshop started, all participants were reminded of their option to leave at any time and to stay for the duration of the workshop even if they did not desire to participate in discussion or writing portions of the workshop.

Taking on the responsibilities of a qualitative researcher, I functioned as the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 7) and joined the participants for the fieldwork component of the study. I led the workshop, using the educational materials as my guide. I took notes on a legal pad while seated and viewing the DVD along with the participants. In my notes, I indicated observations (sight and sound) on participants’ verbalized reactions to the DVD (laughter, verbalized responses, singing, etc.); body language, non-verbal communication; facial expressions (smiling, furrowed brows, countenance shifts, etc.); engagement with other participants (verbal/non-verbal exchanges); set-up of the workshop space (before the workshop begins and any adjustments of the space during the workshop by participants); participants’ references to themes identified by the researcher in the analysis of the educational materials. The purpose of generating the notes was to assist in fairly and accurately reflecting on/analyzing the participants’ responses after having the opportunity to read their written responses after the workshop. Further, having notes of their behaviors, reactions, interactions (verbal and non-verbal) would help me as I considered how their experience during

the workshop reflected the Womanist Black Church thematic foci. In addition, having notes of my observations would give me an opportunity to question or challenge participants' written responses that might contradict behaviors or verbalized responses during the workshop. I wanted to be able to have a point of reference for possible contradictions to what participants expressed to the group, verbally, and what they expressed privately, in their written responses that would only be seen by me during my analysis of the data. As Earl Babbie explains in *The Basics of Social Research*, note-taking is not the panacea to all qualitative research concerns, for it still has its limits due to human limitations; he points out in his discussion about recording observations that "just as [a researcher's] observations will represent a sample of all possible observations, [a researcher's] notes will represent a sample of [her] observations" (340). This compelling observation motivated me to utilize audio-recordings to supplement my observation notes.

In addition to taking notes during the workshop, I also created post-workshop reflection notes. I composed written notes within the first twenty-four hours following the workshop. These notes were written to document my memory of noticed behaviors, interactions, and comments of participants. The documenting of these thoughts reflected my desire to capture as fully as possible accuracy in the eventual reporting of the participants' experience and the subsequent analysis of the findings.

In addition to documenting observations during the workshop, I also used the post-workshop lunch to engage in (and to observe) informal discussions with participants. In an effort to provide participants with an opportunity to continue their discussion of the educational materials and thoughts about the issue beyond the more structured learning session. I engaged in conversations with the participants and observed/listened to conversations and behaviors of the participants in a relaxed setting of communal dining and conversing. These discussions were not

recorded – due to some participants’ children joining the group for lunch. Since the informed consent was not obtained to cover the presence of participants’ children, I did not want to capture voices of the children on any recordings used for the study.

Though audio-recordings were not used to capture dialogue during post-workshop lunch, digital voice recordings were utilized to capture discussion participants’ utterances during the workshop session. To supplement the field notes and memory, digital voice recordings were used as a method of ensuring that participants’ verbalized communication was captured and presented as accurately as possible in the report. Further, the data gathered through the voice recording provided me more information by which analysis and possible suggestions could be generated regarding the effectiveness of the educational materials in teaching and connecting with participants (as indicated by their responses captured in the recording). Transcripts were generated from the recordings for accuracy in the reporting and analyzing of the workshop.

Group Discussion during suggested intervals [as indicated in the companion study guide of BCDVI’s educational materials] on *The Preachers* DVD and after the completion of DVD and Participants’ Writing (reactions to *The Preachers* DVD and responses to Interview/Discussion Questions, which are listed later in this section) were used to document the participants’ verbalized and written thoughts and reactions to the educational materials. Use of both methods sought to provide participants opportunities to respond to the questions in a forum (written and/or discussion) in which they are most comfortable. Some participants preferred writing responses, while others chose to also respond orally. Providing oral spaces and writing spaces for sharing maximized chances of gathering data from the participants and reporting/analyzing the data with fuller understanding of their thoughts.

After the workshop, audio-recordings were transcribed and written responses were reviewed multiple times for patterns/themes. Also, recordings were reviewed several times for identification of themes that emerged during discussions. The selected thematic frameworks for tracing/coding, inspired by relevant literature on womanism, African-American Christian traditions/Black Church Cultural Tool Kit (which are discussed in Chapter One) and repeated foci/themes that emerge in the sermons by Rev. Aubra Love and BCDVI's educational materials: collective community; social ministry; social location of women - social location meaning a position in a social system which reflects a socially constructed world view of how things work, what is real, where things belong, and how they fit together (Robbins, 306); the importance of clergy in maintaining compassionate awareness of victims and their needs; empowerment through words; multidisciplinary approach to serving victims of abuse; collective ethos; presentation of Christian imagery; view of God as active in earthly affairs; prayer; call-and-response; sermons encouraging social action; songs and spirituals that connect to history and social action; and belief in the presence of God in earthly affairs. All of these themes are the themes that are integrated in the Womanist Black Church rhetorical lens that is used to analyze the sermons and educational materials used during the workshop.

While "important insights can emerge from the different ways in which two [or more] people can look at the same set of data," (Patton, 464), I elected to analyze the data collected for this project independently. I was the only coder and did not utilize computer assisted qualitative data analysis programs to trace the presence of Womanist Black Church themes considered for this project. My decision to code manually and independently was influenced by my choice to conduct the research as a participant observer. To minimize the possibility of participants feeling inhibited by the presence of another researcher during the workshop, I did not integrate in

my research plan the inclusion of an outside observer or coder of the data collected during the workshop. As a participant observer, I referred to my documented observations during the workshop when re-reading the transcripts of the workshop. Another coder who had not “gone into the field” of the research setting likely would not have had the necessary familiarity with the participants and their “internal states (worldview, opinions, values, attitudes, and symbolic constructs)” (Patton, 48). This could have potentially compromised or skewed the validity of the coding. In addition, while conducting multiple readings of the data, I also remained aware of the perspective that “closeness [to the people and the data] being studied does not make bias and loss of perspective inevitable” (Patton, 49). My process of coding followed the methods described in Michael Quinn Patton’s *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Beginning with reading all of my field notes (463), I wrote comments on separate sheets of paper and also typed comments for future integration into my report. To promote rigor in my data analysis, I conducted several readings of my handwritten notes and typed transcripts. Because I had already identified specific themes of Womanism and Black Church culture and traditions, I categorized the data using those themes. Though a fairly simplistic (Merriam, 164) and traditional (Patton, 436) strategy of data analysis, this method of coding was chosen to carefully identify the analytical themes in the data collected from the workshop.

In addition to observing and interacting with participants to collect data, I utilized surveys and questionnaires as a data collection method. Surveys were used to acquire demographic information about the participants for the purpose of understanding the factors that might influence participants’ learning experience, engagement with each other, perceptions on the issue of domestic violence, and identity as a member or non-member of the dominant cultural group participating in the study, African-American women who identify as Christians and are part of a

rural church community interested in becoming more informed about domestic violence in their communities. Demographic survey questions requested information based on the following content areas: age, religious identification, church membership, length of church membership, racial identification, relationship status, residency, children, employment status, and educational background.

In addition to the demographic survey, discussion questions were pre-composed, typed, and presented to participants, based on themes discovered through textual analysis and culturally-specific communication behaviors that emerge in *The Preachers* DVD. Questions about the educational effectiveness of the DVD and the workshop were given to the study participants before and after the viewing of the DVD to better inform understanding and subsequent analysis. Specifically, responses to the pre- and post- questions will inform the researcher's conclusions of how the educational materials may be improved. The questions used before, during, and after the viewing of the DVD were adapted from questions suggested for group discussion in *The Preachers: Working to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Companion Study Guide*. I elected to use the questions because they allowed participants to identify their knowledge about domestic violence, their cultural views associated with the issue, as well as their perspectives regarding the roles of the church and the community as they relate to domestic violence. I also recognized that using the questions provided in the learning materials would assist me in assessing if the learning outcomes indicated by the questions would be reached. If the participants' responses reflected that learning had not occurred during the session, then the educational effectiveness of the materials and the actual workshop could be questioned and studied for possible adjustments that might yield more effective learning. Further, by using the questions before and after the educational materials were presented during the workshop, I hoped to be able to identify clear

distinctions between knowledge pre- and post- workshop, hence, understanding the effectiveness of the materials. In addition to using pre- and post- workshop questions, I also presented questions associated with educational effectiveness of the workshop, as well as questions aimed at finding out the why the participants chose to attend the workshop, what their expectations were, and if their expectations were met. The questions presented in the Educational Effectiveness & Cultural Competence survey (Appendix I) were included to also learn what cultural connections emerged during participants' participation in the workshop, if any, ultimately to provide insights into if/how the educational materials connected with the cultural needs of the participants in order to promote an effective learning experience that would promote the ultimate goal of planning social action against domestic violence. All questions are provided in the appendix.

The following information provides a more detailed discussion of the actual workshop and questions used to gather data from the study participants.

The Workshop

The plan for the study included two phases, which were presented in the informed consent forms before their participation as posted below:

Phase 1 – Workshop & Lunch: All participants will attend a workshop and lunch (4 hours maximum). Participants will:

- Answer questions about their pre-session knowledge of and beliefs about of domestic violence
- Complete a demographic survey
- Watch *The Preachers: Working to End Sexual and Domestic Violence* Special Education DVD

- Respond to the DVD through written responses and group discussion
- Answer a questionnaire about the content of the DVD and the methods of instruction presented in the DVD and by the facilitator
- Suggest ways that The Church of God for All People partners can work with others in the community to respond to the problem of sexual and domestic violence – development of a community action plan.
- Join other participants for lunch and informal discussions after the workshop.

Phase 2 - Review of Conclusions: At the conclusion of the workshop, the researcher will invite participants to participate in a group meeting (of all interested workshop participants) at a mutually convenient time. At this meeting, the researcher will give all participants an opportunity read portions of a draft of the researcher's findings and to provide the researcher with feedback about the accuracy of participants' words and actions in the report.

On a sunny Saturday morning a few weeks into Summer 2012, ten study participants and I gathered together for the workshop. Before watching the educational DVD, the participants completed the pre-workshop questionnaire. Some had a cup of coffee, blueberry muffins, or orange juice while working on their questionnaire. Since most of the participants work outside the home and have fairly busy schedules – one participant was just getting off work only a few hours prior to the study – a Saturday morning was the most convenient date and time to conduct the session. Instrumental Christian praise and worship music by Sam Levine (*Smooth Praise*) was played softly while they responded to the pre-workshop questionnaire. In an effort to make the participants as comfortable as possible, the participants were provided a light breakfast, a notepad and pen for note-taking, pocket tissues, bottled water, and assorted chocolate candies for snacking during the workshop. In addition, a lunch buffet was provided at the end of the session.

Menu items were selected to create a casual, light lunch for the participants: chicken salad, fresh vegetables, fried chicken, rolls, sliced ham, fresh fruit, soft drinks, water, and cupcakes.

The workshop and lunch lasted for approximately four hours, including over 1½ hours of audio-recorded discussion, completion of questionnaires, and lunch fellowship (laughing, talking about the workshop and small talk, and eating). I continued to observe the conversations and behaviors of the participants in a relaxed setting of communal dining and conversing. Details regarding the interaction among the participants, the themes of the discussion, the action plan that was created, and the participants' evaluation of the education materials will be presented in the following chapter.

As noted in the previous listing of methods, digital voice recordings were used during the workshop to ensure that I identified as many verbalized responses and perspectives as possible. Clearly, human limitations yielded the risk of potentially insightful comments that were not included in my observations or written in a participant's responses. Careful review of audio recordings will assist me with noticing interactions, non-verbal communication used for emphasis (e.g., clapping and hitting the table), and exploring possible patterns in communication and themes, and interpreting data that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. Also, having the audio equipment integrated into the data collection methods provided me the freedom to engage more liberally, while note-taking, with a higher level of confidence that adequate data of oral communication will be captured during the session at an improved rate beyond two ears, two eyes, a notebook, and one pen. Since I was interested in studying the group's communication and obtaining their feedback in an environment that seemed as familiar as a usual women's ministry event at the church, I elected to conduct the observations without the assistance of

another researcher who would be a stranger and a potential barrier to the most relaxed, natural level of communication that would occur without the physical presence of an outsider.

In addition to integrating audio recording devices to bolster a sense of comfort from a researcher's perspective, food was be integrated as a tool to "promote conversation and communication within the group" (Krueger and Casey, 104). It has often been noted that African-American women, and women in general, view food as a significant gesture and conduit through which comfort, hospitality, and community are fostered (Westfield). Since serving food at the beginning of the workshop could potentially cause a level of "awkward[ness] as I, the moderator, tr[y] to avoid the central topic of discussion" (105) until the official start of the workshop, I elected to integrate the meal at the end of the workshop. During lunch, which was not recorded, I continued to listen and observe participants for "relevant comments concerning the study" (105), especially from those who did not participate robustly during the larger group discussion.

Member-Checking Meeting

In order to increase participants' perceptions of the researcher's trustworthiness and to increase the validity and credibility of the study (Carlson), a member-checking was integrated into this study's methods. The member-checking meeting was also integrated into the methods for this study to assist me in determining "the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel they were accurate" (Creswell, 196). Two questions were used in a member-checking meeting during Phase 2 of the data collection intend to validate the researcher's credibility and to promote participants' empowerment in the research process (Appendix I). The second phase of the study – the member-checking meeting occurred four

months later, after I had reviewed the responses, transcribed the audio-recordings, and analyzed the data for patterns, changes, and discursive practices during the workshop. The member-checking meeting was announced following a Sunday morning worship service; interested study participants expressed their interest in participating in the member-checking meeting. The original meeting date had to be changed, due to inclement weather; I contacted the two participants to announce the cancellation and informed them of a tentative new meeting date and time. Thereafter, a new date and time was announced after the following Sunday morning worship service to alert study participants of the opportunity to meet for the member-checking meeting at the new time. The two participants who had previously expressed interest joined me for the member-checking meeting later that week at the research site (the church, in the conference room) at a mutually convenient time. During the member-checking meeting, participants were given printed portions of the rough draft in the form of PowerPoint slides and were also given an oral 30-minute presentation of the findings (Chapter 5) to review the reported data of their learning experience in the workshop. Their provided feedback during the member-checking has been integrated into discussion of the findings within this dissertation. At the meeting, the study participants provided feedback regarding what they perceived to be an accurate representation of their participation in the workshop.

