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# Institutional Ethnography: Utilizing Battered Women's Standpoint to Examine How Institutional Relations Shape African American Battered Women's Work Experiences In Christian Churches

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: UTILIZING BATTERED WOMEN'S  
STANDPOINT TO EXAMINE HOW INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS SHAPE  
AFRICAN AMERICAN BATTERED WOMEN'S WORK EXPERIENCES IN  
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

ADULT EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

by

Ursula T. Wright

2017

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Ursula T. Wright and entitled Institutional Ethnography: Utilizing Battered Women's Standpoint to Examine How Institutional Relations Shape African American Battered Women's Work Experiences in Christian Churches, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Richard Beaulaurier

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Hilary Landorf

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Thomas Reio

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Tonette Rocco, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 30, 2017

The dissertation of Ursula T. Wright is approved.

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Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2017

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the countless women who lost their voice, identity, dignity, and faith in perils of domestic violence, but for whom somehow found the courage to rise again and are now helping other women navigate the chains of oppression. This dissertation is also written for the voices that lost their lives to violence, and hopefully we lift their voice in this writing to redeem the future of our girls and women.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Finally, to the women, advocates, and pastors who shared their hearts, challenges, triumphs, and stories, our lives will never be the same because of what we now know. I am forever grateful that your experience won't be buried under a pile, but this important work shall be spoken throughout the entire world.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: UTILIZING BATTERED WOMEN'S  
STANDPOINT TO EXAMINE HOW INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS SHAPE  
AFRICAN AMERICAN BATTERED WOMEN'S WORK EXPERIENCES IN  
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

By

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Florida International University, 2017

Miami, Florida

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The purpose of the collected papers dissertation was to critically examine the individual and institutional conditions that shaped battered women's work experiences in church organizations. The studies in the collected papers shared the provision of using a methodological and analytic tool, institutional ethnography, that offers a strategic and comprehensive means of investigating issues related to institutions and institutional processes that merge a macro and micro view. The first paper was a conceptual paper that made an important introduction to IE and explained why researchers in the field of AE and HRD should consider embracing a holistic, multilevel research tool that systemically engages research. The conceptual paper emphasized the socio-political context in which adult vocation education is practiced and shared a practical means of using IE to uncover the interconnected and interdependent social processes that prohibit an individual's ability to navigate structural and political subsystems that impact learning, teaching, and



work. In summation, Study #1 highlighted that IE is a viable analytical tool to investigate the institutional nature of personal experiences.

The second paper was an empirical paper that used IE to help us see how battered women's needs as workers in Christian churches are evaporated behind institutional ideologies and actions that invalidate her concerns while preserving their ideals. The study revealed four ways that African American battered women entered into an institutional death process by direct disclosure or assumed disclosure: (a) invalidation, (b) overspiritualization, (c) inauthenticity, (d) and bifurcation. It was found, that once disclosure took place, women placed a different expectation upon the church to respond to their issue of domestic abuse. In summation, Study #2 highlighted the use of IE in uncovering the institutional relations that shaped women's experiences as work in Christian churches.

Overall, the findings elucidate ways that social workers, churches, adult educators, and HRD researchers and practitioners can engage in research that has implications for how to collaborate for implementable solutions. The findings also provide ways for African American women to navigate oppressive regimes; and lends insight to how adult educators, HRD practitioners, and pastors who work with battered women can assist and intervene in the educational, emotional, and natural support areas for African American battered women working in Christian churches.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.	COLLECTED PAPERS INTRODUCTION .....1
	Statement of the Problem .....4
	Purpose of Collected Papers .....6
	Conceptual and Analytic Framework of Collected Papers .....6
	Description of Collected Papers .....11
	Potential Implications of Collected Papers Research .....24
	References .....25
II.	STUDY #1, INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMS .....32
	Institutional Ethnography .....34
	Application of IE.....36
	Research Techniques in IE .....39
	Stages of Data Collection and Analysis.....40
	Grahame’s Study and IE .....48
	Theoretical Contributions of IE .....52
	Benefits and Implications .....54
	References .....56
III.	STUDY #2, INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: UTILIZING BATTERED WOMEN’S STANDPOINT TO EXAMINE HOW INSTITUTIONAL RULING RELATIONS SHAPE AFRICAN AMERICAN BATTERED WOMEN’S WORK EXPERIENCES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES .....61
	Institutional Ethnography .....66
	Purpose and Research Question.....72
	Research Design .....72
	Battered Women’s Collective Plot and Voice .....80
	The Institutional Death Process: A Discussion of Findings .....88
	Implications for AE and HRD .....96
	Implications for Women .....100
	References .....101
IV.	CONCLUSIONS.....105
	Overview of Findings Related to Purpose of the Collected Papers Dissertation.105
	Summary of Study #1 .....108
	Summary of Study #2 .....109
	Brief Overview of Overall Implications of the Collected Papers .....110
	References.....115

V.	APPENDIX .....	116
	VITA .....	118

## **CHAPTER I**

### **COLLECTED PAPERS INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this collected papers dissertation is to critically examine the individual and institutional conditions that shape African American battered women's work experiences in African American churches. This study is framed by a critical human resource development (CHRD) paradigm. Critical paradigms aim to investigate, expose, and mitigate various forms of social, cultural and political domination that shape human experience (Myers, 2009). In this study, critical is defined similarly to that of Fenwick (2004) where ideology, power relations, and practices are unmasked through pragmatic flexibility and analytic research toward the purpose of political reform. The section begins with the background to the problem, statement of the problem, and purpose of the study. Next, the conceptual and analytic framework, and each proposed collected paper is described. This prospectus ends with a brief overview of the significance of the study as well as an organizational outline of corresponding chapter numbers for each of the collected papers and closing chapter.

#### **Background to the Problem for Collected Papers**

Domestic violence is a global public health and safety issue that affects women's lives regardless of "race, ethnicity, class, educational status, geographic location" (Giustina, 2008, pp. 351), professional occupation, or religious faith perspective (Nason-Clark, 2011; Stirling, Cameron, Nason-Clark, & Miedema, 2004.). Domestic violence is commonly defined as any and all forms of abuse that occur within a relationship, including physical, sexual, financial, or psychological abuse (Mouton, Riovi, Furniss, & Lasserl, 1999) and is used interchangeably with the term intimate partner violence.

Domestic violence and intimate partner violence can occur in same sex relationships and with either men or women as the abuser, but this study is focusing on domestic violence relationships where the man is the abuser and the woman is the victim. Statistics across the world indicate that women are abused or murdered by their male intimate partners such as husbands, ex-husbands, common-law husbands, ex-common-law husbands, boyfriends, and ex-boyfriends (Ellsberg, Caldera, Herrera, Winkvist, & Kullgren, 1999; Kroeger & Nason-Clark, 2010); and 17–50% of women are physically assaulted by their intimate partner at least once in their lives (Ellsberg et al., 1999). Each year, in the United States alone, “30% of female homicides are perpetrated primarily by male intimate partners” (McAllister & Robert-Lewis, 2010, pp. 162). Although most discussion have marginalized the issue of domestic violence to be viewed as either a private, individual, medical, or criminal issue, it is a public issue that cannot be confined to one aspect of life because it intersects across geographic and space boundaries to impact families, faith-communities, and employers.

Domestic violence has a public nature that needs attention, particularly in the workplace (Holter, 2012; Mickles, 2001). Among employers, there is an increasing awareness “of how many acts of workplace violence are linked to domestically-abusive relationships” (Johnson & Gardner, 2000, pp. 197). Approximately 13,000 acts of violence are committed each year at worksites (Zachery, 1998); and homicide is the leading cause of death to women in the workplace (American Institute on Violence, 2001) because a place of employment is one place the abuser can be certain to find his victim. Despite the attempts of employers to ignore the impact of domestic violence, the way that personal problems spill over into the workplace can impact an employee’s job

performance, other employees' feelings of safety, and the company's bottom line. In fact, abused women potentially cost employers approximately \$100 million in lost wages, sick leave, and absenteeism (American Institute on Domestic Violence, 2001), not accounting for training and professional development losses.

Advocates of eliminating family violence have urged employers to examine the scope of their role as employers and as participants within larger coordinated community responses (Jackson & Garvin, 2003). Most for-profit corporations have dismissed and overlooked their role in addressing issues of domestic violence because their production centered mindset categorizes issues of social justice or social action as irrelevant to the fulfillment of their financial goals (Reeves & O'Leary-Kelley, 2007) and they do not ascribe to assuming institutional responsibility for matters that seem beyond their scope (Githens, 2008). In non-profit faith-based organizations where the discussion would seem likely, there is muted silence that often surrounds the issue of domestic violence (Nason-Clark, 2009) as women grapple with their faith, disclosure, loyalty to the abuser, and the often tabooed stigma that attaches itself to exposing one's perceived private affairs.

Although domestic violence occurs among Christians at rates that are parallel to those in the general population (Annis & Rice, 2001; Nason-Clark, 2004; Popescu & Drumm, 2009), the church has not accepted their institutional responsibility to provide services to victims within the church, nor have churches acknowledged their role as an employer who employs women who may be abused and working within its ranks. The intersection of women, abuse, faith, and work is a distant and complicated discussion that has yet to be adequately and collectively researched.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The issues and specific needs of women who are abused and working are rarely recognized or understood (Nason-Clark, 2010; Reeves & O'Leary-Kelly, 2007) although it is indeed a problem (Mears, 2001). In the non-profit sector, where advocacy, volunteerism, and the social good are encouraged from a mission's perspective, organizations inevitably lose sight of their social responsibility when being required to consider non-profit sector employees' private lives within the context of public performance and prevailing institutional frameworks and mindsets. In succumbing to the ideological belief that domestic violence is a private, mental health, or social services issue, the result has been (a) ill-advised policies, (b) failed services, and (c) inadequately framed research for women's issues at work (Wolf, 2000). Although one might assume that domestic violence against working women is included in discussions of social work or by service providers (Hightower, 2002), in these discussions it is rare to specifically look at abused women as workers unless the abuse is tied to engaging and/or transitioning from the welfare-to-work system.

As a consequence of the limited inclusion of research that intersects women as victims and women as workers, the attitudes and needs of this population are poorly understood in the medical field (Mouton, Rovi, & Furneiss, 1999) and the social work field. Little has been done to develop responsive community prevention and intervention programs for women who experience domestic violence (Dunlop et al., 2000; Stiegel, et al., 2000; Vinton, 1999; Vladescu et al., 1999; Wolf & Pillemer, 1997). The legal system's efforts to enact laws to minimize the problem have not been adequately coordinated with service providers (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003; Dickstein & Nadelson,

1989) or with employers. There is a limited understanding of how organizations impact the work experiences of abused women or how the abuse impacts the organization. Consequently, workplace interventions have been haphazardly implemented without much consciousness or empirical research to ground their practice.