Conclusion

Qualitative research methods inform the design of this study. By combining common methods in qualitative research in education, social research, and language studies (rhetorical and discursive), the strategies used to collect and analyze data are aligned within reasonable ethical research practices. The next chapter provides the first example of data analysis presented in this

study, a rhetorical analysis of sermons delivered by BCDVI's founder and executive director, using the Womanist Black Church lens.

CHAPTER 3: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF LOVE’S SERMONS USING A WOMANIST BLACK CHURCH LENS

The significance of Womanist theology to this research project emerges from the use of this theological perspective by Rev. Aubra Love, the organization’s founding executive director, who is now the Executive Director of Building Bridges of Asheville, Inc. Rhetorical analysis of specific texts by Rev. Love will be conducted in this chapter in an effort to understand the non-profit organization/educational ministry and its educational goals through her words in order to lay a foundation for understanding its approach to providing culturally competent education designed to promote social action against domestic violence. Following is a rhetorical analysis using two analytical lenses: womanist and African-American Christian Traditions/Black Church cultural tools as they apply to the interpretations of Love’s “If It Had Not Been for God on Our Side,” and “What Must I Do to Be Saved.” They are not used during the workshop; however, they were useful in helping me identify womanist and Black Church cultural influences that inform the educational materials used during the workshop. Presented in a collection of model sermons on domestic abuse and sexual assault (“If It Had Not Been for God on Our Side” and the BCDVI website (“What Must I Do to Be Saved”), the sermons that are explored in this chapter reflect the theological and cultural underpinnings of BCDVI’s position on action against domestic violence. As explained in the previous chapter, two lenses are merged into one unique lens, a Womanist Black Church lens, which utilizes the three thematic frames discussed in the previous chapter: 1) collective ethos and action, 2) empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and 3) socio-spiritual status.

Analysis of “If It Had Not Been for God on Our Side”

In *Telling the Truth: Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence*, Rev. Love provides a sermon that reflects the theme of socio-spiritual status, requiring audience members to consider critically the self- and socially-constructed identification one's position(s) in society and institutions, as well as one's identification of her spiritual closeness to a divine presence who possesses the ability to engage in her earthly affairs; Love "draws on the experience of Hagar to remind [clergy and potential audiences of the sermon] of ways God speaks through victims who are able to say 'no' to the objectification of abuse" (McClure 6).

Referring to *Genesis 21: 8-20 (Holy Bible)* as the scriptural text from which the sermon elucidates its central message, the sermon begins with four words that immediately highlight the womanist theme of collective ethos and action: "As a global community, our effectiveness toward ending domestic violence is largely contingent upon how we choose to understand this social aberration" (144). Using the collective "we" and naming the community as a "global community," Love establishes an identification of a multidisciplinary, diverse community through which the issue of domestic violence is viewed. Moreover, by using "we," Love suggests a joining of herself to the audience and the larger community, suggesting a connected, shared interest and responsibility for identifying the problem and taking, ultimately, shared action to eradicate the issue that permeates the human experience. The universality of the problem is simply, yet poignantly, suggested through Love's use of *we* and *our*. This use sets the tone for the important idea of the collective, which is highlighted in her later discussion of the need for a collective, "unified" response. Highlighting the roles of various components of a battered woman's community, Love, identifies specifically each of the following groups: the religious community, who should identify "some actions to create a unified response to violence against women" (146); law enforcement, who should maintain "consistency" in their responses

to calls for help (147); healthcare professionals, who should recognize “the problem” of abuse and provide “medical care” despite potential lack of proof of insurance (147); media outlets, who should be mindful of how stories are presented, especially keeping in mind the need to carefully avoid promoting stereotypes that potentially “reinforce [...] and excuse [...] abusive acting out; workplace colleagues, who should exemplify consideration and be “very sympathetic” to the abused person’s situation; as well as athletes who should consider bringing attention to the issues of domestic abuse against women via “public service announcements,” and their employers or institutions, who should enact “strict disciplinary policies for players with regard to domestic violence and violence against women” (147). Reflecting the theme of collective ethos and action, Love highlights various components of the collective community that are necessary for facilitating working relationships that provide holistically efficient services for women and, possibly, their children when seeking to safely transition from abusive relationships.

In addition to including specific references to points associated with the theme of the collective community’s role in the situation of domestic abuse, Love also makes apparent the socially constructed location of women in society. She identifies victims as being located within hegemonic structures in positions of inferiority or subjugation to hierarchical authority. This representation highlights the discrimination that Hagar had to endure before receiving the gift of supernatural aid. Why was Hagar’s humanity not enough in the eyes of her community? To better understand Hagar’s plight, let us explore her identity further.

Abraham, referenced as a seminal ancient religious figure in early religions, including Christianity, in the Old Testament as the father of the Hebrew nation, was married to Sarah. He had been given a promise by God that he and Sarah would have a child, despite their age being beyond child-producing years under ordinary biological circumstances. In an effort to fulfill the

promise that was given to Abraham, Sarah offered to Abraham one of her maidservants, Hagar, an Egyptian, who was not of the same cultural heritage of Abraham and Sarah (who were from Ur of Chaldees, modern day Iraq), hence a marginalized outsider. After successfully bearing a son under miraculous conception, pregnancy, and childbirth at nearly ninety years of age, Sarah became angered by Hagar, who had already had a son by Abraham. She requested to have Hagar and Ishmael banished in her effort to avoid allowing Ishmael to receive an inheritance from Abraham. Banished, due to the compliance of Abraham with Sarah's wish, Hagar and Ishmael were exiled to the wilderness, nearly dying of thirst and only surviving due to divine intervention and a promise by God to bless him by making him eventually making "him a great nation" (*Genesis 21, Holy Bible*).

By making the connection between an Old Testament icon, Hagar, who represents marginalized persons with outsider status, and a battered woman who also potentially experiences alienation, undue criticism, and poor treatment, Love successfully spotlights the social location of women who are battered and need assistance. Further, Love weaves into the sermon a call for social ministry – in this case, a ministry/outreach/community response focused on acknowledging and effectively, caringly meeting the needs of those who are also victimized and in lacking support, spiritual or otherwise, when struggling with the impacts and effects of domestic abuse. Love emphasizes that in Hagar's case, "there was no community response on her behalf" (146) and that the suffering of Hagar, which represents the suffering of abused women who need the support of a caring community, provides a "valuable teaching opportunity around family violence that would implore any community of faith to consider the appropriate human response" to abusive situations a similar level of crisis (145).

Throughout the sermon, Love uses Hagar and Ishmael – Hagar and Abraham’s son whom Sarah desired to eliminate as a heir of Abraham – and their situation of abuse and exile interchangeably with references to abused women, who may also have children who need as much care as the battered woman when seeking refuge, escape, freedom from the oppression of domestic violence. Before the angel appears to Hagar, she and Ishmael are dying of thirst, and Hagar has resigned to his impending death by dehydration and exposure to the hard elements of the wilderness, having thrust him under a bush to die until prompted by an angel of God to pick him up again and to give him water from a well that was revealed to her by God (*Genesis 21, Holy Bible*). Highlighting the absence of assistance from the religious and secular communities, Love implores the audience to consider that Hagar’s represents people in their own communities – perhaps their “child’s teacher or [their] dentist [,...] the woman who played the piano in the last worship service” or even their “aunt or [their] very own daughter” (148). The immediate connection to ordinary people, people who are close to the hearts of audience members compels audiences to contemplate impacts of abuse and ill-prepared, ineffective support resources. An intimacy, a familiarity, a collective identity is created through this rhetorical strategy, prompting audiences to consider victims within the spectrum of their understood experiences, realities, and relationships. Once audiences are able to make the connections to their collective humanity, they are then potentially groomed more effectively to think in terms of collective action to respond to the shared problem of domestic abuse. Ending with a question, Love demands engagement and reflection, asking the audience: “And if it had not been for God on our side, where would we be?”

The use of this question reflects the effective strategy of posing questions to engage, challenge, and motivate an audience to (re)act to the message; simply stated, it demonstrates

Love's rhetorical ability to demonstrate one of the components of empowering womanist religious rhetorics – the Black Church cultural tool of call-and-response. The call of the audience listen to her message while also actively reflecting on their experiences suggests a desire to pull listeners out of a realm of passively listening to engagement, and hopefully, engagement beyond the oratorical experience and into the fight against domestic violence in their communities. In addition to reflecting the theme of empowering womanist religious rhetorics through the use of call-and-response through use of a question, Love's use of "And if it had not been for God on our side, where would we be?" simultaneously reflects a scriptural reference to *Psalm 124 (Holy Bible)* and "If It Had Not Been for The Lord On My Side," a famous song composed by gospel legend Dr. Margaret Douroux, which was also a widely popular song performed in later years by Helen Baylor, another famed gospel recording artist. The lyrics are as follows:

If it had not been for the Lord on my side,
Tell me where would I be? Where would I be?

He kept my enemies away.

Het the sun shine through a cloudy day.

He rocked me in the cradle of His arms,
For He knew I had been battered and scarred.

If it had not been for the Lord on my side,
Tell me where would I be? Where would I be?

This well-known gospel song, and Love's use of its title, reflects Love's likely awareness of audience members' potential recognition of it and/or its allusion to the Old Testament referent to the writing of one of the most recognized biblical figures, King David. The lyrics of the song are not integrated into the sermon itself. However, Love's use of the song's title provides an

opportunity to for audience members who are familiar with the song's lyrics to hear her message while also considering, and hopefully being further inspired by, the words of the song. The lyrics refer to one being "battered and scarred" and the ability of a divine God to keep "enemies away" ("If It Had Not Been for The Lord on My Side). Similarly, improved, and coordinated effective work against domestic abuse do for victims.

King David is an Old Testament icon – a psalmist, war hero, and eventual King of Israel, who famously volunteered during his youth to fight for his nation against a fierce giant and champion-warrior for the enemy Philistine nation, Goliath. King David serves as symbol of brazen courage, and is presented in the Old Testament as being inspired by his belief in the strength of his God, whom he credited for his previous victories against wild animals when guarding his flocks of sheep. David's struggle against a mighty, frightening, seemingly undefeatable opponent suggests a reality with which some audience members can identify, especially those who may view themselves as comparable to an unlikely opponent against oppressive, seemingly unstoppable foes of dominant society and/or oppressive institutions that favor oppressors – or, in the case of domestic abuse – perpetrators.

Using the thematic lens of socio-spiritual status, one could carefully consider how Love's integration of the character of David creates an effective rhetorical moment for the purpose of encouraging listeners to think even more critically about the social position of victims of domestic abuse. Just as an unlikely figure of a David would be able to rise to occasion of obtaining victory for himself and his nation against a formidable foe, women, who through a Womanist filter, are sometimes viewed as socially located on the lower levels of the social schema – due to gender, racial, ethnic, class, educational, religious, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, and/or socio-economic status discrimination – might be able to relate to his struggle

and potentially be inspired by his success in battle. Moreover, the integration of a referent to Psalm 124 (*Holy Bible*, “If It Had Not Been For God On Our Side”) could also appeal to members of Love’s audience who can make references to the history of the Black Church’s contributions to plights of anti-discrimination protests, slavery abolition and citizenship status in the nineteenth century, voting and integration legislation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as social justice and safety for victims of domestic violence terrorism still in the twenty-first century.

In this sermon, Love not only emphasizes themes of womanism – collective community, social ministry, and social location of women – but she also reflects the Black Church cultural tool of recognizing God’s involvement in earthly affairs (McCoy). Love’s inclusion of references to God’s involvement in earthly affairs are presented through her allusions to His divine interventions in David’s battle against Goliath and the near-death experience of Hagar and her son, who were suffering in the desert when exiled from the home of Abraham and dying of thirst until Hagar received a message from an angel that God would save their life.

Analysis of “What Must I Do To Be Saved”

Speaking to an audience of people from diverse racial, religious, cultural, and social backgrounds, Rev. Love delivered “What Must I Do to Be Saved” during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, October 1998, at a Silent March and Candlelight Vigil in Decatur, Georgia, an event that was sponsored by The Women’s Resource Center to End Domestic Violence of Atlanta, Georgia. This sermon is also printed in the Washington State Coalition against Domestic Violence multi-faith resource, “Religion and Domestic Violence: Let’s Talk about God” (2008); however, the title is different, “We Demand the End of Woman Battering.” However, in my analysis, I will refer to it as “What Must I Do to Be Saved.” Love opens and

closes this sermon with a song, framing the spoken sermonic text with selections that reflect unity at the beginning of the sermon – “We Are One in the Spirit,” referenced as a song developed by communities in the National Black Women’s Health Project (BCDVI) – and resolve to live in freedom at the end – “Oh, Freedom” (Negro Spiritual). “We Are One in the Spirit” is presented as follows:

We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the blood
We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the blood
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And we’ll know we are Sisters by our love, by our love
And we’ll know we are Sisters by our love, by our love.

It connotes the theme of collective ethos and action through its lyrics that promote unified identity and connection through gender (sisters) and blood-connection (literally - through bloodline relationships and ancestry) as well as spiritual “blood” relation through religious identity as part of the body of Christ, manifested through spiritual conversion and spiritual cleansing and unification by the blood of Christ’s crucifixion. In addition, the theme of socio-spiritual status, emerges in the lyrics identification of one’s position as a member of a group based on a spiritual commonality, regardless of the person’s experience as a victim of abuse or oppression. The overlap of these themes creates an atmosphere for contemplation, connections, and conduits for action.

Also, linking to empowering womanist religious rhetorics through the use of songs and spirituals that connect to history and social action, the connection between oppression experienced by a battered person and oppression that was endured by African and African-American slaves during the antebellum years of North American colonization and the Institution

of Slavery. In ““Jesus is a Rock,”” Melbourne S. Cummings and Judi More Latta explain, that “during slavery religion offered solace and refuge from lives filled with trials and tribulations” (59) and that:

[s]pirituals were psychologically uplifting to the slaves, for the lyrics that they sang were completely devoid of the feeling of unworthiness. Instead the lyrics were filled with a sense of self-worth, of belong, and of the probability of justice and a sense of the early life and surrounding conditions being temporary. Life after death was depicted as being permanent. (60-61)

The lyrics of “Oh, Freedom” are sung – though not performed during the spoken sermonic text - to pay homage to the women “to whom freedom was more important than this life” (Love).

Oh, freedom

Oh, freedom.

Oh, freedom over me.

And before I’ll be a slave,

I’ll be buried in my grave,

And go on to my Lord and be free.