With the increased number of women serving and working in organizations, organizations cannot risk being uninformed about women as victims. For abused women who work, organizations are faced with meeting the needs of a population and with understanding the effects of violence they may not be aware of. As victims, “women are unable to comply with work requirements because of the violence” (Raphael, 2003, pp. 370). Abusers use several tactics that affect women’s ability to perform at work such as harassing phone calls at work, appearing on the job site, and abusing the woman right before she has to report to work (Lloyd, 1997). Additionally, women suffer from psychological and emotional trauma associated with abuse that may impact their health, work relationships, learning, and performance.

When searching through literature that narrows the scope of domestic violence to investigate the lives of abused women who primarily work in religious organizations, the research becomes scarcer and gravely convoluted. Religious organizations are uninformed on how to address the issue on a service level, knowledge level, and intervention level for women who are abused (Nason-Clark, 2009). When the woman is also an employee of the organization, the issue is compounded because “the resources that religious women seek in the aftermath of domestic violence in part differentiate them from other abused women” (Nason-Clark, 2009, pp. 382-383). They often prefer not to receive help from outside the institution but instead desire to receive assistance from



others of like-minded faith. Religious women as domestic violence victims face ethical and spiritual dilemmas: making the choice of personal safety by leaving the abusive relationship or remaining committed to institutional systems and beliefs that could potentially encourage her to remain in a relationship that conflict with her need for safety (Nason-Clark, 2010; Rzepka, 2002). Women who work for religious organizations are further conflicted because their livelihood, relationships, and faith are hinged upon how the institution responds to violence against women as human beings and how the institution responds to women as employees. Each organizational response toward women, whether as human beings or employees, will inevitably have implications that affect women as workers and as a person. The crossroads where women as workers in religious organizations and women as victims intersect requires conscientious and critical research.

### **Purpose of Collected Papers**

The purpose of the collected papers is to examine how institutional conditions shape African American battered women's work experiences in Christian churches. African American women were chosen because African American women are victimized by intimate partners at higher rates than any other races (Watlington & Murphy, 2006). Additionally, African American women have the highest level of religious commitment and observance, in comparison to women from any other racial or ethnic background (Sahgal & Smith, 2008).

### **Conceptual and Analytic Framework for Collected Papers**

The collection of studies is framed by critical human resource development (CHRD) and Institutional ethnography (IE) frameworks both of which examine issues on

multiple levels. Both CHRD and IE move toward analytic and methodological reflexivity that emphasizes the systematic interrogation of power (Gedro, Collins, & Rocco, 2014), the analytic focus on social analysis (McGuire & Garavan, 2011), the intersectionality between experience and setting (Byrd, 2014), and the culminating aim of more equitable practices, processes, and frameworks when engaging in research that informs practice. Critical research, in and of itself is aimed at “challenging practices, exposing assumptions, revealing illusions, and questioning traditions,” (Sambrook, 2004, pp. 614). The collection of studies will utilize CHRD and IE to lay both a framework and a methodological consideration for uncovering the institutional and societal forms of oppression that shape battered women’s work experiences in faith based organizations. While non-profit organizations may be traditionally overlooked for human resource development research, Githens (2007) acknowledges the need for critical action research in this area due to the large number of practitioners working in this arena as well as the seemingly compatible efforts of critical research with advocacy.

### **Critical HRD**

Human Resource Development (HRD) can be seen as both a professional field and an organizational function (Callahan & Davila, 2004) with broad based definitions. In this study HRD will be viewed as an organizational function whose activities and processes are contested terrains of relations and knowledge (McGuire & Garavan, 2011) constructed and “associated with actions that occur in social systems” (Callahan & Davila, 2004, pp. 79). Critical theory examines power, ideology, and knowledge construction (Brookfield, 2014) and how these intersect to structure social relations, inequitable systems, and marginalizing practices within society and its institutions on

both macro and micro levels (Brookfield, 2014; Fenwick, 2004). Collins and Chlup (2014) have discussed the concept of criticality as HRD practice, speaking to the ways we responsibly and judiciously think and create solutions to the problems that arise in our work structures and corresponding activities. Critical Human Resource Development should have as a goal the focus of organizing “in ways that optimize human interest, organizational advancement, and social impact” (Bierma & Callahan, 2014, pp. 436).

Fenwick (2004) asserted that CHRD has at its core, four main principles: the political purpose of organizational reform for justice, equity, and participation; epistemological examination of the workplace as contested terrain; inquiry focused on power and history; and methodology that includes exposure, iconoclasm, and reflexivity. These four principles provide a solid basis for examining the individual experiences of domestic violence victims within the larger context of organizational practices.

### **Political Purpose: Organizational Reform for Justice, Equity, and Participation**

Examining women as victims and as workers provides a mechanism for naming and uncovering activities, ideologies, and power within HRD that function to shape and control workers (Howell, Carter, & Schied, 2002). Because the experiences of women have traditionally been ignored (Bierma & Cseh, 2003), issues surrounding victimization are critical vantage points for which a complex of social relations can be uncovered for the purposes of individual discovery and organizational reform.

### **Epistemological Examination of the Workplace as Contested Terrain**

The workplace is conceptualized as a contested terrain of social relations and knowledge production that help sustain the organization through modes of ruling that simultaneously oppress certain categories of workers. These social relations are viewed

as purposefully connected and organized actions that create conditions of the local experience (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Therefore, experience is not a taken-for-granted reality, but rather experience is viewed as a representation of the unfolding of social relations over time. “People’s actions are coordinated and concerted by something beyond their own motivations and intentions” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, pp. 30). In determining how a particular experience is shaped, one must look at the institution and its processes that coordinate the experience.

### **Inquiry: Focused on Power and History**

Explaining women’s human or organizational experience using CHRD would center on understanding how sociopolitical processes have historically come to shape ideas, processes, and practices. The issue of power and knowledge construction specifically informs how marginalization of experience is impacted by and between the locale and history of the worker and organization in terms of its social, political, historical and cultural locations and positions. An integral part to the study’s focus on power and history would be to understand that social organization is constructed by “ruling relations” or “relations of ruling” (Smith, 1987, pp. 3). Ruling relations refer to the “intersection of the institutions organizing and regulating society... [it] is a concept that grasps power, organization, direction, and regulation as ... pervasively structured” (Smith, 1987, pp. 3). Ruling relations are the venues (such as legislation, governing boards, program planners, management, administration) where power is generated and perpetuated in society across multiple sites (translocal) through various mediums. The ideas produced become embedded into organizational practice and forms of administrating; initiate the way that reality is perceived; and dictate how organizations

frame and respond to the issue of domestic violence against women. Once an ideological frame is in place, the work process that produced it is invisible and the idea that it references is adopted as common sense.

### **Methodology: Exposure, Iconoclasm, and Reflexivity**

Within CHRD, the methodology should aim to expose and challenge organizational ideologies, practices, and power relations by examining systems from a micro and macro perspective. In this study, IE (Smith, 1978), a form of critical ethnography, is being used as the conceptual framework, and method, and analytic tool for seeing and investigating the institutional conditions of experience (Darville, 2002). Institutional ethnography is a direct style of thinking about the relationships among individual activities, knowledge, society, and political action. To accomplish the goals of exposure, iconoclasm, and reflexivity, IE examines how local experiences are organized, connected to, and coordinated by larger social-institutional structures known as ruling relations. This examination results in explicating the context of individual experience for emancipatory purposes. It begins knowledge construction from the standpoint of women as a means to giving voice and providing an entry way into understanding larger social organization. Institutional ethnography examines how knowledge is constructed and whose knowledge counts. In fact, IE argues that beginning inquiry from the micro perspective guards against accepting mainstream discourse and its controlling apparatuses as dominant and truth. “In its application to the field of domestic violence, institutional ethnography has thus far been used primarily by criminal justice practitioners and domestic violence advocates rather than by academics or trained researchers” (Pence & Smith, 2004, pp. 4).

Familiar critical questions about whose interests are served by development, how knowledge is constructed, what knowledge counts and who influences its assessment underpin pedagogical activities. Reflexivity, both philosophical and methodological, is central to critique both emancipatory efforts and the controlling apparatuses normalized in existing HRD (Fenwick, 2004, pp. 198).

### **Description of Collected Papers**

The fulfillment of this dissertation took place across two collected papers. The first study highlighted the use of institutional ethnography as a useful method for research in adult education and HRD. The second paper is an empirical study that utilized IE to examine institutional issues related to the experiences of abused women who work. Table 1 presents the running title, method, and publication outlet for each of the studies in this dissertation. These studies are further described in the sections that follow.

Table 1  
*Collected Papers Studies 1, 2*

Running Title	Method	Publication Outlet
STUDY #1. Institutional Ethnography: A Holistic Approach to Understanding Systems	Conceptual paper	<i>International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology</i> Published: July-Sept 2016
STUDY #2. Institutional Ethnography: Utilizing Battered Women's Standpoint to Examine How Institutional Relations Shape African American Battered Women's Work Experiences in African American Churches	Empirical study institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987)	<i>Human Resource Development Quarterly (HRDQ)</i>

## **Study #1: Conceptual Paper**

To understand systems, we must take into account the many factors, policies, and people within/outside of an organization that influence an issue or problem. In adult education and HRD practice, there are moving parts and organizational dynamics that contribute or detract from how learners learn, how workers work, and how practitioners plan and practice. In adult education and HRD research, dominant modes of knowing have placed us on an intellectual leash without a critical conscience (Thomas, 1993) and we must struggle to realize the implications of ideology on how we approach research, form analytical categories, situate subjects, construct advance meanings, and justify our actions and the actions of others (Wright & Rocco, 2007, pp. 646).

With the rising discussion of CHRD (Bierma & Callahan, 2014; Brookfield, 2014; Byrd, 2014; Gedro, Collins, & Rocco, 2014), in addressing the criticalities, we need further engagement with research tools that can move HRD to recognize multilayered social constructs and the appropriate means to solve the problems. “Critical perspectives that are theorized, but never acted upon ultimately may not create meaningful change” (Collins, pp. 352). Engaging research tools that move us toward better understanding the cultural, political and historical contexts that make up social practice (Edwards, Clarke, Harrison, & Reeve, 2002), can assist the field in advancing toward more responsible outcomes in adult education and HRD practice. Institutional ethnography has the capacity to assist the field in understanding and advancing the micro, macro, and interactional capacities of IE as a research tool.

**Purpose and research questions.** The purpose of this conceptual paper was to introduce IE as a useful and systematic process for examining organizations and work

data through the lens of stakeholders, at different levels, and considering the different forces at play. The conceptual paper introduced IE and provided a clear rationale for using it as a viable research and analytic tool when conducting empirical research in the field of adult education and CHRD. Institutional ethnography, as a sociological method of inquiry, was created to explore the social relations that structure people's everyday lives. The concept paper followed the format of Rocco and Wright (2007), exploring relevant literature in order to present a concept paper that addressed these guiding research questions: (a) What implications does IE have for adult education and CHRD? and (b) How might institutional ethnography be implemented as a research method in adult education or a CHRD study? In summation, the concept paper purposed to provide a clear rationale for the utilization of IE as a viable method in HRD research.