“Oh, Freedom” creates a reflection of oppression, bondage, and control of one human being over another, and also reflects the refuge that some battered people find in spirituality. The song conjures memories of the plight of slaves longing for freedom before the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, as well as the plight of socially oppressed Americans, virtual slaves of Jim Crow society, before the fruition of change prompted by efforts of the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of the 1950s and 60s. Just as slaves who transitioned to eternity through death experienced freedom, women who died as the result of

homicide by abusers are described by Love at the close her sermon as happy: “How happy are the sisters above who once were sorry here!” (“What Must I Do”) Even though songs that reflect the Christian faith are used, “What Must I Do” represents a prominent collective community focus.

While the sermon is particularly Christian – using a New Testament parable about a young ruler, which is presented in the books of *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke (Holy Bible)* – Rev. Love makes sure that it is not “isolatingly” Christian. Suggesting the importance of collective ethos and action by starting the sermon by greeting the audience as “all you sisters” and identifying Jewish, Buddhist, Islamic faiths and “all women of faith,” Love makes clear her intention to reflect, acknowledge, and respect the struggle of domestic abuse as it relates to women of all beliefs. This relates to womanism due to its emphasis of respecting and love all people and working toward to ultimate benefit of all humankind, not just one select group. It links to Alice Walker’s identified component of womanism that is “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people” and “loves [...] the folk” (*In Search*, xi-xii). Love also makes clear her intention to maintain a clear connection to her religious perspective in an effort to speak with clarity and conscious awareness of her religious lens and purpose for speaking to honor the lives domestic abuse victims at the vigil:

So, I want to acknowledge that I know that some of you maybe haven’t been to church in twenty years for varied and sundried painful or political reasons. I know a few of you may have never been to church in your life. And I know many of you are from traditions that do not encompass that Afro-Christian womanist consciousness. So, I come to bring you some of what you have been missing. [...] And I am determined that we are going to talk about this stuff on our most sincere level, which may include some unintentional

slights but surely nothing that will distract us from attaining our collective freedom. So stay with me and listen for the word of God. (Love)

Even in the declaration of her commitment to adhere to an Afro-Christian womanist consciousness, an invitation is extended to all in the audience in an effort to reflect a desire to engage in the discursive moment with the aim of benefit for all present and for the cause of domestic violence awareness.

To further the thematic connection to collective ethos and action, the attention given to the men in the audience and the men who are also advocates for anti-domestic abuse work highlights the womanist concept of concern for the well-being of all, women and men. After sharing a brief account of a truck driver who stood up on behalf a restaurant waitress who was enduring harassment and threats by an unruly male customer, Love expresses gratitude and encouragement for continued efforts by men in the struggle of violence against women: “Brothers, we appreciate your help when you take on men who bully women. We don’t need you to tell us how much you hate battering... tell the batterers!” Statements to acknowledge and respect the differences in the audience reflect the womanist aim to love “folk” and to support wholeness of all people, in this case wholeness of the united body of individual bodies banded together for a common cause in social justice.

Just as Love carefully features the womanist theme of collective ethos and action in “If It Had Not Been for God on Our Side,” she highlights again the importance of multidisciplinary in the efforts to combat domestic abuse and the urgency for advocates in various professions – legal, medical, religious, philanthropic, and social services – to consider the ministry of Jesus as presented in *Mark 10:17-22 (Holy Bible)*. She asks the audience (and rhetorically, the professionals listed above) if they, when approached by battered women, sometimes alone and

sometimes with a child, “looked at them and loved them before responding” as Jesus had done when looking upon the young ruler in the in the parable. For in this New Testament parable, Jesus responds to query of a rich young ruler who seeks an answer regarding his interest in inheriting immortality. After Jesus reminds the rich young ruler of the Old Testament commandments that he should follow, the young man states that he has observed them for years, since his youth. Before replying to the young man by stating that he would have to sell his possessions and then give all that he had to poor, Jesus is described as loving him as he beheld him (*Mark 10: 21, Holy Bible*). Due to Jesus’ omniscience, he knew that the response would result in the wealthy young man’s despondent countenance and choice to walk away without professing his intention to make the sacrifice of parting with his material wealth. By referencing the example of Jesus as one who looks on those who solicit advice or help but who then choose to not accept the response or “salvation” from their desperate conditions of domestic abuse, Love prompts the audience to consider an awareness of one’s need to emulate the model presented by Jesus when responding to the needs of those who may not follow-through with hoped-for action to redeem themselves from harm’s potentially fatal impact of victimization by domestic abuse.

While emphasizing the need for loving social ministry that efficiently responds to the needs of women who seek an ending of their abuse, Love highlights the theme of socio-spiritual status by identifying the social location of the women who face abuse, emphasizing the fact that domestic abuse does not discriminate to only one type of woman: “We say domestic violence occurs with women regardless of social status or income, but we don’t really believe it or we would advocate with more of a sense of entitlement for those whom we are acting on behalf of” (par. 10). Identifying various examples of women who need effective, competent services when they are pursuing freedom from an abusive situation – reflecting needs of victims who need

shelter services, safe houses, balanced, well-rounded existences beyond the torment of living under the bondage of abusive relationships, or financial help to flee safely from abuse - Love identifies the need for services that adequately respond to the varied financial and cultural identities of the battered women who need assistance. She posits: “We would insist that the continuum of care for domestic violence survivors looked more like our own lives look – with homes, cars, recreation, and medical care” (par. 10)

Issuing a challenge to the audience, while simultaneously highlighting the issue of domestic violence and honoring the lives of the murdered victims, Love weaves together the womanist themes reflected in African-American Christianity. As in the “If It Had Not Been for God on My Side,” Love maintains a balanced, educational, yet challenging tone that reflects that need for awareness and action. Rev. Love’s theological and theoretical perspectives reflect the ability of BCDVI to share “the voices of the historic Black church to the arena of domestic violence prevention and intervention” (BCDVI website).

Conclusion

This chapter provides insight into the rhetorical themes used to reflect womanism and the Black Church, which are both key contributors to the content delivered through the educational materials that will be analyzed in the following chapter. The specific themes of collective ethos and activism, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status emerge in Love’s two sermons and will be further explored as significant rhetorical filters through which to deliver messages linked to domestic violence within a specific cultural context.

CHAPTER 4: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF BDVDI'S EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS, USING A WOMANIST BLACK CHURCH LENS

“To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.” bell hooks quoted by N. Lynne Westfield in *Dear Sisters* (37)

As an educational ministry, BCDVI presents materials for teaching, engaging, and promoting culturally competent awareness in the materials of the complex issue of domestic abuse against women, especially African-American women of Christian faith who worship in predominantly, perhaps even exclusively African-American congregations that recognize and employ some, if not most or even all of the cultural tools identified by scholars of African-American rhetoric and culture (Richardson; Riggs; Williams; Costen; and DeBose). Reflecting the Womanist Black Church theme of collective ethos and action specifically, BCDVI, hosts institutes to provide training for clergy, church members, social workers, domestic violence advocates, law enforcement officers, health care professionals, community-service groups, educators, students, and “ordinary people” who don’t have assigned professional or activist titles but are interested in doing their part to make positive change as citizens, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. It also provides interested persons and groups access to educational materials that can be purchased, reviewed carefully with specific instructions, and utilized by local groups for specialized education on domestic violence within an African-American Christian cultural frame.

This chapter focuses on the educational resources, *The Preachers: Working to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Special Education DVD* and *The Preachers: Working to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Companion Study Guide*, that were used during the workshop outlined in the discussion of methods (Chapter Two). Reflecting the themes of collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status as they link to

the overarching interpretive analytical framework of a Womanist Black Church lens, the DVD is designed to deliver “the liberating Word and lift the spirits of those concerned about the faith based response to violence against women” (*The Preachers*), the companion study guide is designed to help “show how communities of faith and domestic violence agencies can work together to develop a healthy coordinated community response to serve African-American families” (*Companion*, 6). Since one of the healing methods that is suggested in “Domestic Violence in the African-American Community: The Role of the Black Church” is the presence of “Christian education [-] sermons that speak against male domination and abuse [-] and women in leadership roles in the church” (Jordan), *The Preachers* DVD became an obvious choice for me to use as the educational materials integrated into this study. While there are several other domestic violence educational resources made available through Faith Truth Institute, the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the National Association Against Domestic Violence, *The Preachers* has been recommended in various bibliographies, scholarly works, and websites as a resource designed for African-American Christians – including researcher Lynda Jordan’s “Domestic Violence in the African-American Community: The Role of the Black Church”; the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community list of faith community resources; the African-American Lectionary website for Anti-Domestic Violence Day 2010 lectionary material; the National Sexual Violence Resource Center website list; and the Faith Trust Institute’s Bibliography on Sexual and Domestic Violence.

BCDVI states that when created and published for distribution around ten years ago, the DVD was the only one of its kind, tailored to provide “culturally competent education” reflective of the historical Black Church traditions. What makes these educational materials particularly interesting is their integration of womanist and Black Church traditions, the presence of its

dominant focus on women. What follows is a discussion and rhetorical analysis of the educational DVD and the companion study guide. The purpose of the analysis is to identify important themes that emerge in both educational materials. In my analysis, three Womanist Black Church themes from my list will be used: collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status.

In *The Preachers*, three dynamic sermons are delivered by three engaging, insightful, African-American women ministers, Rev. Aubra Love, Rev. Doretha Custis, and Rev. Dr. Sharon Ellis. In their sermons, each reveals a clear thematic focus on empowerment, as well as collective community, social ministry, and social location of women, all Womanist themes. Collective ethos and action, as well as socio-spiritual status are particularly poignant thematic features that emerge in the sermons. Further, each sermon energizes the audience to consider the importance of building a close, self-loving, and self-liberating spirituality by embracing the scriptures as self-applicable and presented with abused women's experiences as a focal point, therefore employing and presenting empowering womanist religious rhetorics.

In *The Preachers* DVD, the various sections methodically cover important aspects of the issue of sexual and domestic violence. The companion study guide – intended for clergy and other interested laity who wish to participate in the learning session - included definitions, as well as detailed lists of what clergy should and should not do when responding to a crisis of sexual or domestic abuse. If clergy are among participants in a session that uses BCDVI's resources, the details will directly provide instructions for their practice. Participants in a session who are not clergy have the opportunity to learn what their clergy could, or should, consider implementing in their practice when responding to crises of sexual assault or domestic abuse.

Further, the companion guide highlights specific points of consideration for clergy and service providers.

Published as a supplement for the educational DVD, *The Preachers: Working to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Companion Study Guide* provides focused points for discussion. The study guide provides suggested talking points for workshop facilitators at various intervals during the screening of the educational DVD. The DVD includes three sermon segments that are divided by portions of posted statistics on domestic abuse and sexual assault for reading and discussion by participants between sermon presentations. In addition, the companion study guide includes: instructions for the facilitator, talking points/notes for the facilitator to use to highlight the importance of the faith community in the issue of domestic abuse and sexual assault, comments on the African-American community's historical views on domestic violence, direct comments for clergy on their importance, words of encouragement for service providers, including definitions of domestic violence and questions to ask participants.

The questions (Pre-Workshop Questionnaire, Post-Workshop Questions, and the Educational Effective and Competence Survey) reflect the themes Womanist Black Church themes that are used to analyze the data collected during the workshop (collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status), especially as they relate to how the participants define domestic abuse, reflect on how domestic abuse is viewed through the cultural filters of the church, how the church can respond to domestic violence, and how they (study participants) feel about the effectiveness of the educational materials in teaching them about domestic abuse and helping them think of ways to respond to domestic abuse as Christian women who are part of rural communities. For example, one question from the Pre-Workshop Questionnaire and the Structured Interview Questions focuses directly on the decision

of women from African heritage to seek help from their faith communities before seek help by secular service providers. In the Pre-Workshop Questionnaire, it is presented as follows: Women of African heritage tend to go to their places of worship for help in domestic violence situations before they seek shelter services. Why do you think that is the case? This practice, supported by research, is also presented for consideration and discussion during the workshop, providing an opportunity for participants to explore their ideas on this practice. The question is presented as follows: Why do women of African heritage typically go to their places of worship before seeking shelter services? Participants' answers give me an opportunity to see if the educational materials impact their responses, hence providing insight into the effectiveness of the materials in accomplishing its educational goals. The questions are included in the listing of questions presented in the discussion of the workshop methods (Appendix E). Also, analyses of participants' response to those questions are discussed in the following chapter.

In the companion study guide, statistical information regarding domestic abuse and sexual assault are provided, as well as common perceptions that people have that could undermine compassionate perspectives for victims. For example the following question is included, for participants to consider: "Why don't women just leave?" (9). The issue with this question is clearly the responsibility that is given to the battered woman. It suggests that victims are responsible for their exposure to abuse. If a victim were asked such a question her pastor, clergy counselor, or fellow church member, she could believe that others in her faith community may also have the perception that she could leave if she wanted to leave. This question and the discussion that it invokes relates to womanism directly due to its recognition of the socially constructed location/placement of women within the structure of their families and/or roles

within the abusive relationship (socio-spiritual status). How this question is discussed during the workshop is presented in Chapter Five.

The question of “Why won’t *she* [my emphasis] leave?” within the study guide as a topic for discussion, presents an opportunity for participants to place into question their ideas, and potential biases, against women who are victims. Perhaps discussion could then present an opportunity to explore the questions that are less often asked: Why won’t *he* [my emphasis] leave? Why won’t the abuser stop the abusive behavior? Moreover, by integrating the question into the study guide, it also presents a talking point that can allow participants an opportunity to think about the roles established in the Christian tradition regarding power structures within a home environment that aligns with Christian traditional perspectives, particularly traditionally patriarchal power structures that place male authority higher than female authority and promote traditional roles that subjugate women under male control in marriage and family structure. Through discussion and exploration of perspectives guiding their positions of socio-spiritual status of victims, participants will have opportunities to practice constructing a collective ethos by exploring potentially varied views by all participants and to possibly revisit perspectives after hearing the sermons presented by the ministers on the educational DVD.

Also highlighting this idea of lack of compassion demonstrated by some clergy, who unfortunately use the power of pulpit for ill-timed and poorly-chosen language for misguided ministry purposes, Rev. Sharon Ellis brings to the fore the overlapped themes of collective ethos and action and Empowering womanist religious rhetorics, overlapping in the intersection of clergy’s need to share unified identify with the congregants while also thinking carefully about how they present the gospel in their sermons:

It's about Jesus looking around, looking around at us in the pulpit engaging in theological terrorism, terrorizing everybody that comes in that needs healing, that needs renewal, that needs to hear a fresh Word from the God. He call that the kind of snake theology that you do because you look at the Garden of Eden and you say that because of their sins that women have to be lower than men and men have to be over us. Because he says that that's hierarchical, snake theology. Jesus theology all men and women are created equal. Jesus theology is I died so you could have the abundant life. (*The Preachers*)

In this segment of her sermon, Ellis highlights an important aspect of womanist theology, as presented by Westfield regarding the level of respect that womanist Christian African-American women enjoy in their spiritual view of and relationship with Jesus. Westfield writes in "Doing Womanist Theology" that:

African-American women during slavery and since have understood that Jesus identified with the plight of the weak, the poor, the down trodden, the marginalized, the outcast, the misunderstood, the abused, and the scorned. Jesus identifies with, understands, and embrace the struggle of African-American women. In doing Womanist theology in everydayness of their lives, African-American women understand the profound notion that the empathy and compassion of Jesus exists for them, then and now. (79)

Directly contrasting the "snake theology" that Ellis identifies, the themes of empowering womanist religious rhetorics and Socio-spiritual status emerge in the presented liberatory theological perspective that clergy could embrace when serving their congregations, especially parishioners who are part of unhealthy, potentially abusive, relationships. For her commentary not only identifies problems of how clergy mishandle the scriptures to oppress people, but it also

recognizes the problems with how women have been located within oppressive social systems within her cultural, social, and religious communities.

Rev. Love beautifully models empowering womanist religious rhetorics by using words to empower herself as she ministers the morning homily presented in the educational DVD. Pausing and stating, “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace,” she then commences her sermon delivery with a peaceful, projected confidence into a sermon inspired *Mark 2:1-12 (Holy Bible)*, a New Testament story about a paralytic man who received healing and forgiveness of sins after he has been presented to Jesus by his four friends, friends who had taken aggressive action, despite their own possible needs, to place their paralyzed friend before Jesus to receive a miracle. The theme of collective ethos and action is reinforced here. Love’s discussion of the paralytic man’s friends within the context of their needs highlights the idea that by the collective quest to help one of the group in acquiring his healing, the helpers were also united in their focus on communal engagement for good. This example creates a reflection of the community, clergy, and practitioners who can also work as collective community agents to for the sake of victims of domestic violence. Love iterates,

When we come into the text, the person is already not able to walk. I want to liken this to the women who we encounter in our work who are fleeing domestic violence. When the women come to us they are already traumatized. It really doesn’t matter very much how exactly the women participated in becoming traumatized. When we come on the scene, when we enter these women and children are coming for healing and assistance. The devastation has already occurred. [...] But the committed four who saw something worth redeeming in the paralytic decided to be innovative in pursuit of this healing. The four saw something worth redeeming in the one that they carried. Now just because these

four were so dedicated to the healing of this one that was paralyzed, you and I needn't assume that they were without their own wounds. I'm thinking they might have been hurt up a little bit, too. I believe that they were probably a team of unhealed healers like you and me. (*The Preachers*)

Through her sermon about the paralytic man [i.e., the victim of domestic abuse], Love uses imagery through the metaphorical presentation of the paralytic man to connect to the audience's identification of their own potential limitations, critical views, and struggles as "committed helpers" of those in need of a collective, responsive community response.

Using *Mark 2:1-12 (Holy Bible)* as scriptural foundation to explore a "multidisciplinary" approach of four friends to successfully place their paralyzed friend before Jesus to receive healing, Rev. Love describes the four friends, having different strengths and abilities, much like various community organizations that collaborate to coordinate an effective, even if radical, response to abuse in order to assist a victim with getting the help that she needs to be *healed* from the oppression of a batterer. She also proclaims:

I can imagine that one of the four may have had very poor vision but very strong hands, just right for breaking through a roof. Perhaps another of these four – if you can see it in your mind had very keen eyesight, wasn't lacking in vision but had a little physical endurance. This one could see so much he'd get tired. Uh ha. The third helper, I'm believing might have been brilliant, just a little bit afraid of heights. This one was terrified to even get up on a roof. And finally the last one was probably quite courageous, fearing no one and nothing but the possibility of displeasing God. (*The Preachers*)

She then explores the various "wounds" - wounds of frustration with the cycle of abuse experienced by victims and batterers, lack of appreciation for their work, and the unfortunate

imbalance of overwork undercompensated experienced by the various groups, agencies, offices, and faith institutions, who work together. She emphasizes that the faith of the four helpers was what Jesus responded to in His choice to heal the paralytic man. The metaphor of the four helpers symbolizes that argument presented by Rev. Love that despite the wounds of the community responders to domestic violence, the work is still worth pursuing to affect social change and to save lives while saving communities.

In the companion study guide, BCDVI reflects the Womanist Black Church theme of empowering womanist religious rhetorics in its calls for clergy to use language that offers hope to victims, to affirm God's love for victims, and to encourage victims. By highlighting language as a guiding principle, educational materials make clear the significance of the "power of words" – as demonstrated in Rev. Custis' sermon at the 2000 This Far By Faith Institute (which is where the sermons for the educational DVD were recorded). Custis challenges clergy to reconsider their views regarding their own empowerment and how that affects the people they serve in ministry:

You can't empower anybody, especially clergy. I'm talking to clergy here, men and women. But you can't empower anyone until you feel empowered. [...] When you're not courageous to stand for what is right, and to do what the Bible tells you to do, you have no empowerment. [...] Do you know why the people in our congregations leave our churches feeling worse just as bad as they did when they came in, if not worse, and the sad part is in a lot of instances, they don't even know why they feel that way, the power of words. You have the power of words. You make choices about what you're going to do with these words. What is your goal? What is your agenda? Do you need that much power by making someone feel worse? (*The Preachers*)

By placing into question how clergy are using their social status, authority, and place of power when communicating with parishioners, especially battered women, Rev. Custis emphasizes a crucial aspect of discourse and how it affects one's attitude, ministry, and level of success with sensitively meeting the needs of battered women in their congregations. In addition to highlighting in her sermon the power of words when used by clergy, Rev. Custis also encourages everyone in the audience to place themselves into the text, especially in scriptures that affirm blessings, healing, and protection. She states, highlighting the ability of people to use empowering womanist religious rhetorics (by their use of the text to promote their own power, agency, and influence):

Be inventive. When you go to *Psalms* instead of reading, where it says me and I, tell people to put their name in there. *Jeremiah* 17. Heal me and I shall be healed. Save me, oh, Lord, and I shall be saved. Heal Doretha, and I shall be healed. Save Doretha, and I shall be saved. Try that with *Psalms* 139 with some of your members. Tell them to put their name in there, and you'll see the healing that could come about. (*The Preachers*)

The suggestion of placing oneself (and urging others to do the same) in the biblical text – scripture - is further highlighted in the sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Sharon Ellis, who emphasizes the need to demonstrate womanist love for people for positive language to be the choice-language, instead of profane, derogatory, hurtful language that is devoid of the a central concept of Christianity, love. A Christian concept and a foundational element of Walker's definition of Womanism, love, is a motivating ideal that frames how other and the self are treated. Moreover, a central awareness of the self – as Collins articulates as placing oneself in the “center” (*Black Feminist Thought*) is also highlighted in Ellis' dynamic sermon. Ellis

explains that language that integrates the gospel with self-awareness and a faith-filled intimacy with God's word is a worthwhile approach that be practiced as part of one's religious life:

We have to know God, our Creator, for ourselves because people, I was telling a group the other day, when you feel suicidal, don't go talk to another suicidal person because ya'll gonna kill each other! You know, you got to go where your strength is. You gotta make this personal. You gotta, you gotta find out where your support [is] and you have to get personal with this. You gotta understand it's about you! It's about you! It's about you! It's about you! You got start looking for those scriptures and them songs that talk about I, and me, and myself. I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in *my* mouth. My soul shall make boast in the Lord and the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. Oh magnify the Lord with *me* and let us exalt His name together. The Lord is *my* light and *my* salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of *my* life. Of whom shall I be afraid? God is my refuge and my strength, a very present help in the time of trouble. Have mercy up *me*, according to thy loving kindness, according to thy tender mercies. (*The Preachers*)

Rev. Ellis continues this line of scriptural quotations, continuing to emphasizing personal pronouns, while pointing to herself in concert with the emphasized personal pronouns to symbolize through her actions and voice the effort required to persist in pursuing and maintaining a view and practice of language that connects the human experience intimately with God. This is a method of practicing the theory of placing oneself in the center of analysis, as argued by Collins in *Black Feminist Thought*.

Highlighting the theme of collective ethos and action, specifically as it promotes the concept of multidisciplinary approaches to serving victims of abuse, BCDVI National Board of

Directors, Chair, Rev. Elaine Oliver, speaks about the need for partnerships among sacred and secular agencies. In the opening comments of the This Far By Faith Institute, Oliver states:

We want to increase our understanding of how we can partner with secular agencies to provide appropriate response to those who are hurting. We are here to educate for prevention and change, intervene where abuse has occurred, [and] provide materials and spiritual support to those offenders and their families. (*The Preachers*)

It is also highlighted as a suggested talking point to be included in the discussion aim at brainstorming a coordinated community response, an ultimate learning outcome for the educational materials.

Conclusion

This exploration of the excerpted sermons included on *The Preachers* educational DVD and the companion study guide reflects through interpretive lenses of womanist themes and cultural tools of the historical Black Church: the importance of clergy in maintaining compassionate awareness of victims and their needs, empowerment through words, and a multidisciplinary approach to serving victims of abuse. As will be discussed next, I integrated the guide's questions into this study to collect data intended to help me gain an understanding of the participants' responses to the educational materials, particularly learning outcomes such as community action plans.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF THE WORKSHOP

“Many black women, especially church women, have the talent to connect immediately across differences in the black community in order to take care of crises that emerge.” Deloris S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (238)

In this chapter, I will report the analysis/findings of: workshop data collections and observation, post-workshop field notes, and a post-workshop member-checking meeting during which participants offered comments about my preliminary findings and analysis of the workshop by their review a draft of my findings. As part of the analysis, specific portions of participants’ dialog are also integrated (in italics) in this chapter to capture specific moments during the workshop that lead to compelling points for analysis.

As explained in the discussion of methods used for this research study, in addition to conducting a rhetorical analysis of the educational materials and sermons by Rev. Love through the themes of collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status (as filters by which to use my analytical lens of the Womanist Black Church), I conducted a participant-observer case study as part of this project. As a participant observer, I functioned in various capacities, including “moderator, listener, observer, and [...] analyst using an inductive process,” (Kruger and Casey, p.12) influenced by the communication that transpired during the discussion intervals prescribed by the educational materials, as well as the communication that ignited spontaneously during the workshop.

Moreover, I also have taken into careful consideration the womanist pedagogical theory presented in “Hearing the Voices of African-American Women” by N. Lynne Westfield, who explains her scholarship on concealed gatherings as a pedagogical theory and practice in the recognition of its existence by African-American women. She states, “[o]ne test of this work [of concealed gathering pedagogy] will be whether African-American women who routinely

participate in concealed gatherings recognize the practice as one that hones resilience” (39). Concealed gatherings are exclusive, private gatherings of people [in the case of this study, African-American women who worship and share roots in a rural, Southern Christian community] to ultimately “hone resilience” in a society that does not allow total unmasking or freedom of this group without criticism, marginalization, or “inhospitality” (Westfield). I explore the participants’ communication and outcomes of the workshop through a womanist theoretical filter that views the workshop as a concealed gathering. The concealed gathering in the context of this research has an ultimate goal of education about domestic abuse in an atmosphere of hospitality and fellowship; the outcome of the gathering is the development of a plan for action against sexual and domestic violence by this group. The concept of concealed gatherings will be used as an analytical lens in this chapter.

Participants’ Demographic Profile

The participants were given a demographic profile to complete. The questions included multiple choice answers, blanks for responses that were not listed as options, and options to not answer the questions if preferred. The questions [answer options posted in Chapter Five and Appendix D] were as follows:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your religious identification?
3. Are you a registered partner of The Church of God for All People?
4. If so, how long have you been a partner [member] of The Church of God for All People?
5. What is your race?
6. What is your current relationship status?
7. In which county do you reside?

8. How many children do you have (any age)
9. Which best describes your employment situation?
10. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.

Based on the respondents' answers, the demographic information provides an understanding of the make-up of the participants. The youngest participants identified themselves as being 18-29 years old, and the oldest participants were 50-59 years old. All of the respondents identified themselves as Christian, and all respondents identified themselves as current members of Church of God for All People. Half of the respondents indicated that they had been members of the church for 5-10 years, and the other three respondents identified themselves as members of the church for at least one year or more. Two participants did not respond to the question. With the exception of one respondent, all were current residents of Bertie County and had, at least, one child. Six respondents identified themselves and married, while one identified herself as currently separated; three self-identified as single, never married. Also, the respondents varied in their educational and employment backgrounds. Four respondents identified themselves as not currently employed, three as full-time employees, two as part-time employees, and one as a homemaker. All respondents identified themselves as having completed high school, and eight indicated that had completed higher education – two having earned Associates Degrees, five having completed at least one year of college, and one having earned a Bachelor's Degree.

Since this study seeks to discover what emerges as culturally competent conduits for educating and promoting social action by a specific group of African-American women of faith in the rural South, the targeted population functioned well for the study. Even though participants were of different ages, marital status, parenting status, educational backgrounds, and

employment status – the homogeneity created by their rural geographic demographic and/or their church partnership and/or participation with worship services and events held at The Church of God for All People enabled me to proceed with the study; the participants reflected the age groups present in the church’s membership and were, therefore, representative of the larger population of women who attend worship services and/or community outreach events at the church. The majority of the participants in my study (80 % between ages 30-59) reflect the age groups of the overwhelming majority of individuals documented as calling to receive the various services provided by the state of North Carolina (95% of the total of 155 ages 35-54). Further, the study’s participants are representative of the greater female population of the research site, which reflects the majority of citizens who utilize domestic violence services, especially considering that the overwhelming majority of domestic violence victims are women.

Pre-Workshop Questionnaire - Written Responses

Following is a discussion of the responses provided by the study’s participants to questions designed to obtain their pre-session awareness of domestic abuse, as well as their views on the roles of the church and the community in lives of involved with domestic violence.

1. Why are men battering women and children?

According to the language used to answer the pre-workshop questionnaire, respondents consistently believed that there is always an underlying motive for abuse. Whether it was unresolved childhood issues, personality disorder, or a desire for selfish personal gain, the respondents did not view battering as an unmotivated random occurrence.

“They may have been going through domestic violence in their childhood.”

“Their pass or something in theirs childhood life or the way they were brought up in life[.] They might have seen violence when growing up.”

“To gain control and Power over them. Maybe they was abused in the past.”