**Publication submission and formatting.** The first paper of the collected papers was submitted to the *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* in accordance with the guidelines of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), (6th ed.). Because of a prior publication on IE, we were invited to submit an article to this journal. The paper was published in the Fall of 2016.

### **Study #2: Empirical Study Institutional Ethnography**

While there has been a recent trend of studies that addresses the issue of domestic violence and its implications for work, there is a current deficit of empirical data on battered women who work unless it is in the context of barriers faced by women who are transitioning from welfare to work. Even less work exists on the organizational experiences of battered women in churches, where ideologies of male dominance have



controlled the mindsets, activities, and practices of faith based organizations' treatment of women. While many would be interested in merely exploring this on a level that walks us into the depths of the individual experience only, this study is concerned with unraveling what and how macro-level institutional relations shape and construct the experiences of battered women in hopes of furthering efforts to change any institutional conditions considered to be oppressive.

**Positionality.** By virtue of my ministerial position within the Christian community, I anticipated that access would not have been difficult. The rapport that the researcher has with the faith-based world opens up the possibility for access to victims of abuse who might be interested in sharing their experiences. As a Pastor of my own church and an academic, it is sometimes interesting to hear how I think in relation to how the institution has historically thought and shaped life for women. My positionality in relationship to the informants who are a part of this research sometimes placed me between four worlds: observer, minister, advocate, and researcher. I feel, though, an unusual passion for this topic, not by any means of personal experience with abuse, but because of my thoughts about how a relationship with God should be quite liberating, yet I understand domestic violence to be one of those issues for which we, the church has not adequately addressed. It is an important consideration to recognize these areas of positionality in relation to that of the participants in order to understand where objectivity ends and subjectivity may begin.

Being positioned as a minister and an advocate can be an interesting convergence of a bifurcated consciousness as I ask myself the question of how to do I fight a system for others when my existence within it associates me with a prescribed set of

preconceived ideas and principles? In this study, I was positioned as the advocate and the instrument, through which women could achieve a better reframing and response to their issues with domestic violence. As a minister, I represented someone with whom women could feel comfortable sharing their stories of pain, sadness, and escape. As a pastor, I represented empathy and understanding for the plights that women face within religious dogma. Finally, in my position as a researcher, I represent the balance to my internal connections, by being able to objectively canvass and examine the multiple perspectives that come through the lives of these participants.

**Purpose and research questions.** The purpose of this study was to critically examine the institutional ruling relations that shape African American battered women's work experiences in African American churches. *Ruling relations* (Smith, 1987) are the institutional complexes that coordinate and control the everyday work and lives of those impacted by administrative regimes (Devault & McCoy, 2001). The following research questions guided this study: (a) What are the institutional experiences of African American battered women working in Christian churches? (b) How do institutional ruling relations intersect to shape African American battered women's work experiences in Christian churches?

**Method.** This study utilized an institutional ethnographic method (Smith, 1987) to guide data collection and analysis because it allows for comprehensive and multifaceted interpretation of data, allows issues to be studied in "depth, openness, and detail" (Patton, 2002, pp. 14), and allows multiple methods to make connections and meaning of individuals' problems and lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Since my study was undertaken to understand the institutional relations shaping battered women's

experiences in organizations, this method was appropriate because it allowed for analysis that uncovered the interconnection between battered women's private experiences with their work experiences and the macro processes influencing them.

Following ethnographic tradition, institutional ethnographers simultaneously engage in data collection and analysis from beginning to end (Fetterman, 1998). In IE, the process of inquiry is rather like grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out (Devault and McCoy, 2001, pp. 755). Institutional ethnographic investigations are rarely planned out fully in advance, identifying research sites, informants, text to analyze, or even questions to pursue with informants. Acknowledging these challenges, I engaged in an exploratory qualitative study that was "emergent and flexible, and responsive to the changing conditions of the research progress" (Merriam, 1998, pp. 8).

The procedures of the study were guided by the data levels identified within the institutional ethnographic method. Institutional ethnography is aimed at (a) entry level data and (b) translocal (level two) data. Entry level data are concerned with the local setting and the individuals who interact there. Level two data are data that extend beyond people's experiential accounts to include extended social relations. Institutional ethnographers proceed through three main phases of data collection and analysis to obtain these data: (a) investigating the local experience through an individual's standpoint, (b) analyzing processes and larger social organization through multiple informants' accounts of the experience, and (c) establishing the interconnection between macro and micro relations (Griffith & Smith, 1990; Smith, 1987). "Institutional ethnography does not address a given institutional setting from the point of view of its overall organization.

Instead, it begins with a particular standpoint – for example, that of a woman who has been abused – and questions the institutional processes that produce a certain outcome from that standpoint” (Pence & Smith, 2004, pp. 3).

*Data collection.* Data collection evolves as IE research unfolds. Where traditional ethnography uses data to produce descriptive accounts, using the IE method, data is a means of co-investigation to build understanding of an activity’s coordination across sites (Wright & Rocco, 2007). Locating informants and talking with them occurs in everyday life, in multiple settings; and is used inherently in the IE process to identify and fully understand the problem. Throughout the course of this study, data were collected from interviews, personal notes, and texts to provide cross-method triangulation (Hoyle, 1998) and improve methodological validity.

*Sampling and informants.* Encountering an informant can occur at any stage of the research process. “Because IE researchers are not oriented toward descriptive reporting on a population, they do not think of informants as a ‘sample’” (Devault and McCoy, 2001, pp. 764). Institutional ethnography researchers may aim at diversity of experience rather than categories in order to point toward other possible informants, utilizing snowball or chain sampling. Therefore, institutional ethnographers do not aim for categories of individuals to interview, “but for analyses that trace how the people living in these different circumstances are drawn into a common set of organizational processes” (pp. 764).

For example, in this study, one group of informants that I used is African American battered women who experienced abuse during a time when they worked/volunteered at church. As discussed earlier, battering is used interchangeably

with the term intimate partner violence or domestic violence. Because the majority of batterers are male, and the victims are female (National Organization for Women 1999), men were excluded from being studied as victims. The group was identified as *survivors*. The second category of informants was called *practitioners* and includes three males and three females. This was done because accounts from social workers, health services, criminal justice practitioners, pastors or policymakers may be just as important to discovering how battered women's work experiences are socially organized to happen as they do. Institutional ethnography uniquely merges the emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspective in research by employing a holistic outlook that allows "for multiple interpretations of reality and alternative interpretations of data "(Fetterman, 1998, pp. 474).

Informants identified as survivors were solicited through local organizations such as churches, advocacy agencies serving battered women, Facebook, and through personal contacts in hopes of creating a snowball effect. Informants who were labeled as survivors needed to meet four criteria: (a) be 18 years of age or older, (b) be African American, (c) be a woman, and (d) be a survivor of domestic violence which occurred while they worked/volunteered in the church. Informants identified as practitioners needed to meet two criteria: (a) be 18 years of age or older and (b) be current/former provider of services to African American battered women while they worked/volunteered in the church.

*Interviews.* To achieve the goal of this study, 13 interviews were conducted with a cross section of individuals. Seven interviews were conducted with battered women who worked (paid or unpaid) in churches at the time they were battered. They were asked to suggest informants who work with battered women such as social workers and health

care professionals; and professionals who work in churches or other faith-based organizations and served battered women such as pastors, associate pastors, or human resource professionals. Six interviews were conducted with practitioners who provided services to battered women. When possible, an attempt was made to interview the latter group to the extent they were connected to the seven battered women. The latter group, however had no connect direct connection to the battered women.

The rationale for not interviewing 13 individuals in each category is that “given its emphasis on how work in organizations coordinates everyday experiences, data analysis in IE cannot focus simply on individual standpoint” (McCoy, 2006, pp. 113). Instead, IE takes a multifocal view of the issue- in this case the experience of being a battered woman and how this experience is viewed by those who interact with the battered woman. Although institutional ethnographers are interested in local knowledge, “IE does not treat people as the object of analysis but as an entry point into understanding organizational processes” (Walby, 2012, pp. 142-143) and explaining the organizational linkages between the individual and the coordinating relations.

Interviews were approximately one hour guided by a set of questions related to battered women and institutional conditions (see Appendix A). The interview guide was constructed to flow as a conversation, allowing ease in moving from topic to topic (Krueger, 1998). Flexibility to probe as needed is critical to IE research. Informant responses to questions were recorded, transcribed and preliminarily analyzed to identify indicators that may point to areas needing more attention in the research. In some cases, probing questions for practitioners changed in subsequent interviews. In the publication and throughout the analysis process, informant identities remained confidential.

Pseudonyms were used for all informants to ensure that their identities remained undisclosed.

*Personal notes.* Personal notes were kept by the researcher. I set aside an hour after each interview to free write my description of the event and corresponding thoughts as to what I felt and how I believe the informant felt. These types of notes are considered post-interview debriefing and were vital to the future analysis of data (Wengraf, 2001). It is important to note that these notes were subject to my interpretive bias.

*Texts.* Data were also collected using texts. Materially, texts are documents (any kind of document on paper, electronic file, artistic representation, law, academia, policy) or representations that have the ability to be reproduced, copied, transferred, disseminated by different users at different times (Grahame & Grahame, 2000). Symbolically, texts function to organize and dictate social and cultural space for particular individuals and groups (Smith, 1987). For example, in this study, the Bible was referenced by survivors and practitioners; and was identified as one of the factors that impacted how women's experiences happened.

“Texts are forms of signification linking language and consciousness to the social relations of power in society” (Griffith, 1995, pp. 1). Texts transport power in ideologies and practices across sites and among people. In its many forms, texts disclose how power is embedded within social institutions and structures. Time was spent reviewing Biblical references that supported information shared by informants during the interview.

Scripture was found to inform the perspectives and activities of churches. Notes were taken on any text references mentioned by informants if they were identified as a source of influence or had relevance in any of the matters related to battered women. A

discussion of the text was written into the personal note debriefing under a separate heading in order to delineate that those notes related specifically to the texts.

*Analysis and synthesis.* Directions and concrete steps for data analysis in IE are vague. To strengthen the analysis process, I utilized a modified version of the listening guide approach (Doucet, 2008) in conjunction with applying IE principles. Adding the listening guide approach allowed me to approach the data from a variety of levels and vantage points because of the multiple steps and analytical focal points inherent in the method. In the analysis phase, I engaged in five steps. The first step was considered a preliminary analysis. After each interview, I spent up to an hour responding to the interview to reflect on the interview and to begin writing preliminary notes. Preliminary themes began to emerge and were noted. This was done for each of the 13 interviews conducted.