“Possibly because they have had childhood problems with a woman figure. Also as a child they might have been abused period, and they feel thats the way a child is to be treated.”

These responses reflect the overall responses given by respondents to the question asking why men batter women and children. The respondents’ answers reflected their views that: some men were affected by their childhood, perhaps being victims of abuse or observers of abuse as children; some did not have positive father figures; some abused for control over women and children; some were suffering from psychological problems, stress, low self-esteem, insecurity; some have a desire for personal gain [through abuse of women and children]; some have unresolved issues with women or female figures, stemming from problems during their childhood through adulthood; and some men are merely bullies.

Other responses from one participant veer from focusing on men’s motivations for battering women and children by responding to the question with statements that some women are “weakened by love and powerless” and that some women “feel that they can love enough” for both partners in a relationship. This particular response relates to Womanism through its direct focus on the woman’s place in a relationship in which a man is a batterer. The question asks why men batter, not how battered women feel about love. This participant’s responses place women in the center, suggesting that the question of why men batter can only be critically thought about when the women who are battered are also considered. This connects to Walker’s description of womanists’ attention to “entire” people (Walker, xii), not just one group - in this case being men who batter.

While none of the responses directly attribute male batterers' abusive behaviors to religious teachings, participants' responses can be interpreted as being reflective of traditional cultural lessons that promote patriarchy. Consider the following responses:

“Due to their environment/upbringing coming up/growing up. (What they were taught as importance, value/morals or learned behavior) [...]”

“Men are always taught they are the dominant superior being and women and children are to respect them as just that.”

These responses can be inferred as alluding to scriptures that have been interpreted by some Christians as reflecting God's intention for men, particularly husbands and fathers, to be hierarchically superior to women. For example, *Ephesians 5:22-33*: Wives submit to your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church[...] Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives be to their own husbands in everything.[...] Nevertheless let [...] the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband. If a batterer did grow up being taught to be dominant in a family relationship, bolstered by isolated scriptures used to support values of male domination, male authority/superiority, he would then have the potential to become abusive if not also taught how consider those scriptures within a foundational Christian principle of love, the “greatest” commandment (I Corinthians 13).

2. Is there a lack of accountability required for men who batter? Explain.

The participants (7 out of 9 respondents) responded with “yes” when asked if there is a lack of accountability required for men who batter. One participant answered “no” while one participant responded with “not sure.” Respondents who answered “yes” cited problems with laws, counseling, and society and the need for stronger punishments for abusive behaviors. The

respondent who answered “no” supported her position by stating that the lack of accountability stems from a “glitch in the system” that does not adequately punish offenders for their acts of violence. She responded: “No there is just a glitch in the system that allows offenders to not be punished for what they do.” While she cites a “glitch,” other respondents state that [the] “law need to be more involved,” that batters “jailed for only a short period of time,” and that the lack of accountability reflects women’s behaviors of excusing battering. Specifically, two respondents answer this question as follows:

“If some women don’t call police, continue to drop charges, or not file charges. That’s what make them [batterers] repeat offenders and makes the women enablers”

“Yes in some cases the women feel like it is all there fault and make excuses for the men.”

These two responses in particular reflect the respondents’ apparent recognition of the roles of victims as part of the larger issue of lack of accountability for batterers. However, these responses also recognize power of women that is manifested in the decisions of some victims – though they may be directly influenced by the abuse of their batters – to either blame themselves for the abuse or to allow the abuse to continue by not persisting in the jurisprudence processes designed to promote their safety. While seemingly negative in their responses, even casting blame on victims who do not call police or file charges after abuse has occurred, the respondents’ emphasis is still placed on the women and their actions. While answering the question, which focuses on accountability for men, some respondents maintained a womanist filter through their reflection on the question with women in the center of their responses. Reflecting what seems to be a recognition of “women’s strength” (Walker), a component of Walker’s definition of womanism, some respondents’ perspectives speak about victims’ power to pursue justice even though they are clearly vulnerable to violence that can weaken them

physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. While the participants are not asked to answer the questions from specific vantage points, womanist thinking emerges in some responses as the participants reflect on various aspects of domestic abuse. One can infer that these two responses, in particular, reveal participants' consideration of the impacts of Christian teachings of forgiveness (dropping charges or not filing charges) and patience making excuses (exercising patience, or thinking of others more highly than themselves), which may be distorted by some victims who do not keep their own significance, well-being, and humanity as priorities.

3. Do you believe that there is a systematic acceptance of violence against women?

Explain.

Just as seven respondents answered “yes” in their responses to the previous question, seven also answered “yes” when asked if they believe that a systematic acceptance of violence against women exists. The one respondent who answered “no” provided no explanation, while two participants did not respond to the question at all. Those who answered “yes” referred to silence surrounding the issue, which looks like acceptance of the abuse; social views that argue for a woman to be “kept in her place” and for the perspective that women who stay in abusive situations deserve the abuse for not leaving; inadequate punishment for crimes associated with domestic abuse; and the anger of abusers who are only frustrated by the ineffective punishments. One respondent's view emphasizes a position presented in Lynda Marie Jordan's “Domestic Violence in the African-American Community: The Role of the Black Church,” particularly the following argument:

The women have been oppressed—to serve, to serve, and to serve, even at the expense of their own safety. The conflict that the abused African-American woman faces is either to continue in the state of oppression or to risk being isolated, defamed, or degraded if she

speaks out. Either choice leaves her in a probable state of “isolation” and “aloneness,” which adds to the internal and external oppression she already experiences. (17)

For example, one respondent answered: “[B]ecause they don’t leave and choose to stay[,] society will say well they are getting what they deserve and we close our eyes to it,” virtually ignoring the abuse and the victim’s alienation from a caring, responsive community. One respondent also equated the church’s silence with acceptance, stating, “[I]t’s too silent. You don’t hear too much about it in churches. Some women believe that they should stay in the situation because that is the right thing to do.” Despite the shared agreement that men batter women and children because of some unresolved emotional or psychological issue, respondents overwhelmingly felt that stronger punishment instead of effective counseling would serve as a better means of increasing accountability among batterers. Respondents expressed that the systematic acceptance of violence against women was due to more social constraints rather than institutionalized sexism. They understood that there are legal recourses (perceived as inadequate however) for abusers, but the social stigmas that accompany speaking out against violence keep most women silent and danger. For example, one respondent replied:

To a degree, I believe there is a systematic acceptance. Example, woman or child calls 911 against domestic violence, police comes and converse[s] with the victim and the person or man causing the violence. Sometime police may carry them to jail 24 hrs. the case goes to court – judge order[s] the man not to go so many feet to the home or around the victim. This makes them the more angry. Death [of the victim] could be next.

4. Women of African heritage tend to go to their places of worship for help in domestic violence situations before they seek shelter services. Why do you think that is the case?

Respondents indicate their beliefs that women of African heritage go to their places of worship for help in domestic violence situations because they experience the feeling of safety, they believe in possibility of deliverance by God, they believe in the church's [place of worship's] ability to provide answers, they seek to avoid prejudice in society; and they find love their places of worship. In other words, the theme of socio-spiritual status emerges. Participants' responses suggest that God is present in their earthly affairs and linked to their identity as a spiritual being that can connect with God regardless of the limited, unfavored position that they hold as victims in a culture – even religious culture – that does not consistently value victims' needs.

Participants' responses included:

1. "When your place of worship is a God filled, love filled place, a place where God is 1st it would be easier to get help. [...] A shelter may make you feel defeated."
2. "I believe it is to avoid guilt and shame. The church is the one place where they have been taught God love you no matter what."

Respondents thought that women of African heritage tend to go to their places of worship for help in domestic violence situations before they seek shelter services because of the familiarity of perceived love and safety in their places of worship as opposed to the fear of unknown treatment or possible prejudices that may exist in unfamiliar shelters. The lack of an identified collective identity (collective ethos and action) deters some victims from accessing resources outside of communities with which they identify. Women of color often turn to their faith-based communities before mental health, social service, and medical providers (Bent-Goodley; West).

5. What can the community do to assist in addressing domestic violence?

This perspective also emerges in a participant's response to the question of what the community can do in addressing domestic violence: "Change the way the victim is viewed look at them the

way God looks at us with open arms and understanding.” Providing several ideas before the educational session started, the respondents suggest the following: more pronounced indication to people that “we” care; encouragement for victims to seek assistance; meetings and group discussions; direct involvement with a victim, providing supporting, and being responsible by reporting abuse; emphasizing a need for more domestic violence in the community; promoting a change in negative social view of victims to a spiritual view of God’s love for victims.

This perspective reflects a call for people to consider the thematic concept of socio-spiritual status of victims, as well as the importance of considering collective community (collective ethos and action) when thinking about the conditions that can be improved to better meet the needs of victims. It was also highlighted in one of the participants’ comments in the discussion during the workshop, following the completion of the pre-session survey; she spoke about how the people in a victim’s community may not be able to assist in domestic violence because of their lack of understanding about the complexities of the issue:

C: you know, it could just be, you know, in other degrees, but um sometimes people just don’t understand um domestic violence. Sometimes if you never walked that walk

D [overlapping]: hmm

C: and you’ve never been there. You see, I’ve been there

[?]: hmm

C: and a lot of people think that, you know, you can easily just walk away, but that’s not always the case

6. What can the church do to assist in addressing domestic violence?

Respondents list the following as interventions that can be conducted to address the issue of domestic violence: prayer, support for (potential) victims, counseling/hotline/”secret services,” openly addressing the issue, meetings and conferences, and public awareness. These responses

align with the recommendations by Lynda Marie Jordan in “Domestic Violence in the African-American Community: The Role of The Black Church,” especially her view that healing methods include: the need for more Christian education; sermons that speak against male domination and abuse; and women in leadership roles in the church (22). Respondents desired the church to be more than just a house of prayer and worship in regards to addressing domestic violence. They wanted the church to more prominently reflect the thematic concept of collective ethos and action by providing access to services that are already available through community organizations. It is possible that women of African heritage would be more likely to utilize these services if they were offered by the church instead of community organizations. Since the church is viewed as a loving and supporting place (based on the participants’ responses to #5) and can be interpreted as a hospitable environment, the church has the potential to be a healing environment.

The pre-workshop responses reflected the thematic filters used to analyze the educational materials; however, the thematic lenses that emerged most clearly in the pre-workshop questionnaire responses are collective ethos and action and socio-spiritual status. The interpretive filter of empowering womanist religious rhetorics does not emerge as clearly, leading me to expect them to possibly emerge in the responses linked to the educational effectiveness and cultural competence of the educational materials presented during the workshop

Structured Interview Questions (Written & Verbal Responses)

After the viewing of the DVD was complete and discussion had occurred at various intervals throughout the viewing of *The Preachers*, participants had the opportunity to write responses to the following questions, as well as discuss their responses to the following questions during the

workshop. This series of questions, designed to identify any differences in the pre- and post-workshop perspectives and/or knowledge, include repeated presentation of the questions that were given before the session started.

1. **How do you respond to what you have seen? What feelings came up as you watched the**

DVD? Respondents reported feelings of sadness (reflections on their own experiences with domestic violence and/or for victims); “hurt” – sadness prompted by the awareness of domestic violence; prominence of the issue in society, including direct quoting of statistics that were presented during the workshop; awareness, resulting from a new or increased understanding of the impact of domestic violence; and inspiration to take action. One respondent answered the questions with a question of her own: “How can I be a help? The world needs our help!” This response suggests excitement and eagerness of this participant to engage in the fight against domestic abuse. Walker’s definition of womanism includes a reference to womanists being committed and wholeness of entire people; the participants stated desires and intentions to become active in helping others who are involved in domestic violence and to spread awareness to the community as a whole reflects this womanist ideal. In addition, the responses of the participants to this question reflect their connection to the traditional practice of outreach conducted through the Black Church since its conception. Making an impact – politically, financially, culturally, and socially – is nothing new in African-American Christian traditions/the Black Church, for centuries of outreach, education, and activism have occurred to promote social justice, equality, and holistic well-being.

2. **Why are men battering women and children?** After the workshop, the respondents’ answers highlighted the influence of past experiences with violence; however, some (3 of 10)

responses included new references to alcohol and drugs as stimulants of increased violence in domestic situations.

A: Like in the beginning, it was just, he was just emotionally abusive to her, verbally abusive where she had no, where she had been torn down so much that she didn't even know how to build herself back up until somebody else saw something in her but that's how it starts. And then like I said a lot of times alcohol is involved because it seems like a Saturday night people getting together. All of a sudden something said, next thing you know somebody get hit

Respondents believe that substance abuse (especially alcohol) is a major contributing factor for domestic violence. The educational video does not include references to alcohol; however, during the workshop, discussion of various triggers and attributes of batterers were discussed. Alcohol use, drug use, and anger management deficiencies were acknowledged and discussed during the session. The fact that this point emerges in the post-workshop responses of the participants suggests the significance that they placed on their collective ethos established in the workshop. For example, by placing value on the perspectives shared during the workshop by the participants, in addition to the content delivered on the DVD and prompted by the companion study guide, participants' inclusion of references to alcohol as a stimulus for abusive behavior suggests an importance that the participants' assign to the knowledge gleaned through their own knowledge making/sharing. It also suggests flexibility in their acceptance of information coming from sources other than the expert material delivered in BDCVI's educational materials.

- 3. Do you believe there a lack of accountability required for men who batter?** Respondents included concerns about loopholes in the law enforcement and justice system that create ineffective strategies for holding batterers accountable for domestic violence.

A: [...] It seems like the system is just down, or beating the victim down no matter what. You can try, try, try and it seems like – and even before that, if the male has already been through it several times, he'll start telling the victim, "Well, you already know they ain't gonna do nothing."

The consistency of the respondents' pre- and post- workshop responses suggests their lack of confidence in law enforcement and distrust in the legal system. Westfield discusses the fact that some African-American women experience "inhospitality" in mainstream society (*Hospitality*), which also can include their experiences with law enforcement and the justice system.

Moreover, the lack of trust in law enforcement and the legal system reflects decades of unfair treatment and cultural insensitivity, leading some African-American women to avoid interactions with these social institutions, even at the risk of their lives. From a traditional standpoint, the Black Church has been where African-Americans have gone for help; it is also the place where inequities in social, legal, and justice systems have been highlighted. Therefore, the lack of trust in the legal systems – supported by anecdotal evidence of batterers who aren't punished or rehabilitated adequately – emerges in some of the participants' perspectives and responses.

4. Do you believe that there is a systematic acceptance of violence against women?

Explain. Answers reflected the same responses given before the workshop, overall.