I engaged in a more formal analysis once all of the interviews were completed. After all of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by trint.com, each transcribed interview was loaded into NVivo. I played the audio version of the interviews while simultaneously reading through each transcript four times, each for different purposes. Consistent with the listening guide approach, I listened to and read the transcripts first to reflexively ask what was happening, which elements repeatedly occurred, and to examine my interpretation of those elements (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) in order to become aware of what influenced my knowledge construction. The first listening and reading was done to listen for the plot in informants' stories and to examine the researcher's responses (Balan, 2005). I created a node and labeled it as *plot* in NVivo for each part of the transcript that reflected the plot of the informants' stories. A second listening and reading



of interview transcripts was conducted to examine informant's language and to analyze how they spoke about themselves within the parameters of their social world. Nodes were created in NVivo for *perspective* and *voice*. The second listening and reading was aimed at examining the informant's multiple perspectives or voices. Both the first and second listening and reading focused on micro level perspectives.

The third and fourth listening and reading of the transcripts revealed the macro level institutional relations. The third listening and reading of interview transcripts was to uncover social or institutional relations, social networks, and close and intimate relations which became vital in understanding organizational dynamics. Several nodes were created in NVivo surrounding institutional and ruling relations as themes emerged. The fourth reading reflected a concern to link micro-level narratives with macro-level processes and structures" (Doucet, 2008, pp. 406). A fourth listening and reading of interview transcripts was done to examine the "structured power relations and dominant ideologies that framed the narratives of informants. The process involved examining the transcripts and the Bible as a text to look for commonalties and differences in order to determine themes and understand where both survivor and practitioner narratives intersected.

Smith (2005) persistently advocated searching the data for the ways it helps us interpret the context and the social relations that shape women's experiences and influence their lives. This focus on multilevel analytics increases the researcher's faith in the value of the data and the analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1970). By the fourth reading of the data, themes and corresponding relationships emerged that helped to inform the study

and provide clues to how the experience happened as it did. Several nodes were created in NVivo surrounding additional institutional relations.

The related themes were synthesized for coherency. I grouped and regrouped categories in order to produce a clear analysis. To synthesize the data, I reviewed informants' verbatim transcripts, my personal notes, and examined the themes that emerged from the transcripts. I created a rule that specified, in order for a theme to appear in the findings, the overarching theme had to be mentioned by more than four informants.

To ensure that the analysis properly represented the participants' experience, a member-checking package (Balan, 2005) was reviewed with the informants. The package consisted of their verbatim transcript, a set of I-statements that arose from their transcripts, a review of the findings and overarching themes generated, and my interpretation of the social relations surrounding their experience.

***Data presentation.*** There is no one technical process in IE for the writing analysis, but it is a consistent reengagement and reflexive analysis of the problematic discovered through the researcher's own thoughts, the informant's data, and the insights gained as the researcher moved through the study (Wright & Rocco, 2016, pp. ). In representing the data, the researcher provides a conceptual map, whether narratively or pictorially to help the data make sense and illuminate where and how the experience happens as it does. When used pictorially, the researcher presents a map similar to a social cartography which is a visual map used to analyze patterns and identify collective experiences in hopes of shifting the relationships of power that are the root cause of social and environmental injustices (Moore & Garzon, 2010). A social cartography map allows people's language and their defined reality to be represented as a means of

illuminating institutional roles that structure where and how a person's experience is shaped (Moore & Garzon, 2010; Paulston & Lieben, 1993), though not necessarily bound to any one specific mapping process. The researcher presents the data not for descriptive reporting but to explain the social organization of what is happening. In presenting the data, as is consistent with IE, the ultimate goal was to create a map that highlights the power relations and intersections of coordinated processes that shape battered women's experience, providing a visual representation of how their experiences are socially organized.

**Publication submission and formatting.** The second and final study of the collected papers will be submitted to *Human Resource Development Quarterly (HRDQ)*. Manuscripts submitted to the above-mentioned journal must be in American Psychological Association Style Manual format (6<sup>th</sup> edition).

### **Potential Implications of Collected Papers Research**

My study provides space, voice, and methodological tools to bring awareness to both the research and practice mandates of HRD, lending to a systematic framework for examining, researching, and discussing the issues of power and knowledge construction that leave people marginalized and organizations suffering. Examining how power and knowledge are constructed, we can articulate for women how practices of oppressive organizational structures further compound issues of victimization, extending from an individual to an organizational level and back again. In Christian organizations where oppression should be absent, this study calls for churches to carefully reflect upon their complicit involvement in the oppression of their most stout supporters- women. It is my hope that the African American church will take advantage of the fresh perspectives that

this study generates and respond to the issues they have marginalized, minimized, or ignored. The study has the potential to provide women with tools to navigate the oppressive organizational structures that have silenced their voices and silenced their perspectives. It is my desire, both in the field of HRD and in the faith community that this study will provide tools to counter the processes that have removed women from positions as knowers and have dehumanized them- instead, privileging men.

### **Structure of Collected Papers Dissertation**

This doctoral dissertation follows the FIU School of Education and Human Development's guidelines for the "Collected Papers" dissertation format. It consists of this introductory chapter and a closing chapter written solely for the dissertation, as well as the two related studies outlined above. The conceptual paper has been published; and the empirical paper will be submitted to HRDQ, a peer-reviewed journal. Dissertation chapters are as follows:

*Chapter 1:* Introduction, related literature review, research rationale.

*Chapter 2:* Concept paper on IE as a viable research tool.

*Chapter 3:* Institutional ethnographic analysis of battered women in Christian churches.

*Chapter 4:* Conclusions, implications, directions for future research.

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## CHAPTER II

### STUDY #1

#### **INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMS**

Originally introduced by Dorothy Smith (1987), institutional ethnography (IE) is a direct style of thinking about the relationships among individual activities, knowledge, society, and political action. In other words, IE takes a holistic approach to understanding or uncovering a problem that is reminiscent of general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1972), force-field analysis (Lewin, 1946), or stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984). Notions of systems, fields, and stakeholders take into account that many factors, policies, and people within/outside of an organization influence an issue or problem. Senge's (2006) concept of a learning organization or Swanson's (1995) declaration that human resource development is based on three theories, system theory being one of them, are examples of the perspective that a holistic approach is the way forward. A research method with a systematic process for collecting and analyzing data used to examine a problem through the lens of stakeholders, at different levels, and considering the different forces at play seems useful to fields examining organizations and work.

Ideological shifts are moving away from viewing research as purely technical and rational but rather as social practice "embedded in particular cultural, political, and historical contexts" (Edwards, Clarke, Harrison, & Reeve, 2002, pp. 129). Awareness at the academic level has raised the question "what types of research and research methods should be acceptable to support the competing purposes of this field" (Quigley, 1997, pp.4). Research has translated into partially unsuccessful practice because it negates

individuals' unique experiences based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender, allowing "for a monolithic view to become the 'given' reality for all those who live in our society" (Rocco & West, 1998, pp. 171-172). This reality is sustained by the ideologies purported in dominant discourses and interpenetrates multiple sites of power, implicating the power persons have in their homes, communities, jobs, and government.

Because adult vocational education is practiced in a highly charged political context, amongst a nexus of interconnected and interdependent social processes such as federal and state legislation, program funding and planning, literacy work, and employment training, discourse sets the parameters for a person's ability or inability to navigate the structural and political subsystems that impact learning, teaching, and work. Heavily constructed and maintained through texts and documents, discourse transports ideology from individuals to governing bodies, to practices within bureaucratic administration, to extended social relations- which are the external contexts that shape and influence adult learning and the practice of adult education.

The field needs (a) an alternative vision of the traditional adult vocational education setting, its students, and the profession (Cunningham, 1989); and (b) an analysis of adult vocational education that merges social and cultural dimensions with microsocial theories of learning and teaching (Amstutz, 1999; Cunningham, 2000; Ettlting, 2001; Heaney, 2000; Sheared, 1999; Sissell, 2001). Essential to this analysis is institutional ethnography (IE), a research method that gives analytic emphasis to merging both social and individual contexts- entering everyday life from the standpoint of marginalized, often excluded, populations (Grahame and Grahame, 2000), yet extending investigation to the larger social and economic processes that shape individual experience

(Smith, 1987). This article seeks to introduce institutional ethnography (IE) as an effective analytic research tool- useful for investigating oppressive ruling relations that intersect institutional and cultural boundaries with individual experience within a system. The intent of this article is not to outline a recipe for conducting an IE study but to discuss its basic premise. The following section introduces institutional ethnography-its conceptual and methodological basics; discusses its applications for adult vocational education using as examples adult literacy and employment training; and concludes with implications for practice.

### **Institutional Ethnography**

IE is a form of critical ethnography committed to a particular way of seeing and investigating the institutional conditions of experience (Darville, 2002). Devault and McCoy (2001) describe institutional ethnography as “the empirical investigation of linkages among local settings of everyday life, organizations, and translocal processes of administration” (Devault & McCoy, 2001, pp. 751). *Institution*, does not imply that the research is conducted on a particular type of organization, but is directed at understanding how institutional processes extend across multiple sites to coordinate local activity (Devault & McCoy, 2001). The institutional processes and multiple sites are locations where the issue under investigation can be seen and experienced from different perspectives. IE focuses on an issue that might be felt or experienced by an individual but the focus is not on the individual’s experience of an issue, the focus is on explicating the social relations shaping the issue as experienced by multiple stakeholders and observers of the issue. “The term *ethnography* highlights the importance of research methods that can discover and explore these everyday activities and their positioning within extended

sequences of action” (Devault & McCoy, 2001 pp. 753). For example, in a phenomenology an individual’s experience of workplace violence as victim is the focal point. In IE the focal point is how the workplace violence is organized and coordinated by an institutional process to shape the ways a victim experiences that violence. IE seeks to understand the experience through the lenses of multiple players throughout an organization, service providers who help the victim or intervened in the act of violence, and others who have insights on the issue. Multiple vantage points would be used to explain how the workplace violence happens as it does

The central premise of IE research is the idea that (a) people’s individual experiences are organized, connected to, and shaped by larger power relations, known as ruling relations. *Ruling relations* are the textual venues (such as legislation, governing boards, program planners, management, administration) where power is generated and perpetuated in society across multiple sites (translocal). IE asserts that these relations must be uncovered in order to reveal and combat “the ideological and social processes that produce experiences of subordination” (Devault & McCoy, 2001, pp. 754) for individuals. The guiding question for an institutional ethnographer is “how does this [experience] happen as it does? How are these relations organized” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, pp. 7)? Drawing from ethnomethodology, IE uses people’s everyday experience to uncover how it is socially organized, how the coordination and intersection of work processes, activities, and relations organized around a specific function (such as education, welfare, law, social work, health care, etc.) and occurring in multiple sites form part of the ruling apparatus in society (Grahame & Grahame, 2000). Social relations are not viewed as chaotic, but as purposefully organized systematic processes

and practices used to manage and control people's lives through ruling relations "more or less mysteriously and outside a person's knowledge" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, pp. 18). Power becomes critically important as an analytic focus; illuminating practices that marginalize and making visible how ruling relations are transported through knowledge, experience, discourse, and institutions.