References to flaws in the legal system, community resources, and social views on domestic violence were indicated in the respondents' answers. The educational materials seem to have aligned with the participants pre-workshop views about a systematic acceptance of violence against women. The following excerpt from the workshop transcript reveals one participant's verbalized view of the ineffectiveness of the current law enforcement and combined community effort to respond the problems of domestic abuse:

A: [...] And a lot of the times now just thinking about how the whole system works, it's actually, more so for the defender, defendant and you can come and get the warrant for the person but nine times out of ten you're not gonna find that person. I mean they can, you can see them in Lewiston at the Duck Thru twenty minutes ago. Law enforcement get there, might be right there looking at the person. A lot of times it's just the mindset of what is of why our law enforcement is doing. It's like the discord of communication between our entities that can help these women. It's like communication is non-existent. The woman can come in. She can go, go get the domestic violence order. She can have law enforcement serve the person. They go to court. By the time that time frame for them to go to court, he's done talked to her, she's starting to recant

B: huh hmm

A: bottom line. So when she starts recanting then they start saying, "Well, how do we fix this issue?" Well, I say what you can do is know that there are things out there, but it needs to be done is everybody needs to be on the same page where if a person comes to social services and says, "Look, I'm going through such and such. It's right now."

Respondents view the legal system as incompetent jurisprudence. The belief that the justice system can't truly help victims influences some victims to accept the abuse. What emerges in the responses is a suggestion for improved collective ethos and action, particularly by community organizations, law enforcement, and the justice system. The responses indicate a lack of identification with these agencies and a subsequent mistrust of them.

5. Why do women of African heritage typically go to their places of worship before seeking shelter services? Participants' responses included clear statements favoring places of worship over shelter services for victims, due to their perspective that places of worship

and faith-leaders in them are not judgmental and genuinely care about them. In addition, places of worship, viewed as the sanctuary for God's presence, are highlighted as an earthly medium through which direct connection to God and His divine assistance are available.

They responded:

“They are seeking answers from a non judgmental person.”

“Jesus. Jesus is the answer and the BFF [best friend forever] that will never tell anyone! He will never tell anyone! He will listen, hold, concole, forgive, and nourish wholeness into your (their) life (lives). Amen.”

Once again focusing on the expectation for spiritual guidance from God and churches, as well as a feeling of safety that women of African heritage typically feel when they go to their places of worship, respondents provided responses that were consistent with the responses given before the workshop started. There is no apparent change in the responses in the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires for this question. The impact of the workshop appears to be its reinforcement of respondents' existing beliefs; otherwise, the impact could be interpreted as lack of impact of the respondents' views about the choice of women of African heritage typically to go to their places of worship before seeking shelter services.

6. What can the community do to assist in addressing domestic violence?

Respondents generally gave the same answers to this question as they had given in the pre-workshop round of questions. However, there were more references to taking action against violence and specific references to support groups, meetings, conferences, and direct contacting of local social services office to request more attention to be given to children in their schools and adult behavioral issues associated with domestic abuse. Such responses include the following:

“Get involved let it be known to social services or other resources pay more attention to children at schools and sometimes adult behaviors change.”

“Have violence help and support groups held often and invite domestic violence victims to share their personal stories/circumstances.”

“Forming groups and communities that cares and put forth Action to Fight Against Violence.”

“Letting the community know that it does exist. Hosting workshops about domestic violence an what the community can do to help.”

Womanism promotes learning and knowing, linking the participants’ responses to the idea of promoting and sharing knowledge that will support a commitment to the womanist ideal of survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female (Walker). Moreover, as discussed in previous analytical comments, the Black Church invests much time, energy, and effort in educating its members and communities on public safety issues. Participants’ responses on this aspect of traditional Black Church outreach practices reflect their perspective that the effective outreach and education through the church is possible and important. The change in responses suggests that a heightened sense of collective ethos and action developed during the workshop, perhaps by the participants’ engagement with the sermon delivery and the integration of statistical data/facts about domestic abuse in the African-American community.

7. What can the church do to assist in addressing domestic violence?

Reflecting respondents’ pre-workshop views of what the church could do to assist in addressing domestic violence, second-round responses reemphasized meetings, support groups, counseling, and hotlines. An excerpt from the workshop transcript highlights one participant’s articulation of the need for phone support for victims.

B: I wrote um having people available at any time.

Researcher: Okay

B: Ones that are familiar with the situation [issues relating to domestic violence] and cause domestic violence doesn't happen at 9 to 5. It may happen at 3 o'clock in the morning. Where you gon' go? Who you gon' call? You need to have the people available. You know, I can be ready in ten minutes, 15 minutes, to meet that need.

Researcher: Okay. So somehow come up with a 24-hr. availability

B: Right

Researcher: Okay, so people who are in a situation or need someone to talk to or somebody to help them

B: somebody's available

Researcher: Yes ma'am

A: And just having somebody who is not going to be quote unquote – it's gotta be the right people in that position.

Linking to the theme of collective ethos and action, as well as the theme of empowering womanist religious rhetorics, participants' responses also called for direct messages on the issue to be delivered from the pulpit and more attention given to the delivery of "healing words" from churches, their leaders, and their parishioners. Since the Black Church has traditionally been a platform from which messages of liberation and freedom are presented, participants believe that domestic violence is also an important topic to be addressed in the church. Moreover, as a matter of public safety, domestic violence is as significant in community well-being as gun violence, gang violence, and AIDS/HIV awareness issues. Because of the destructive nature of domestic violence against individuals, families, and communities, the womanist link to these responses

stems from their relationship to Walker's definition of womanism, specifically referring to the survival and wholeness of entire people. By speaking on the destructive impacts of domestic violence from the pulpit and within church communities/congregations, church leaders and parishioners can create environments that promote and potentially facilitate support for those who are impacted. Traditionally, sermons have been catalysts for change in the community.

The responses, in both rounds of questioning, highlight the following issue that persists in churches that do not clearly articulate messages that promote healing for unhealthy family dynamics in "Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence among U.S. Couples" :

For instance, by promoting the sanctification of marital bonds and family life, some religious groups and traditions may actually make it more difficult for both victims and perpetrators to come forward and seek counseling (from clergy or others), and may also lead victims of abuse to remain in dangerous relationships. Certain theological systems may also make it more difficult for clergy and others to acknowledge and deal with the phenomenon of domestic violence, and may limit clergy awareness of (or interest in) secular agencies or resources for helping abuse victims and their families. These and other important issues deserve close attention from researchers in the future. (284)

Respondents would rather have the option of calling clergy in cases of emergencies instead of having to call law enforcement. If clergy are perceived by the victim as being the right people to call, those people may be persons deemed by victims are more trustworthy than law enforcement of social workers. Also, these trusted, "right" people can include counselors, or anyone who is familiar with domestic violence and is willing and able to assist in ways requested by respective victims. In addition, two respondents recommended having survivors to share their stories to serve as inspiration for others who might also be in abusive situations. During the workshop,

one of the participants shared the following point, which connects to one of the suggestions given by the participants. This idea of sharing stories will be discussed in the following chapter:

A: And that was a point. Remember I was talking about the woman who said that she felt victimized and having to relive it all over again. That was a point of the advocate is that if you can go on and be that courageous person and tell that story, then you might encourage someone who is sitting in the public who is going through what you're going through to get that courage, to make that move to arise and take up your bed and walk away.

This particular recommendation by a respondent is interesting due to its presence in a pre- and post-workshop response. Clearly, for participants, sharing of narratives, personal experiences with domestic abuse is important enough to recommend. The absence of a testimonial of abuse/survival in the workshop leads to questions regarding ways in which the educational materials might be improved.

Educational Effectiveness & Cultural Competence Questions

At the end of the workshop, participants were given a set of questions to provide further insight into their reactions to the materials. Ultimately, the answers to the questions would provide insight into their survey responses. The implications that stem from participants' reactions will be explored further in the next chapter. To better understand the participants' responses, each question is discussed and explored using womanism and African-American Church Traditions/Black Church Cultural Tool Kit as interpretive lenses.

- 1. What influenced your decision to participate in this workshop?** Respondents answered this question by referring to their interest in gaining more knowledge about the issue. “Also, some responses indicated that respondents chose to participate in the study because of their

previous experiences as victims of domestic abuse. Also, some indicated their belief that participating was a way to be helpful and to meet a need that exists.

- 2. What did you hope to learn by participating?** Responses generally indicated participants' desire to learn more about domestic violence and to learn how to help others. Specific representative examples include the following.

Information Focus: "Become more knowledgeable" / "Hope to learn"

Escape Assistance Focus: "What I could do to help" / "How to be able to help someone or have resources to help and get results"

These learning goals reflect participants' verbalized and written engagement during the workshop and their general inclination to use learning for personal advocacy in their communities. Respondents' answers to this question connect to their answers given in #4 (where they indicate what they learned) and #5 (what they intended to share with others).

- 3. Were your expectations met or not met? Explain.** Nine of the ten participants responded to this question. All who responded answered "yes" and some indicated in their written and verbal responses that their expectations were exceeded. For example, respondents replied with affirmative on the merging of the religious content with the content on domestic violence: "Yes beyond what I ever imagined. I was very impressed with the pastor's word and how it related to domestic violence." Other responses indicated respondents' expectations to learn about helpful resources, such as hotline telephone numbers to share with others and the facts associated with the issue of domestic violence (e.g., statistics relating to incidents of violence and homicides associated with domestic violence). The educational materials appear to have been especially effective in meeting respondents' stated expectations to learn more about the topic of domestic violence.

4. What did you learn, if anything, from the DVD that you did not know before?

Responses to this question reflected notes that participants were taking during the session, specifically statistical data and facts associated with domestic violence. The responses reflect a brief transitional moment during the workshop when participants were asked if they were learning anything during the session. Their enthusiastic responses suggested that the educational materials and the workshop were yielding positive learning results for the study participants, perhaps due to their lack of previous exposure to information about domestic violence:

Researcher: good stuff, okay [pause, setting up DVD for next sermon] Does anyone feel like you're learning anything.

Voices: Oh, yes.

A: a lot

Researcher: Was this not quite what you thought it was going to be?

B: More

Laughter

A: I would say more

Researcher: I was thinking in a bad way.

D: Oh, no.

Researcher: Oh, no. What am I walking into.

A: Yeah, it's good. Learning so much

D: It's helping.

This exchange reveals my expectation that participants, even if only anecdotally, would have attended the event with a set idea that domestic violence was a pervasive issue. However,

despite my knowledge of the limited formal resources available to the study participants, I was still surprised that they hadn't come across information in their online communities and/or through other media (e.g., television, radio, and social networking).

5. What, if anything, has the content of the DVD inspired you to share with others? What content? With whom? Respondents indicated their interest in sharing information about domestic violence and warning signs with battered women, children, and teens. What most prominently emerges in their responses is the identification of their desire to broaden collective ethos and action among others, establishing a connection with other community members of varied ages for the ultimate goal of spreading knowledge for the purpose of acting against the social problem.

6. How do you feel about the songs and music included on the DVD?

Indicating their identification with the educational materials, particularly the DVD's inclusion of compelling elements of empowering womanist religious rhetorics, participants responded enthusiastically in their written responses to this question. In addition, there were multiple moments connections to the songs emerged during the workshop, especially when participants sang or hummed along with music presented in the DVD, particularly Rev. Love's rendition of "We Shall Not Be Moved." Responses such as encouraging, uplifting, inspiring, and touching were used to describe the songs music integrated into the DVD. One commented, "They were helpful years ago and they are still effective." Moreover, one respondent explained her ability to connect with her historical cultural heritage through the songs. Her response:

"Nourishing and soothing to the soul is how I felt about the music included in the DVD.

It also reminds me of the slaves by the river worshipping God. I can literally see the

Preacher on a tree stump and worshippers all around with tears in their eyes and hands to the sky.”

The Black Church began as an invisible institution for during the era of slavery in the U.S.; during this era, slaves would congregate secretly, singing and worshipping God together. Songs created for worship and coded communication were passed down and have continued to be mainstays in cultural history. The performance of “We Shall Not Be Moved” was passionate, not following a set tempo or accompanied by musical instruments. Signaling to a collective ethos (a shared identity) and recognition of traditional symbols spanning generations of traditional Black Church members (empowering womanist religious rhetorics – particularly songs that connect history and social action), Rev. Love’s performance of the song, which was integrated into the sermon with a brief contextual note of how her own mother would sing the song in church during worship services. Further, Love’s rendition of the song inserts lyrics that connect to the occasion. Instead of singing just “We shall not, we shall not be moved,” Love adapts the lyrics to express, “No more walking on egg shells, we shall not be moved” and creates a relevant, cause-oriented, womanist, liberatory performance of the spiritual. The customization of the lyrics to reflect the refusal of oppression and control – abuse – within the larger context of the spiritual song demonstrates a symbolic ability of victims and activists to engage in defiant action against oppression inculcated by systematic social and cultural institutions of religion and tradition.

7. How do you feel about the scriptures included in the sermons presented on the DVD?

Responses to the scriptures were also positive. One participant summed up her evaluation by writing, “Words can’t express.” Others used descriptors similar to ones used for the responses to the previous question: inspiring and uplifting. Others remarked on how they felt that the

scriptures used were relevant for the topic of domestic violence, and one participant indicated that the scriptures provided evidence of abuse “being around since and before Jesus.” During the viewing of the DVD, there were moments during the sermon by Rev. Sharon Ellis when participants joined in with her recitation of Psalm 23, which emphasized integrating of personal pronouns *I* and *my* to emphasize the connection with which Christians can make scriptures personal, relevant, and tools for empowerment. The responses suggest that the organization’s claims of cultural competence aligned with the needs of this specific group. The Black Church is diverse and informed by many denominations, as well as non-denominational traditions; however, the educational materials managed to receive consistent praise for the inclusion of elements that aligned with participants’ religious and cultural needs. For audiences outside the cultural group of the Black Church, the question regarding the effectiveness of the materials’ ability to provide insight into the Black Church and its connections with domestic violence/domestic violence interventions would be an interesting point of study in an effort to identify aspects that do not clearly help audiences’ understanding of themes that emerge in the materials.

8. Did the style or of the sermons appeal to you? If so, what about one of more the sermons connected with you? In what way(s)?

Reflecting the theme of collection ethos and action, directly identifying their connection to the sermon’s delivery, as well as the idea of collective community and shared essence/identification with the ministers and the content delivered by the ministers, respondents answered included the following:

“Yes, the way the sermons related to myself on a personal level. Also Ms. Ellis ma[d]e me excited with her encouraging sermon.”

“The sermons were re[l]event. It was so on point to give viewers an idea of a knowing that Jesus is Against Violence and it’s not just for the world to handle - - - Its’ for us to work together.”

“Dr. Love’s view of the 4 friends really was an eye opener for me. Her description of the unhealed healer help[ed] deepen [sic] my view on each component of those who try to help the victim.”

All responses indicated an appreciation of the sermons. Responses emphasized the importance of collective community – either in reference to Rev. Love’s presentation of the four friends of a paralytic man as unhealed healers or in reference to the general effectiveness of the sermons collectively emphasizing the need for “us” to work together against violence. Also, comments were included regarding the charismatic delivery of the sermons, especially the final sermon by Pastor Sharon Ellis. Even though none of the preachers used the “traditional Black sermonic style” of “whooping” (DeBose), the delivery of the sermons included in the educational materials was appealing and effective, based on participants feedback and observed engagement during the viewing of the educational DVD.

9. What portions of the DVD did you enjoy most? Explain.

According to their responses, the participants’ most enjoyed the thematic elements of the of the DVD that reflect empowering womanist religious rhetorics - themes of empowerment through words, as well as Black Church cultural themes of prayer, sermons encouraging social action, and songs and spirituals that connect history and social action. Responses included: “the entire DVD as whole; singing and preaching; sermon on the four committed helpers (*Mark* 2:1-12); the presence of women as the speakers on the issue – “all powerful women who love the Lord and do his will for their lives”; and Rev. Ellis’s use the *Psalm* 23, “tone” for delivery of her sermon,

and emphasis of entering oneself (I, me, my) into the scriptures. In addition, thematic concepts of collective ethos and action emerge in the respondents' identified favorite portions, due to their integration of meanings associated the characteristic essence of a group, including its cultural symbols, customs, beliefs, as well as the engagement among members of the group in worship experiences, community service, communication, and multidisciplinary social action.

10. What portions of the DVD did you enjoy least? Explain.

Only one response indicated a portion of the DVD that was least enjoyed. While all other responses indicated that there was nothing that was not enjoyed, one participant noted the use of “bitches” by Pastor Ellis when identifying names used to berate women in contemporary society. The participant’s displeasure stemmed from surprise by its integration into the sermon: “When Ms. Ellis spoke curse words. I guess I wasn’t expecting it.” Perhaps, due to the departure of usual vernacular integrated in discourse utilized in the rhetorical contexts of worship and religious education, the use of language that is deemed profane within the context of a spiritual moment was not expected or able to be ignored for its apparent breach of boundaries established for a traditional Black Church cultural experience.

Educational Effectiveness & Cultural Competence Survey

At the end of the workshop, participants were given the following survey to complete to reveal their views on the effectiveness and cultural competence of the educational materials used during the session. I did not conduct a discussion of cultural competence before administering the surveys to minimize influences from others’ views on their individual responses. Their responses indicate that the majority of the study participants rate the materials’ effectiveness positively. The responses to the survey align with the positive written responses to the questions

regarding the materials' effectiveness. The implications that stem from participants' reactions will be explored further in the next chapter.

BCDVI makes several statements regarding the purpose and goals of its educational ministry. Regarding BCDVI's educational aims, how well do <u>The Preachers</u> DVD and this workshop...						
	Very Poorly	Poorly	Neutral /Okay	Well	Very Well	Don't Know
deliver the liberating Word	-	-	-	2	8	-
lift spirits of those concerned about the faith based response to violence against women	-	-	-		10	-
show how communities of faith and domestic violence agencies can work together to develop a healthy coordinated community response to serve African-American families	-	-	1	4	5	-
present information in a culturally competent manner	-	-	1	2	7	-

Figure 1: Educational Effective & Cultural Competence Survey

Respondents expressed their willingness to participate in this workshop because they hoped to gain more knowledge about domestic violence including statistical data, facts, as well as warning signs of possible victims of domestic violence. In reality, the information that the respondents desired to ascertain was readily available to them through various means. Statistical data, facts, as well as warning signs of possible victims of domestic violence can be found via internet. Links to counseling services are provided by social services. Legal forms, protective orders, and affidavits can be obtained through the Clerk of Superior Court. Emergency services and immediate protection are accessed by making a phone call Emergency 911. Despite having these different avenues of obtaining knowledge available to them, it seems that respondents felt more comfortable, confident, and safe participating in a workshop held at their place of worship. With the exception of two participants, who shared that they had participated in sessions relating to the issue of domestic violence – either as a school- or job-related requirement – no other participants revealed participation in an a session or workshop relating to domestic abuse.

Consistent themes within the responses of the participants reoccur throughout the workshop.

These themes include:

- Women of African heritage tend to go to their places of worship for help in domestic violence situations before they seek shelter services because of the familiarity of perceived love and safety in their places of worship as opposed to the fear of unknown treatment or possible prejudices that may exist in unfamiliar shelters or services,
- Respondents have a lack of confidence in law enforcement and distrust in the legal system,
- Respondents view the legal system as incompetent jurisprudence,
- Respondents trust clergy more than judicial officials, and
- Respondents would rather have the option of calling clergy in cases of emergencies instead of having to call law enforcement. These consistent themes suggest that the most effective educational environment for women of African heritage would be the church.

Moreover, the educational effectiveness is increased by the cultural competence of the language used in the delivery of the educational material. Instead of bombarding the participants with assorted legal jargon, the education material is presented through sermons accompanied by scriptures, songs, and prayer. Participants submitted positive responses to scriptures referring to the scriptures as inspiring, uplifting, as well as tools for empowerment. They also described the songs as encouraging, nourishing, and touching. This culturally relevant approach fostered an atmosphere of serenity, trust, and sincerity. Once the speakers began to preach and teach about domestic violence the participants were open and eager to learn. Using this teaching method of the educational workshop that integrated Womanist Black Church themes reaffirmed the participants' preconceived notion of God being active in earthly affairs, which is one of the

foundational concepts of black Christianity as presented in McCoy's cultural tool kit of African-American churches.

Member Checking Meeting

During the member-checking meeting, two questions were used to ascertain the participants' perceptions of the findings.

1. As you recall, does this draft of the report reflect what your words (written and spoken) and actions during the workshop?

Yes _____ No _____

1. If your answer is no, please explain your answer.

During the member-checking meeting, the participants were shown and given copies of a 40-slide PowerPoint presentation covering my review of the data collected during the workshop. At the conclusion of the meeting, both respondents replied "yes" to the question asking if what I reported reflected their recollection of their written and spoken responses. Both marked "yes" and also explained during the meeting their view that the presentation of the data reflected their memory of other participants' views. They also commented on how much they enjoyed the session and how they felt that the participants were "waiting" for the opportunity to discuss the issue of domestic violence within the context of our religious community.

Since the workshop was the first of its kind at the research site for the study's participants, the participants' language, behaviors, and responses resulted in the identification of responses to and evaluation of the materials' competence free from influences of previous exposure to the content, theoretical and pedagogical theory, and cultural tools employed in the materials. As anticipated, due to my review of womanist theory and analysis of the educational materials prior to the workshop, the responses generated by the study participants conclude that

BCDVI effectively uses language to encourage freedom of battered women from culturally constructed social and religious domination, clergy from church traditions, and secular practitioners from ignorance of the complex connection of religion to women's experiences in domestic violence. Further, language used in the educational materials reflects the beliefs and values of the participants, resulting in an effective educational experience and a productive session during which participants were motivated and empowered to engage in generating ideas to combat violence in their communities.

Conclusion

Overall, the workshop appears to have been successful in its attempt to provide - within a culturally competent paradigm - information about the issue of domestic violence with an ultimate goal of promoting the group to construct a community action plan by which to engage the religious community with secular agencies in the community through which to respond to domestic violence.

The workshop created an actual community, one that aligns with Black Church cultural traditions and the womanist theme of collective community. By conducting the workshop with a constructed community space populated by women who were like-minded in their interest to participate in the study, I was able to create a physical representation of the womanist theme (placement of women and their issues in the center). The feedback provided in the participants' written and spoken responses, as well as my observations, reflected their recognition of community and apparent comfort to express themselves in relaxed language and behavior.

Within the context of the analytical theme of socio-spiritual status, the workshop highlighted the place of women – including Christian women – within the context of domestic violence and sexual assault. By having a focus placed on women “in the church” who are

involved in domestically unhealthy relationships, the participants were able to consider the various contexts in which victims and batterers function. Moreover, as participants in the study, they were also given an opportunity to engage as agents of action or change; by participating in the study, they had a chance to not only respond to the educational materials but to identify and explore possible actions through which they could engage in the fight against domestic abuse.

Also, through such thinking and engagement with the other participants and the educational materials, study participants were able to hear and articulate empowering womanist religious rhetorics; their affirming comments to each other during the session (“yes,” “it’s okay,” “that’s right,” “uh hmm”) and their singing-along, laughing, and expressing affirmative utterances during their viewing of the educational DVD demonstrated their connection with the language and cultural expressions that were part of the session.

In response to the overarching question – How do rural, Southern African-American Christian women engage language as a social practice with culturally competent education and social action as its expected outcomes? – the simple answer is that rural, Southern African-American Christian women engage language as a social practice with social action as its expected outcome in ways similar to how they would engage when the expected outcome is not social action against domestic violence. This perspective is contemplated further in the following chapter. Moreover, the findings do provide opportunities to reflect on how the educational effectiveness might improve, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Ensuring that all services are of the highest quality and culturally competent is critical to the success of this endeavor. Culturally competent intervention methods are needed across all levels of intervention: individual, couple, family, group, community, and societal. In addition to providing such interventions, they should be documented to provide greater confidence in results and to offer opportunities for replication in other comparable places. Tricia Bent-Goodley & Oliver J. Williams (41)

As presented at the beginning of this dissertation, the ultimate research question for this project is: How do rural, Southern African-American Christian women engage language as a social practice with culturally competent education and social action as its expected outcomes? This participant-observer field study, combined with rhetorical analysis of materials used in the study, identifies what emerges as culturally competent conduits for educating, communicating with, and promoting social action by a specific group of African-American women of faith in rural Northeastern North Carolina. The results of this study identify the culturally competent conduits as sermons, songs, narrative testimonies, and hospitable interaction. This study supports research that presents relationships among womanist discourses, religion, community, and social awareness. The participants' verbalized, written, and demonstrated expressions seemed familiar – much like what I would observe and experience during a Sunday morning worship experience. They also aligned with the cultural themes that I used to explore traditions and ideologies of womanism in the Black Church (collective ethos and action, empowering womanist religious rhetorics, and socio-spiritual status). Perhaps the “social action” outcome against domestic violence aligns with the same level of concern that participants have for those who are “lost” or in need of soul-salvation (the Christian belief in eternal redemption from spiritual bondage of sin), a loving church community, or spiritual rescue. Since the focus of the educational materials was on domestic violence and sexual assault against women, the salvation message from “sins”

committed *by* a person differed in its application to the sin of “domestic violence” *against* a person. The salvation message appears to have yielded results in participants’ engagement due to the cultural filters through which the message was presented. If the educational materials included a sermon on domestic violence delivered by a male clergy – still constructed and delivered through a womanist lens – responses and discussion potentially would have been different. It would be interesting to explore the differences in participants’ experience with the materials had they included a sermon presented through a different gender-based performance style.

While a major focus is placed on sharing the stories of the Bible and presenting them through a womanist lens to highlight domestic abuse through sermons, I found that the workshop participants’ sharing of their personal stories during the workshop links to a tradition of giving testimonies. During the workshop, three of the participants shared stories of abuse that they had endured and escaped. This was particularly interesting to me because none of the questions given to the participants (written or verbally) asked them to identify if they had been victims or batterers. Also, during the member-checking session, one of the participants stated that she felt that the women [the study participants] were just waiting for an opportunity to share their stories. Moreover, one of the participants said that she recommends (as part of an action plan) to invite survivors to share their stories of abuse and survival. After watching the videos during the workshop, respondents either reflected on their personal experiences as victims of domestic violence or identified with victims they knew personally. The integration of their own narratives, even though their personal experiences with domestic violence were not a focus of the study, became a dominant component in the communication during the session. Four of the participants shared stories of dysfunctional intimate, domestic relationships. They also all shared

that they are no longer in such relationships. Because narratives are what family relations social researcher April Few identifies as “integral to understanding culture” (493), the inclusion of designated time for sharing/verbalizing, hearing, and/or reading narratives of victims, batterers, and advocates’ experiences with domestic violence will likely yield a result of engagement in domestic violence advocacy. I recommend the integration of a storytelling component into the educational materials created to appeal to future groups of African-American women of Christian faith. Stories (narratives) by victims, survivors, clergy, advocates, social workers/practitioners, law enforcement/first-responders, children (or adults who observed or experienced domestic abuse as children) would be a recommendation regarding the development of culturally competent materials to appeal to the specific demographic that I am studying. Also, storytelling by African-American women of Christian faith, who identify themselves as part of rural communities (facing similar challenges relating to access to resources and cultural views within their communities) is recommended.

When conducting the research, I found particularly interesting the interactions among the participants, the overlapping of comments, the completion of each other’s statements, the laughter, and the affirming utterances during particularly emotional moments. Research in the discursive strategies among women collaborating for social action would be an interesting study, especially if it explores and identifies discursive strategies that work effectively for groups as they generate, synthesize, and implement ideas for positive impacts on contemporary society.

This research project is the beginning of my focus on discourses of rural African-American women relating to domestic violence. The enthusiasm of the participants and the subsequent awareness activity that has occurred in my church has been rewarding on personal, spiritual, intellectual, and civic levels. Since the study, the church has observed Domestic

Violence Awareness Month as part of a Sunday Morning worship service, Adult Sunday School teachers (male and female) have integrated discussions about domestic violence into their lessons. In addition, church members (study participants and non-participants) have stated that they are interested in planning more awareness sessions and partnerships with community organizations.

With a problem as insidious and pervasive as domestic violence, there will always be more research to conduct and work to do. What made this study on educating women of African heritage about domestic violence effective was the trusted environment in which the workshop took place and the culturally relevant language used to disseminate information. The implications of my findings suggest that educating women of African heritage about domestic violence through Westfield's womanist pedagogical practice of concealed gatherings in a trusted place of worship while using culturally relevant language has potential to be an effective technique in combating domestic violence within the context of rural, African-American women in the Black Church. This research would be potentially more enlightening if conducted with a larger group, perhaps even a group of participants from several Black Church congregations in rural communities, including multiple denominations, to further explore the relationships among discursive and pedagogical approaches, the Black Church, rural communities, and social action against domestic violence in those communities.