### **Application of IE**

Human capital theory pervades job training policy and continues to ascribe the burden of being unemployed to 'unskilled workers' lack of education and skills rather than examining the roles of stakeholders, systems and the forces that maintain disparate education systems, and government policies which benefit corporate profit and devalue workers. In a study of employment training programs, Grahame and Grahame (2000) examined "the notion of skill" and "how official knowledge operates in [the] practice ...of job training" (pp. 4). IE was used to explore how the skill deficit-model permeates employment training discourse, policy, and program planning efforts and is projected toward the disadvantaged (poor, racial/ethnic minorities, women). Studying Asian immigrant women, Grahame and Grahame (2000) discovered that participants entered employment training with a variety of skills and that there was a discrepancy between the Asian immigrants' perceptions of their skill needs and the perception of the employment training system. Although participants and the community agencies recognized that English language proficiency was the most pressing need of the Asian participants, enrollment in classes to improve English language skills was prohibited by the state because this was not permissible based on the parameters set by job training agencies. Programs continued to be developed emphasizing work habits and not English language

proficiency. Thus, through these practices, dominant views around skills and jobs were maintained and participants' needs ignored. In this instance, IE demonstrated how political discourse and organizational knowledge on macro levels translated into micro practices that distance educational access, govern actual employment opportunity, and shape participant's quality of life.

In a study on the social organization of literacy the concept of literacy changed over time (Darville, 1995). Initially, literacy was used as a way to exert power and establish social and political hierarchy, imposing societal limitations on those who were illiterate. Over time, the conceptualization of literacy has been primarily associated with workforce development; and has increasingly become a critical and problematic issue for those entering the workforce without necessary skills (Askov, 2000). Primarily associating literacy with workforce development ignores other types and functions of literacy such as those used in cultural, communal, and spiritual contexts and literacy achieved through informal means or for achievement of personal goals (Askov, 2000). The lack of consensus surrounding what it means to be literate is equally discouraging because "how literacy is assessed actually indicates how it is being defined" (Askov, 2000, pp. 249).

In Darville's (1995) study of how literacy is organized, IE was used to generate discussion on how the lack of certain "forms of literacy constitute disempoweredness in our society" (pp. 250). Specifically focusing on organizational literacy, Darville (1995) examined how organizational literacy, which constitutes knowledge of regulations, contracts, policies, licenses, judicial procedures/decisions, and discourse jargon, usually excludes those with certain cultural and social experiences. He argued that although



individuals may be versed in various forms of literacy: religious, informal community life, or organization, without functional literacy marginalization and exclusion will continue. Functional literacy encompasses the ability to understand both covert and overt organizational dialogue, documents, and processes in order to navigate the social and cultural landscape. “Literacy is like currency” (Darville, 1995, pp. 254). Literacy has worth and can be transferred. Without it, there is immobility.

Holland and Redish (as cited in Darville, 1995, pp. 256) studied the experiences of ‘experts’ and ‘novices’ in filling out job applications. Darville (1995) explained that in order to competently fill out the application, there must be an understanding of how the application is used. The ‘experts’ completed the application with knowledge of what employers look for or what will gain the applicant an advantage. The ‘novice’ was constrained solely to completing the items on the application and excluded beneficial information. Darville (1995) concluded that the applicants completed applications based on experience, “not to the ways that they will be viewed in an organizational process...their difficulty is not in reading skills in a rudimentary sense, but practical knowledge about how certain information is organizationally relevant, how it will be used” (pp. 257). He made further reference to how an individual may misread and misunderstand an organizational memo unrelated to their line of work. Darville (1995) argued that “anyone may be rendered illiterate and powerless when they face writing that is constructed for purposes that are mysterious to the reader” (Campbell and Gregor, 2002, pp. 12).

Thus, in teaching literacy, Darville (1995) argued for workers to guide students, not solely in reading and writing, but in understanding the significance of how

organizations employ and use knowledge. Darville (1995) argued that conventional methods of teaching literacy fail students when teachers dismiss the additional responsibility of showing students how organizational literacy dominates them. How organizations utilize material to get their work done is a form of literacy that is immobilizing if an individual is unaware of its functions. Drawing on IE's liberatory aim, Darville (1995) encouraged literacy workers to teach literacy as a form of social analysis that fosters student political action. Since IE does not treat a knower's location as a problem of bias, but as an issue of power that reveals whose interests are being served, Darville (1995) suggested using student narratives as an entryway into investigating the practices around literacy that impact a student's social and economic advancement. Beyond rudimentary functions within academia, IE was used to foster pedagogical reflection and practice which becomes liberatory for students.

### **Research Techniques in IE**

Research techniques, data collection, and data analysis in institutional ethnography are a fluid and reflexive process aimed at uncovering how practices and power are organized at an institutional level to influence individual experience. Institutional ethnography refers to an approach to inquiry rather than a specific set of methods. There is no one way to conduct an institutional ethnographic study. The inquiry process builds upon itself throughout the research process and does not follow a traditional design approach (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Institutional ethnographers do not preplan interview questions, select interviewees or select texts to analyze in advance. Instead institutional ethnographers begin with finding the *problematic* and deciding throughout the research process what research techniques to use as the investigation

proceeds, who to interview, what documents are of interest, and what steps to take. The problematic is the point of contradiction from which the investigation flows. It is referred to as the problem that highlights that an investigation is necessary. Institutional ethnographers use individual everyday experiences as the starting point for finding this problematic, for developing the focus of the inquiry, and for exploring the often invisible ruling relations that organize experience (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 2006).

In researching a problematic, the sequence is as follows: “1) identify an experience, 2) identify some of the institutional processes [social relations] that are shaping that experience, and 3) investigate those processes in order to describe analytically how they operate as the grounds of the experience” (DeVault and McCoy, 2001, pp. 755). The stages of the investigation begin with gathering information from the individual’s standpoint because institutional ethnographers posit that people are knowers or have knowledge of what is going on around them (Smith, 2002).

### **Stages of Data Collection and Analysis**

In institutional ethnography, data collection and data analysis is cyclical; and is constantly ongoing. The focus is on identifying what the individual experience is, examining the individual account of the experience, and simultaneously looking for the institutional ruling relations that are shaping the experience. In order to collect information on both the macro and the micro level, the researcher engages in two main stages of data collection (Smith, 2006) and is searching for two levels of data (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). The first stage of data collection is aimed at gathering entry level data. Entry-level data is information about the local setting and the individual experience and activities at the local level told from the individual’s standpoint. “Entry-level data come

from the interactions and activities of subjects in the local setting; that is, the subjects whose experience is the keynote component of the problematic under investigation” (Deveau, 2008, pp. 15).

Stage one is centered on the researcher fully understanding and developing the research problematic. This involves entry into the experience under study to set ones “gaze on the macro structure from the micro level” (Brotman, 2000, pp.109). In other words, stage one provides the data that points the researcher towards key information regarding the potential problems or processes to be explored, potential people involved in the issue, and potential textual influences that are related to the issue. Individuals who provide critical information as to the local setting and individual experiences are referred to as informants. In institutional ethnographic studies, informant data is used to gain an understanding of what the problematic is to be studied by hearing the account of their individual experience. Experience becomes the ground zero of analysis (Campbell, 1998, pp. 56), starting from the standpoint of individuals’ everyday lives and real concerns; and explores the organization of power that is outside the range of an individual’s own knowledge. The research problem in an institutional ethnography is not finalized beforehand, but is uncovered more clearly in stage one as the problematic emerges.

The second stage of data collection is centered on gathering level two data. Level two data is information that extends beyond people’s experiential accounts to include extended ruling relations that may be uncovered apart from and/or interconnected to the individual account, through textual examination, observations, and interviews with others who did not directly experience the event. The researcher is examining and mapping out the ruling relations that shape the experiences of the individuals under study. Because

institutional ethnographers support the notion that experiences or situations do not occur outside of a context, environment, and a set of coordinated activities, the aim of data collection is to capture and discover specific connections between the triggers of the experience and the impact of those triggers on the individual (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, pp. 70).

The narratives of the informants interviewed during the collection of entry-level data provide the clues to who is approached and interviewed in the collection of level-two data; that is, with those who are ‘positioned outside the setting.’ The purpose of collecting level two data is thus to understand the nature of the connections between people at this level and the informants interviewed at the first level, as a contribution toward explicating the relations of ruling in operation (Deveau, 2009, pp. 15).

Phase one brings the problem into view, but phase two is a way to “explicate how the local setting, including local understandings and explanations, are brought into being- so that informants can talk about their experiences as they do” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, pp. 90).

### **Interviewing as Data**

Most institutional ethnographic studies begin with interviewing in order to uncover the problematic. The purpose of the interview is to construct an understanding of the coordinated activities- also known as institutional processes, that work together to form the experience under investigation (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Because institutional ethnographers are sampling an institutional process as opposed to a population (Webster et al, 2015), they do not aim for categories of individuals to interview nor to gather data that produces descriptive accounts representative of the

broader population. Rather, the goal is to understand a phenomenon or process in-depth (Webster et al, 2015, pp. 4) and to produce “analyses [and explanations] that trace how the people living in these different circumstances are drawn into a common set of organizational processes” (Devault and McCoy, 2001, pp. 764). Institutional process refers to what activities are being coordinated to shape the specific experience.

Institutional ethnographers refer to its participants as informants because they are considered the experts in describing what is happening to them and in their lives. Informant data is used as a means of co-investigation to discover the problematic and to build understanding of how an activity’s coordination across sites shapes individual experience. Because power is socially constructed institutional ethnographers give credence to using one’s own experience (embodied knowing) as a beginning place of inquiry as opposed to assigning authority to literature (Campbell and Gregor, 2002). The informant as ‘knower’ allows the research to emerge from one’s own knowledge and experience as opposed to their knowledge and experience emerging from dominant ideological frameworks where their experiences are misrepresented or inadequately framed to the benefit of the privileged. Institutional ethnographers “listen for the sort of informants’ talk that contains and expresses their expertise of living their lives” (Campbell and Gregor, 2002, pp. 69). The ethnographer is engaged in the ‘art of hearing’ data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The eye and ear of an institutional ethnographer is always looking toward the macro level, even if given micro information.