Moreover, other interesting paths of discovery would focus examination on Christian clergy – female and male – of the Black Church and other religious faiths who are part of rural African-American communities, as well as Christian men and Christian teens – who are part of rural African-American communities. Studies such as these would offer additional insight into what discursive, pedagogical methods may yield effective results in raising awareness about

domestic violence and increasing anti-domestic violence action within the respective communities. Of course, explorations of these connections beyond specific faith communities is also important and worthwhile, especially considering the growing number of African-Americans who do not identify themselves within Christian traditions or any specific religious groups. The problem of domestic violence is not isolated to Christian communities, so casting the proverbial net to include more groups within rural communities will yield potentially more enlightening research on perceptions, impacts, and discourses associated with domestic violence and social action/interventions against it.

Further, as a teacher of writing in higher education, serving predominantly African-American students, many of whom are individuals from rural communities, I am especially interested in exploring discursive strategies and pedagogies that will enhance my teaching and, ultimately, result in more effective learning and writing. Integrating instruction that reflects womanist theory would help me to provide students another tool by which they may choose “to explore interpretation” of texts and join “a community of women, religious and secular, layperson and scholar, who continue the work of resisting oppressive hegemonies through insightful interpretation and social action” (McCrary, 549). An exploration of womanist pedagogy in the writing classroom of a Historically Black College or University, or with a cohort of students from rural, predominantly African-American communities may contribute to research on effective practices for teaching of writing in multicultural contexts. Also, an exploration of teaching of writing that integrates social action, activism, and what bell hooks identifies as the “souls of our students” (*Teaching to Transgress*) would add to the current body of scholarship on methods of writing instruction that impact students’ lives and communities beyond the four walls – or the iPads – of the writing classroom.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ECU IRB Approval



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Jeanette Morris](#)
CC: [Wendy Sharer](#)
Date: 5/29/2012
Re: [UMCIRB 12-000870](#)
An Examination of the Relationships among African-American Female Discourse(s), Culturally Competent Education, and Social Action against Domestic Violence through The Black Church

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 5/29/2012 to 5/28/2013. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Demographic Questions History	Surveys and Questionnaires
Demographic Questions History	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Informed Consent History	Consent Forms
Interview Questions History	Surveys and Questionnaires
Interview/Discussion Questions History	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Prospectus: An Examination of the Relationships among African-American Female Discourse(s), Culturally Competent Education, and Social Action against Domestic Violence through The Black Church History	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Workshop Announcement/Flyer History	Recruitment

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Study ID:UMCIRB 12-000870 Date Approved: 5/29/2012 Expiration Date: 5/28/2013

East Carolina University



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: An Examination of the Relationships among African-American Female Discourse(s), Culturally Competent Education, and Social Action against Domestic Violence through The Black Church
Principal Investigator: Jeanette W. Morris
Institution/Department or Division: East Carolina University / Ph.D. Program in Technical and Professional Discourse / Department of English
Address: 109 Travis Drive, Elizabeth City, NC 27909 / 429 Mount Olive Road, Windsor, NC 27983
Telephone #: (252) 325-0430

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study problems in society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. Our goal is to try to find ways to improve the lives of you and others. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to identify what is revealed about the impact of the educational resources of The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute as a culturally competent conduit for social action by a group of African-American women of faith in the rural South. Ultimately, the goal of the study is to learn more about the relationship between rural African-American women's discourses and social advocacy/action in order to provide insights into existing knowledge about the relationships among Womanist discourse(s) and cultural competence used in educational practices within/beyond formal classroom settings. By doing this research, I hope to learn the following: What is revealed about culturally competent education methods when employed for the purpose of combating domestic violence within the context of rural, African-American women in the Black Church?

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a woman of/over the age of 18 who attends worship services and/or events at The Church of God for All People. If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about fifteen to twenty people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

If you do not desire being in an setting where sexual and domestic violence are discussed or participating in a study that will give you an opportunity to share your written or verbal responses, you should consider not participating in this research.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research procedures will be conducted at The Church of God for All People Fellowship Hall during June 2012. It will begin at 9:00 a.m. and last until all participants have had an opportunity to participate in discussion. It will not last longer than four hours. You will need to come to The Church of God for All People Fellowship Hall at 9:00 a.m. Lunch will be provided at the end of the workshop at The Church of God for All People Fellowship Hall. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is three to four hours, which includes time for the video presentation, discussion, and lunch.

UMCIRB Number: _____

Consent Version # or Date: _____
UMCIRB Version 2012.02.12

Participant's Initials

Title of Research Study: An Examination of the Relationships among African-American Female Discourse(s), Culturally Competent Education, and Social Action against Domestic Violence through The Black Church

- People designated by PCMH and University Health System

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

All submitted written responses and survey question responses will be anonymous. The anonymity of participants' verbal responses in workshop discussion and interviews will be protected by the changing of the participants' names in the report. After recording written responses in a digital format to be in the possession of the researcher only, all written responses will be returned to participants. The researcher will keep the digital file of collected data for the purpose of research and teaching presentations for the duration of her years in the fields of teaching and research.

What if I decide I do not want to continue in this research?

If you decide you no longer want to be in this research after it has already started, you may stop at any time. You will not be penalized or criticized for stopping. You will not lose any benefits that you should normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The person conducting this study will be available to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at (252) 325-0430 between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 on any day.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the UMCIRB Office at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of UMCIRB Office, at 252-744-1971.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Principal Investigator (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Consent Version # or Date:
UMCIRB Version 2012.03.12

Participant's Initials

Title of Research Study: An Examination of the Relationships among African-American Female Discourse(s), Culturally Competent Education, and Social Action against Domestic Violence through The Black Church

What will I be asked to do?

You are being asked to do the following:

- Phase 1 – Workshop & Lunch: All participants will attend a workshop and lunch (4 hours maximum).
Participants will:
 - Answer questions about their pre-session knowledge of and beliefs about of domestic violence
 - Complete a demographic survey
 - Watch *The Preachers: Working to End Sexual and Domestic Violence* Special Education DVD
 - Respond to the DVD through written responses and group discussion
 - Answer a questionnaire about the content of the DVD and the methods of instruction presented in the DVD and by the facilitator
 - Suggest ways that The Church of God for All People partners can work with others in the community to respond to the problem of sexual and domestic violence – development of a community action plan.
 - Join other participants for lunch and informal discussions after the workshop.
- Phase 2 - Review of Conclusions: At the conclusion of the workshop, the researcher will invite participants to participate in a group meeting (of all interested workshop participants) at a mutually convenient time. At this meeting, the researcher will give all participants an opportunity read portions of a draft of the researcher's findings and to provide the researcher with feedback about the accuracy of participants' words and actions in the report.

What possible harms or discomforts might I experience if I take part in the research?

It has been determined that the risks associated with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. However, if emotional distress arises during the workshop, you may feel free to leave at any time. Also, clergy will be available to provide immediate counseling, if desired.

What are the possible benefits I may experience from taking part in this research?

I do not know if you will get any benefits by taking part in this study. This research might help us learn more about current domestic violence statistics; contact information for local, state, and national domestic violence and sexual assault resources; and methods through which the church can respond to the problem of sexual and domestic violence. Additionally, you may benefit from the social interaction that will occur during the workshop and free lunch for all participants that will follow the workshop. Otherwise, there may be no personal benefit from your participation; however, the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

I will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

What will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research. The researcher will pay the costs of writing materials, handouts, and lunch provided at the workshop.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

To do this research, ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- The researcher
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff, who have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research, and other ECU staff who oversee this research.

UMCIRB Number: UMCIRB 12-000870

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Consent Version # or Date:
UMCIRB Version 2012.03.12

Participant's Initials

APPENDIX C

Workshop Flyer



You Are Invited To Participate In A Research Study.



Event

Domestic Violence Awareness Workshop for Women of Faith

Title of Study

An Examination of the Relationships among African-American Female Discourse(s), Culturally Competent Education, and Social Action against Domestic Violence through the Black Church

Purpose of the Research Study

By doing this research, I hope to learn the following: What is revealed about culturally competent education methods to combat domestic violence when studied within the context of rural, African-American women in the Black Church?

Who is eligible?

Any woman of/over the age of 18 who attends worship services and/or other events at The Church of God for All People is eligible to participate.

What is involved?

- **Phase 1 – Workshop & Lunch:** All participants will attend a workshop and lunch (4 hours maximum). Participants will:
 - Answer questions about their pre-session knowledge of and beliefs about of domestic violence
 - Complete a demographic survey
 - Watch The Preachers: Working to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Special Education DVD
 - Respond to the DVD through written responses and group discussion
 - Answer a questionnaire about the content of the DVD and the methods of instruction presented in the DVD and by the facilitator
 - Suggest ways that The Church of God for All People partners can work with others in the community to respond to the problem of sexual and domestic violence – development of a community action plan.
 - Join other participants for lunch and informal discussions after the workshop.
- **Phase 2 - Review of Conclusions:** At the conclusion of the workshop, the researcher will invite participants to participate in a group meeting (of all interested workshop participants) at a mutually convenient time. At this meeting, the researcher will give all participants an opportunity read portions of a draft of the researcher's findings and to provide the researcher with feedback about the accuracy of participants' words and actions in the report.

What will I receive if I participate in this research study?

Participants will receive:

- Information on domestic violence statistics
- Contact information for local, state, and national domestic violence and sexual assault resources
- An opportunity to engage with other women to discuss the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault against women
- An opportunity to collaboratively brainstorm methods through which the church can respond to the problem of sexual and domestic violence
- An opportunity to participate in a meeting with the researcher to review the researcher's findings

Where does this research take place?

The research will take place at The Church of God for All People Fellowship Hall: 433 Mount Olive Road, Windsor, NC 27983.

How do I participate?

You can participate by attending a workshop on Saturday, June 16, 2012 at 9:00 a.m. Lunch will be served. All participants will be offered the opportunity to participate in a meeting with the researcher to review the findings of the study before the final report is published.



Contact Jeanette W. Morris, Investigator, Ph.D. Candidate,
Program in Technical and Professional Discourse, East Carolina University
Phone: 252.325.0430 / E-mail: morrisj01@students.ecu.edu



APPENDIX D

Demographic Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
 - a. 18-29
 - b. 30-39
 - c. 40-49
 - d. 50-59
 - e. 60-69
 - f. 70-79
 - g. 80-89
 - h. 90+
 - i. I prefer not to answer

2. What is your religious identification?
 - a. Christian
 - b. None
 - c. Other _____
 - d. I prefer not to answer

3. Are you a registered partner of The Church of God for All People?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I prefer not to answer

4. If so, how long have you been a partner [member] of The Church of God for All People?
 - a. less than one year
 - b. 1-5 years
 - c. 5-10 years
 - d. 10-20 years
 - e. 20+ years
 - f. I prefer not to answer

5. What is your race?
 - a. Black
 - b. White
 - c. Hispanic
 - d. Other
 - e. I prefer not to answer

6. What is your current relationship status?
 - a. Single, Never Married
 - b. In a relationship
 - c. Living with partner
 - d. Married
 - e. Separated

- f. Divorced
 - g. Widowed
 - h. I prefer not to answer
7. In which county do you reside?
- a. Bertie
 - b. Hertford
 - c. Gates
 - d. Wilson
 - e. Other _____
 - f. I prefer not to answer
8. How many children do you have (any age)
- a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4
 - f. 5+
 - g. I prefer not to answer
9. Which best describes your employment situation?
- a. Full-time
 - b. Part-time
 - c. Homemaker
 - d. Full-time student
 - e. Retired
 - f. Not currently employed
 - g. I prefer not to answer
10. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.
- a. No schooling completed
 - b. Nursery school to 8th grade
 - c. 9th, 10th, or 11th grade
 - d. 12th grade, No Diploma
 - e. High School Graduate (Diploma or GED)
 - f. Some college credit, but less than 1 year
 - g. 1 or more years of college, no degree
 - h. Associate's degree (for example: AA, AS)
 - i. Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, BS)
 - j. Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MBA)
 - k. Professional degree (for example, MD, DDC, JD)
 - l. Doctorate degree (for example: PhdD, EdD)
 - m. I prefer not to answer

APPENDIX E

Pre-Workshop Questionnaire (Written Responses)

1. Why are men battering women and children?
2. Is there a lack of accountability required for men who batter? Explain.
3. Do you believe that there is a systematic acceptance of violence against women? Explain.
4. Women of African heritage tend to go to their places of worship for help in domestic violence situations before they seek shelter services. Why do you think that is the case?
5. What can the community do to assist in addressing domestic violence?
6. What can the church do to assist in addressing domestic violence?

APPENDIX F

Structured Interview Questions (Written & Verbal Responses)

1. How do you respond to what you have seen? What feelings came up as you watched the DVD?
2. Why are men battering women and children?
3. Why is there a lack of accountability required for men who batter?
4. Do you believe that there is a systematic acceptance of violence against women? Explain.
5. Why do women of African heritage typically go to their places of worship before seeking shelter services?
6. What can the community do to assist in addressing domestic violence?
7. What can the church do to assist in addressing domestic violence?

APPENDIX G

Structured Interview Questions (Written & Verbal Responses)

Educational Effectiveness & Cultural Competence

1. What influenced your decision to participate in this workshop?
2. What did you hope to learn by participating?
3. Were your expectations met or not met? Explain.
4. What did you learn, if anything, from the DVD that you did not know before?
5. What, if anything, has the content of the DVD inspired you to share with others? What content? With whom?
6. How do you feel about the songs and music included on the DVD?
7. How do you feel about the scriptures included in the sermons presented on the DVD?
8. Did the style or of the sermons appeal to you? If so, what about one of more the sermons connected with you? In what way(s)?
9. What portions of the DVD did you enjoy most? Explain.
10. What portions of the DVD did you enjoy least? Explain.

APPENDIX H

Educational Effectiveness and Cultural Competence Survey

BCDVI makes several statements regarding the purpose and goals of its educational ministry.
Regarding BCDVI's educational aims, how well do The Preachers DVD and this workshop...

	Very Poorly	Poorly	Neutral /Okay	Well	Very Well	Don't Know
deliver the liberating Word						
lift spirits of those concerned about the faith based response to violence against women						
show how communities of faith and domestic violence agencies can work together to develop a healthy coordinated community response to serve African-American families						
present information in a culturally competent manner						

APPENDIX I

Member-Checking Meeting (Participants' Review of Researcher's Findings Draft)

1. As you recall, does this draft of the report reflect what your words (written and spoken) and actions during the workshop?
Yes _____ No _____
2. If your answer is no, please explain your answer.