IE researchers may aim at diversity of experience rather than categories in order to point toward other possible informants, utilizing snowball or chain sampling. Informants are not considered a “sample” because the research is not aimed at descriptive

reporting on a population, (Devault and McCoy, 2001, pp. 764). Encountering an informant can occur at any stage of the research process. Locating informants and talking with them occurs in everyday life, in multiple settings. Interviews may be conducted one-on-one or in a focus group setting. Interviewing performed via focus groups produces rich data and has the ability to present “a natural environment where participants are influencing and influenced by others-just as they do in real life” (pp. 30). Because institutional processes are viewed as standardized across settings, focus groups may be used to “generate conversation about shared experiences (Devault and McCoy, 2001 pp. 757). Informant interviews do not need to employ a standard set of questions. Questions emerge the more the researcher talks with people. Questions are based partly on what was learned from previous interviews and partly on the researcher’s emerging knowledge of what relations constitute the problematic under investigation (Duveau, 2009). One informant’s interview may influence what questions are asked in the next interview or what text is analyzed as data. The informant’s standpoint is at the helm of the discovery process.

Interviews and focus groups are used to assist in identifying the problem and uncovering the connectedness between the experience and the larger relations coordinating the experience. Analytic thinking begins in the interview and requires the researcher to check for understanding and correction from the informant (Deveau, 2009). Data collection constantly evolves as the research unfolds. Often times, the analyst must engage the actual setting, observe, and interview various individuals before identification of the problematic is fully understood. Interviewing is initially thought of as coinciding mainly with level one data.

## **Texts as Data**

Interviews provide direction towards what texts are involved in the coordination of the informant's experience. Texts are critical sources of information in IE research because they support understanding how, in its many forms, power is embedded within social institutions and structures. Materially, texts are documents (any kind of document on paper, electronic file, artistic representation, law, academic writing, policy) or representations that have the ability to be reproduced, copied, transferred, disseminated by different users at different times (Grahame & Grahame, 2000). Symbolically, texts function to organize and dictate social and cultural space for particular individuals and groups because it relies on shared beliefs and ways of expressing those beliefs. Texts transport power in ideologies and practices across sites and among people.

Through interviews and analysis of informant talk, "...the institutional ethnographer identifies a series of texts and discourses that are present in the language of participants as they describe their everyday work practices" (Webster et al, 2015, pp. 5). The institutional ethnographer is looking for "clues" that point to what texts may help to explain organizational details that are missing from experiential accounts given by informants. Texts are useful to the institutional ethnographer because they need to be examined as data in terms of explaining their role in shaping the consciousness and coordinating the experiences and actions of individuals and processes (Zurwaski, 2012).

Texts, as the primary medium (though not the substance) of power, communicate and influence every aspect of our lives through ideologically structured messaging that shapes what perspectives we form and what actions we pursue (Smith, 1987, pp. 17). The



power of a text crosses boundaries and can be viewed similar to Foucault's (1967) explanation.

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always the elements of *articulation* [italics added]. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application (pp. 234).

In conventional ethnography where data triangulation is used to test the accuracy of what informants say, IE triangulates data by referencing texts (not for factual information), but as an alternative to, and a remedy for accepting ideological accounts in interviews.

Realizing that informant's talk was shaped by something, institutional ethnographers consult texts to develop a concrete understanding of the experiential account that the informant explained in contrast and comparison to the actualities of what is really happening. The purpose is not to validate data, but to extend the researcher's understanding of what is taking place. Important to this phase of data collection and analysis is the notion that power is carried through the ideological constructs of texts.

Analysis is about deriving particular meaning from the data as to their social construction across multiple settings. IE analysts engage in textual analysis to uncover how texts and certain objectified ways of knowing shape the everyday experience. IE

researchers utilize texts to crystallize their understanding of the social relations, and “...as an alternative to, and an antidote for, accepting ideological accounts” given by informants (Campbell & McGregor, 2002, pp. 79.). Texts are used to expose linkages between different data types and levels. Texts serve to produce level two data.

### **Analysis and Writing**

While data collection and analysis constantly takes place throughout the research process, there comes a point where the institutional ethnographer must bring it all together. The goal of the final analysis is to both explain and produce an accessible account of how the ruling relations shape the experience; and to describe the critical junctures where power and process collide to influence these experiences. Institutional ethnographers analyze interviews, documents, and any notes taken by the researcher for their face value accounts, for their interpretive value, and also for their connection and organization of institutional activity. The goal of the analysis and writing is to make the connections that are uncovered explicitly for others to understand. “A successful analysis supersedes any one account and even supersedes the totality of what informants know and can tell” (Campbell & McGregor, 2002, pp. 85). The researcher must identify the additional sources of information that reveal how the informant’s experience is structured outside of their knowing. The researcher investigates power first on an institutional level where institutions transpose what really happens to people “...in a form that makes it[power] administerable...these categories are embedded, for example in case reports, report cards, application forms, tickets, etc.” (Darville, 2002, pp. 61). Secondly, the researcher investigates texts that articulate a generalized language or way of describing, explaining or handling people and their experiences.

When writing up the data, the institutional ethnographer focuses on how the data illuminates what is happening. There is no one technical process for the writing analysis, but it is a consistent reengagement and reflexive analysis of the problematic discovered through the researcher's own thoughts, the informant's data, and the insights gained as the researcher moved through the study. In representing the data, the researcher is presenting a conceptual map, whether narratively or pictorially to help the data make sense and illuminate where and how the experience happens as it does. When used pictorially, the researcher presents a map similar to a social cartography which is a visual map used to analyze patterns and identify collective experiences in hopes of shifting the relationships of power that are the root cause of social and environmental injustices (Moore & Garzon, 2010). A social cartography map allows people's language and their defined reality to be represented as a means of illuminating institutional roles that structure where and how a person's experience is shaped (Moore & Garzon, 2010; Paulston & Lieben, 1994), though not necessarily bound to any one specific mapping process. The researcher presents the data not for descriptive reporting but to explain the social organization of what is happening. It is methodologically important to be attentive to the ways that individuals, in speaking about their life and experience, miss its social organization. When the local setting's happenings are made known to the victims affected by its coordination, an opportunity for emancipatory processes can be engaged and explored.

### **Grahame's Study and IE**

This paper has introduced the major conceptual underpinnings for conducting IE research generically. To understand these phases further, we can look at Grahame's

(1998) study on Asian women which examined the entry of Asian immigrant women into a gendered labored market via a government funded training program. Grahame (1998) examined the ways that the program's structure and administrative underpinnings determined how women were included or excluded from the program; and how services rendered were non- beneficial to their specific needs versus the program's goals.

To discover the problematic she began her inquiry in the local setting and from the standpoint of Asian women in the employment training program as opposed to the standard practice within social science inquiry that begins within "academic or 'ruling' discourses' that objectify people's experiences (Grahame, 2003, pp. 69). Grahame (1998) conducted open ended interviews with Asian women who participated in the program as well as with agency personnel over a period of months before moving forward to observe their actual classes or the intake process of the organization. The interview process revealed a number of activities centered around texts, such as forms, reports, and other records. She requested these texts in order to examine them and further understand how certain experiences were happening for these women. Grahame (1998) examined the textual forms of currency that were shaping these women's lives.

Grahame (1998) further considered as a part of her analysis, the organization of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the funding and bidding process, the program itself, and the actual intake process. Examining each of these aspects elucidated how Asian women were incorporated into the work force; and were stratified by gender, race and class mainly through the way that the training program was implemented and administered. In the analysis and explication of the issue Grahame (1998) utilized the information from the local setting (stage one), and information from texts and examined

other external processes outside of the scope of informant's knowledge (stage two) to explain how Asian women were marginalized.

Because the “decision making process regarding the kinds of programs to run is articulated not only to the perceived needs of their clients but also to both employer and service deliverer's understandings of the fields of work in which women are employable, from the start, the opportunities that are going to be available for the Asian women are co-ordinated in relation to a funding process organized in such a way as to make it difficult to challenge stereotypical understandings of what Asian women will or can do” (Grahame, 1998, pp. 82).

The predeterminations regarding what type of women would be successful in the program exposes how the decision making process dictated how Asian women were chosen or excluded from program participation. In this case, Asian women who displayed more of the cultural resources or aptitude indicative of American culture were slated for training. This outcome is not merely a consequence of intake worker's discriminatory practices, but “because of the organization of the employment training system which has built in pressures to accommodate clients most likely to succeed in the workplace as opposed to those most in need of help (Grahame, 1998, pp. 77).

The study uncovered that the screening process negated the needs of Asian women in exchange for the needs of the program, never mitigating the issues that kept these women from receiving the training they needed for the labor market. The community based organization (CBO) who performed the program intake made a decision to recruit women with higher English language abilities. They changed the testing level from a mid-level to an advanced test because they were dissatisfied that they

continued to recruit clients who were not competent enough in the English language to secure the jobs they were being trained for. English language competency, both from a testing framework and also from a speaking framework, was a measure used to determine job placement, yet was found as a barrier. In reality, however, competency was found not to be the resident issue as some individuals were teachers, nurses, or managers in their home country, yet speaking or understanding the English language was a hindrance. So the ideological framework of competency became a factor to either being placed in the training program or in being successfully placed once the training was complete.

Grahame (1998) listed her fieldnotes here:

It is because of the English, said the teacher, especially what she has seen in the classroom 'with the student's listening.' The teacher then goes on to explain that Van should get a job where she can speak English daily-for example day care or babysitting *American* (emphasized) children where she must use English daily. She explains it is not that Van isn't a good worker but that her English is a problem. The teacher says this numerous times and finally says that in the pre-vocational classroom she has noticed Van frequently ask a fellow student what the teacher is saying...(Field notes)

In addition to the stereotypical measures, the study highlighted the role of record-keeping and documents as it related to how Asian women's lives were coordinated by these texts. Documents became one of the central ways that ruling relations were established. The documents were coordinating pieces that connected activities between people in different settings. The process of documentation connected the activities of the training program to its contractual obligation of the state program at large. Several institutional processes engaged to shape what was happening to individuals and the

outcomes experienced. But it is not just the program itself, but the state's involvement in shaping the policies that ultimately had implications for the participants in the program. The macro and the micro relations tied together to reveal or map the junctures within the program that provided marginalization to the individuals it intended to serve. Grahame's (1998) study begins to open up for the field of vocational education the ways in which programming goals and infrastructures may indeed, be counterproductive to the actual needs of its clients. Through an institutional ethnographic framework, however, we can begin to uncover the many layers of power, process, and practice that undermine program planning, implementation, and outcomes.

### **Theoretical Contributions of IE**

To build theory, expertise is needed in the form of knowledge of the phenomenon and of suitable research tools (Storberg-Walker, 2003). Lynham's "general method of theory-building research in applied disciplines" suggested the research tools be both inductive and deductive and incorporate "intuition, creativity, and curiosity of the researcher in various phases" (Storberg-Walker, 2003, pp. 211). IE does just that by allowing the researcher to follow leads and clues to build a picture of the issue under study. For example, the leads and clues can be in the form of interviews of participants at one level in a system that generate questions for another participant at another level in the system and documents from an external agency. The capacity of IE to contribute to theory building is demonstrated in Selvaraj's (2014) analysis of Cervero and Wilson's "planning table model" and subsequent researchers who used their model as a theoretical lens to examine the activity of 'negotiation' in program planning. The examination of program planning theoretical models through the lens of IE would help to build upon

previous theoretical frameworks and provide a stronger platform that (a) better explains mechanisms of power, (b) more clearly accounts for unintended consequences of the work of planning, and that (c) contributes to illuminating the ways that institutions have a subversive role in coordinating people's lives across space and time. Introducing textual forms of examination, inherent in IE, future theoretical frameworks could account for the role that documents play in transferring power and organizing learning and work.

Program planning "inherently involves both individual and contextual factors" (Selvaraj, 2014, pp. 467), thus research on program planning cannot simply describe the consequences of power without adequately analyzing its inner workings when in operation. The model's current analytic emphasis will be compromised if it continues to focus solely "on individual deficit and educational solution" and does not clearly map "the social relations from the local setting into the broader institutional dimensions" (Selvaraj, 2014, pp. 469). Utilizing IE to bring into focus institutional dimensions lends to theoretical constructs that take into account the unconscious use of power both within and beyond the borders of program planning.

IE could also be useful for creating a theoretical framework that fuses action research and critical human resource development (CHRD) constructs. Because CHRD has been criticized for focusing mainly on the problem more than it seeks to solve the problem (Githens, 2015), further theoretical frameworks using IE could introduce a model that holistically integrates multilevel research fused with actionable practice. Most action research occurs on three levels: individual, group, and institutional (Githens, 2015). McGuire & Garavan (2011) began building a theoretical multilevel model of analysis for CHRD that closely aligns to these three levels in hopes that analysis of this



kind would be useful for liberating employees from dominant discourses and privileged power structures. Bierma & Callahan (2014) introduced a new framework for CHRD. They outlined four areas within their framework to identify what types of reflection is necessary to interrogate the ways in which we reflect and consider our research around how we engage human and organizational systems. IE, as a multilayered theoretical framework could help to build a theoretical model that advances the aims of critical action research and CHRD. IE, has as its goal, to produce a map that illuminates where and at what junctures the problem is actually the problem.

### **Benefits and Implications**

IE makes an important contribution to the field by demonstrating its ability to: (a) acknowledge the masked political and social power relations embedded in experience, (b) uncover the ability of texts to shape and control lives in unrecognized ways, (c) provide practical tools to foster change at the federal, state, and local levels, and (d) address dual contexts, connecting issues across multiple sites. As adult participation becomes more culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse, the field's challenge is to think more politically (Amstutz, 1999) and socially (Selvaraj, 2014), making the issue of learner and social context more critical. IE can address long-standing concerns in adult education of why some individuals do not participate by understanding the ruling relations that shape and organize learners' experiences. With the increased role of adult educators in program planning, IE research can illuminate how policy or administrative procedures in training programs stifle the learning and autonomy pursued by its participants by carrying dominant ideologies into program planning, design, and instruction. As noted by Selvaraj (2014) institutional ethnography could reveal

unintentional consequences of work that people engage in as well as helping institutions understand their hidden roles in mediating and coordinating people's lives. Additionally, IE can provide a practical map, outlining current adult education practices or pedagogically driven techniques that are ineffective for learners on the margins.

For organizations, uncovering ways that ruling relations operate within organizations becomes a fundamental tool for understanding issues of learning and performance- how learning may not be taking place for certain groups of people. How knowledge and power interact across multiple settings to inhibit performance or what constitutes effective interpersonal relations related to team learning are important topics of study (Brooks, 1997, Selvaraj, 2014). Understanding how federal policies, such as the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (2006), shape the way that women are treated in organizations may reveal factors that impact women's work performance and career advancement opportunities within the organization. With increased interest in incivility, workplace violence, and domestic violence at work, IE can also serve as an effective framework for investigating how the administrative practices of the criminal justice system collide with organizational processes to influence modern workplaces and employee relations.

As a research tool, IE challenges scholars to examine the context of his/her own research, to acknowledge the implications of ideology on the research problems we select, the techniques we use to understand those problems, and the processes used to form analytical categories, situate subjects, construct advanced meanings, and justify our actions and the actions of others. Because dominant modes of knowing have placed us on an intellectual leash (Thomas, 1993), our worldviews, thus our research and our practice

is limited without a critical consciousness. The leash constrains us into a web of preconceived ideas and thoughts framed for us and does not leave much room to frame our own issues and the issues of those who society marginalized. The ideological apparatus is a part of the reason why researchers have become domesticated, useful for studying things in isolation from their processes and objectifying their subjects.

Researchers can be found guilty of failing to explore “the ironic and emancipatory potential of [their] research” (Thomas, 1993, pp. 8). There is a connection to practice from what is discovered in research. IE offers scholars a way to change our lives and the lives of others- individually, organizationally, and socially. “The transformative potential of IE comes from the character of analysis it produces; it is like a ‘map’ that can serve as a guide through a complex ruling apparatus” (Devault and McCoy, 2001, pp. 754). There is an advancement of knowledge that can come from understanding what actually happens and how ideology is enacted within educational programs (Selvaraj, 2014).

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## CHAPTER III

### STUDY #2

#### **INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: UTILIZING BATTERED WOMEN'S STANDPOINT TO EXAMINE HOW INSTITUTIONAL RULING RELATIONS SHAPE AFRICAN AMERICAN BATTERED WOMEN'S WORK EXPERIENCES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES**

While it is true that domestic violence effects everyone, it is not true that domestic violence effects everyone equally (Kanuha, 1994; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Domestic violence, defined as any and all forms of abuse that occur within a relationship, including physical, sexual, financial, or psychological abuse (Mouton, Riovi, Furniss, & Lasserl, 1999), is trivialized in discussions within mainstream literature. The trivialization is clear when the research discusses all women's experiences with domestic violence the same way when in fact African American women disproportionately experience the most severe and lethal acts of domestic violence in comparison to other women (Bent-Goodley, St. Vil, & Hubbert, 2012; Sokoloff et al., 2005). The experiences of African American battered women are also minimized when pastors ignore violent acts or provide inadequate counsel in an attempt to preserve the sanctity of marriage over the safety of women. "The church has often put the responsibility for the abuse on the woman by encouraging her to pray, honor her sacred obligation to marriage, and forgive her partner" (Bent-Goodley et al., 2012, pp. 53).

The prevalence of domestic violence and the reality that it exists on many fronts has been well documented by global organizations around the world, yet a hush of silence "still operates in many congregational or denominational circles" (Nason-Clark, 2009,



pp. 379). While attending a meeting at Miami-Dade County's faith-based organization's roundtable, one clergy member emphatically exclaimed that "The church needs to stand up! We have a problem that nobody is talking about." The outcry of the clergy member seems to reaffirm the reality that there is indeed a problem and it is either being underdiscussed or inadequately responded to, especially in African American churches. The lack of response is problematic because African American women are more likely to reach for help within their faith family before reaching towards formal providers (Bent-Goodley et al., 2012).

Domestic violence is more than a personal experience that happens in a cocoon to be handled privately. When churches imply that women should be solely responsible for the solution to abuse, it reflects an institutional position that ignores the church's macro level institutional responsibility for reframing the perceptions and responses to domestic violence, once again pushing an institutionally shaped dialogue into the hands of an already bruised soul. Churches fail to recognize that the women in their churches who serve them are entire people. In addition to sweat equity and brain power, a woman engages her emotional, social, and spiritual being into service and work. When the premise, scope, and consequences of domestic violence are misunderstood and misapplied in the church, abused victims become victimized twice- once by their partners and again by the church.

Victimization that occurs in church is externally shaped and coordinated by larger social processes, some of which are hidden. The church, as a contested terrain of political, social, and cultural influences is laden with historical and societal ideologies surrounding patriarchy, women's familial roles, and the biblical interpretation of

women's positionality in relation to men. The church becomes the geographical space whereby women experience either emancipatory assistance or suffer a subjugation of human rights within the church. When women are subjugated they become involuntary victims of historical influence and religious misapplication. There is a linkage for how scripture and history organize African American battered women's institutional life to happen as it does.

### **Church as an Institution**

The linkage between a battered woman's life and her institutional life is a noteworthy consideration because African- American women outrank men and women from any other racial and ethnic background in terms of their religious commitment and religious observance (Sahgal & Smith, 2008). The Pew Forum reported that more than eight in 10 Black women (84%) say religion is very important to them, and roughly six-in-ten (59%) say they attend religious services at least once a week (Sahgal & Smith, 2008). Because of the African American church's emotive nature, we can often times overlook the African American church's viability as a formative organization for exploring its human resource development constructs. In examining its historical underpinnings, the masculine rationality found in other disciplines, such as human resource development (Bierma & Storberg-Walker, 2007) can be found within the culture of formalized religious institutions.

Bierma and Storberg-Walker (2007) described human resource development (HRD) as a "feminized profession whose discourse, scholars, and leaders continue to be masculine and rational," lacking the ability to fulfill its "pivotal role of humanistically facilitating development and change" (pp. 1-6). A feminized profession is thought to be

one highly populated with women, but where women do not receive equitable positioning, pay, or consideration. I believe, in looking at the African American church, while we see the participation and the majority of stakeholders as women, we encounter a barrage of external controls such as patriarchally defined ideologies, practices, and roles that shape life for African American religious women, and life in particular for battered women working and simultaneously seeking help from these institutions.

There is a lack of agreement by the church in establishing shared goals, values, and practices that serve the organizational purpose of emancipating all and demeaning none. Like HRD, the church is predominately represented by women, but is characteristically masculine in bureaucratic organizing as it focuses on absolute male headship, performing well in the sight of God, and in preserving the sanctity of marriage for the family unit as opposed to seeking the common good for both. Because of the significant role that the African American church has played in the lives and practices of African American families (Sahgal & Smith, 2008), it is important to create dialogue and bridge understandings around its institutional practices in the lives of battered women who attend and participate. As such, critical examination of the church as an institution moves us toward a critical human resource development (CHRD) research focus for holistically addressing the church institution's attitudes and practices towards women and giving voice to these women on the margins.

### **Battered Women and Church**

Several scholars have documented the relationship between spirituality, church involvement and domestic violence; and the struggles and impact of domestic violence among religious women (Bent-Goodley, 2006; Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Gilbert &

Gilbert, 2001; Kroeger & Nason-Clark, 2001). The impact of domestic violence, attitudes regarding disclosure, clergy and institutional responses are not as widely understood in religious communities although “it is clear that domestic violence has an adverse impact on the family and community and is worthy of investigation and attention” (Brade, Fischle & Bent-Goodley, 2004). For African American battered women, it is difficult to determine the extent of domestic violence because of their limited inclusion in the research and because of other methodological shortcomings as it relates to research (Brade, 2009). In relation to religious communities, the issue is compounded by the taboo nature of the topic as well as ideologies suggested by scripture where women feel the need to not let God down, to be submissive, to preserve the marriage, to forgive and reconcile; and women may ultimately not disclose. African American battered women have been known to be strong while experiencing adversity. The church, however, has been considered the informal network that African American battered women draw upon if they do seek help (Brade, 2009; Hage, 2000), although religious leaders’ responses have not been proactive or appropriate (Jones & Fowler, 2009). These are unique perspectives that separate religious women’s abuse experiences from the abuse experiences of nonreligious women. There is a scarcity and inherently a need for “theological, conceptual and empirical literature that provides a context for understanding the issue as it relates to religious leaders of faith communities,” because such literature is scarce (Brade, 2009, pp. 19). Among adult African American women (aged 15-59), assault by an intimate partner is the leading cause of premature death (US Department of Justice, 1998). Some researchers attest that African Americans experience domestic

violence at higher rate than other racial groups (Bent-Goodley, 2001; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

In terms of religion, research has examined battered women's experiences within the context of help seeking behaviors (Nason-Clark, 2010), faith-based spiritual support (Bent-Goodley, T., Vil, N. S., & Hubbert, P., 2012), clergy ineptness at responding to the issue, (Nason-Clark, 2009), spiritually driven motivations for remaining in abusive relationships (Nason-Clark, 2009), and patriarchal or biblical influences that support or uphold biblically based religious perspectives toward violence against women (Tracey, 2007). When it comes to issues of battered women who work, empirical research is lacking in this area on a broad organizational scale and on the narrow focus of faith based organizations who employ or utilize women in a working capacity. Research ignores the multilayered interactions between African American battered women, work, and faith in the organizations that employ them. In order to frame the discussion properly, shape the appropriate institutional responses, and draft the necessary policies to inform change, we must acknowledge the need for research that moves beyond a narrow focus on any one aspect of individual experience. Instead, consideration should be made for how an institution's social and political landscape influence battered women's lives as workers and victims.

### **Institutional Ethnography**

Dorothy Smith (1987), through a research approach called institutional ethnography (IE), provides a way to investigate the purposeful, yet hidden, organizing of battered women's experiences within churches. Institutional ethnography is a form of critical ethnography that provides an empirical way to map the social and institutional

processes that produce battered women's experiences at local sites (Shan, 2009). Devault and McCoy (2001) describe institutional ethnography as "the empirical investigation of linkages among local settings of everyday life, organizations, and translocal processes of administration" (Devault & McCoy, 2001, pp. 751). *Institution*, does not imply that the research is conducted on a particular type of organization nor does it address "a given institutional setting from the point of view of its overall organization (Pence & Smith, 2004, pp. 1).

"Instead, it begins with a particular standpoint – for example, that of a woman who has been abused – and questions the institutional processes that produce a certain outcome from that standpoint. The layers of legal, bureaucratic, and professional structures are not addressed as a whole. Rather, specific processes relevant to the problems women experience are identified. Institutional ethnography traces those processes as sequences of institutional activity in which people participate at various levels and in various capacities" (pp. 1).

The institutional processes and multiple sites are locations where the issue under investigation can be seen and experienced from different perspectives. "From the lens of IE, it is in the social concerting and coordination of people's activities that ruling is accomplished at multiple sites" (Shan, 2009, pp. 53). "The term *ethnography* highlights the importance of research methods that can discover and explore these everyday activities and their positioning within extended sequences of action" (Devault & McCoy, 2001 pp. 753). In institutional ethnographic research, investigating how an individual's everyday world is mediated begins in a person's direct, lived experience and moves toward uncovering the observable and unobservable determinants of that experience.

Institutional ethnography, then, “is a strategy for investigating institutions from the locations of disempowered groups” (Oneill, 2015, pp. 131-132) as the researcher seeks to examine the broader social relations that are embedded in the coordination of their lived experience.

To answer the question of how does this happen as it does or how are these relations organized, institutional ethnographers focus on (a) the social organization of knowledge, (b) the power of connectedness of the local to the social, and (c) standpoint theory.

### **Social Organization of Knowledge**

According to a social organization framework, social life is viewed as purposefully organized to happen as it does “more or less mysteriously and outside a person’s knowledge” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, pp. 18). Systematic processes and practices known as *ruling relations* (Smith, 1987), are woven together to manage and control battered women’s social world. Ruling relations are the textual venues (such as legislation, governing boards, policy development, management, administration) where power is generated and transported in society and its institutions across multiple sites. For battered women who work in Christian churches, ruling relations operate and are transported through a church’s knowledge, interpretation, and practices following scriptural interpretation, historical ideologies surrounding women’s roles in relation to men, and what is considered to be acceptable spiritual practices according to one’s faith.

Power becomes critically important as an analytic focus- illuminating practices that marginalize and making visible how ruling relations are transported through knowledge, experience, discourse, and institutions. The Pastor, as one of the church’s

most influential employees, has the power to transport these relations of ruling to multiple generations or reshape how the institution interprets and transmits its social life. The concept of social organization is important to the discovery of systemic and systematic power relations that influence battered women's work experiences and ways in which perceptions and ideologies are constructed to influence conceptions about battered women as individuals and as workers. "Smith uses the concept social relations, to refer to the processes by which people's lives are shaped to conform to dominant ideologies" (O'Neill, 1998, pp. 132).

### **Power of Connectedness**

The theory of connectedness in IE posits that oppression and power is carried and coordinated across sites by means of texts (Smith, 1987). Institutional ethnographers acknowledge that (1) "texts function to make invisible connections work" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 32); and (2) that texts have defining power in people's lives. Texts give significance to linking practice "and consciousness to the social relations of power in society" (Griffith, 1995, p. 1). "By texts, she [Smith] means not only documents such as legislation, organizational policies, and procedures, but also the social relations which flow from such documents (O'Neill, 1998, pp. 132). Because texts transport power in ideologies and practices across sites and among people, no distinction can be made then "between the powers of the public and the private domains" (Smith, 1987, pp. 211).

An institutional ethnographic view would propose that household life is connected to multiple institutions outside that organize paid work, leisure, health care, and social and economic services. Because social, medical, legal and organizational discourses operating on macro levels are controlled by men (Smith, 1987) their ideologies translate



into micro practices that systemically impose patriarchal ideologies on women's local lives. The discourses that sustain the patriarchal culture transport ideology from individuals to governing bodies, to practices within bureaucratic administration, to extended social relations. Thus, it is easier to clarify how women's "intimate and personal experiences of oppression are [in fact] anchored in and sustained by a patriarchal organization of ruling" (Smith, 1987, pp. 211).

The power of a text to cross boundaries can be viewed similar to Foucault's (1967) explanation of power.

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always the elements of articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application. (pp. 234)

The premise of power becomes important to this research because if power circulates like a web, then conceptually, the personal must indeed be connected to the public or the institutional. Because texts given by the church are the basis by which members of family groups operate outside their homes, families organize home life (or do not) in relation to these ideologies, and the ways their activities fit with those sites (or do not) have consequences for their family lives (Devault, 1999, pp. 49).

## **Standpoint Theory**

Standpoint theory is a critical epistemology that suggests when research is conducted from the lived experiences and locations of marginalized groups as opposed to the positions of dominant groups, a clearer construction of the realities of the experience can be garnered (Collins, 1991; Oneill, 2015; Smith, 1987). “Standpoint is a social position within the bodily experience, relevancies, and everyday knowledge of people in a designated group or social location. Those relevancies, knowledge and experience are the starting points informing the research design of an institutional ethnography” (Bisaillon & Rankin, 2013, pp.). Knowledge developed from the standpoint of the marginalized is construed as being more comprehensive “because members of marginalized groups live within the dominant culture as well as their minority culture” thus they may have knowledge which is unavailable to dominant groups who mainly experience one social location (O’Neill, 1998, pp. 131). In the case of battered women in churches, women are able to speak to both aspects of their lived experience as opposed to an awareness of one. Being positioned between both worlds leads to what Smith (1987) calls a bifurcated consciousness. A bifurcated consciousness references the unsettled dichotomy that manifests when women are negotiating and navigating between the mismatched worlds of lived experience and dominant knowledge in their public and private spheres of life. For African American women who are both battered and religious, this bifurcated consciousness causes them to live between institutional ideologies that may be subjecting them to a psychological commitment to private abuse for the sake of public spiritual devotion.

## **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the institutional relations that shaped African American battered women's work experiences in Christian churches. In this study, institutional relations refer to the institutional ideologies, politics, and social relations that operate within churches to influence its perspectives, frameworks, spoken and unspoken rules, policies, and actions. It is important to identify the ruling relations that shape these women's experiences as workers because battered women may utilize their work in church as an escape from the abuse suffered at home. Understanding how these relations are at play can assist in uncovering modes of power, process, and practice that are the antithesis to the intended emancipatory aim of African American Christian churches and Christian service. By African American church, I mean churches that are predominately African American in makeup. Women in this study came from Christian churches as follows: (a) Baptist, (b) Non-Denominational, and (c) Apostolic. This empirical study was guided by the following research question: (a) What are the institutional experiences of African American battered women working in Christian churches? (b) How do institutional ruling relations intersect to shape African American battered women's work experiences in Christian churches? The remainder of this paper outlines the research design, discussion of findings, and implications and conclusions.

## **Research Design**

The study utilized an institutional ethnographic method (Smith, 1987) to guide data collection and analysis because it allows for research "that makes visible how people's experiences at the micro level of the everyday social world are shaped and determined by the macro-level influences that enter into their everyday lives (Zurawski,

2010, pp. 15). Institutional ethnography provides “a way for us to see how a woman who is beaten by her husband is made institutionally actionable and how in that process attention to her safety drops away as other institutional objectives subsume her particular situation and needs” (Pence, 1997, pp. 10). Institutional ethnography produces knowledge for women rather than simply about them. Institutional ethnography lends itself to helping women understand their social world from their own location (Smith, 1987) and using analysis to the benefit of the marginalized as opposed to the dominant regime. The present section outlines procedures that were followed in this study for identifying informants, informant demographics, data collection and analysis.

### **Identifying Informants**

Informants in this study encompassed two groups. “Because IE researchers are not oriented toward descriptive reporting on a population, they do not think of informants as a ‘sample’” (Devault & McCoy, 2001, pp. 764). Institutional ethnography researchers may aim at diversity of experience rather than demographic categories in order to point toward other possible informants. One group of informants was called survivors which consisted of battered women who were formerly abused. The other group was called practitioners which consisted of individuals who provided services to battered women.

Informants who were identified as survivors were required to meet four criteria: (a) be at least 18 years old, (b) identify as African American, (c) be a woman, and (d) be a survivor of domestic violence which occurred while she worked/volunteered in the church. To recruit participants, e-mails were sent to individuals and church leaders who were known to me or who worked with battered women as counselors, pastoral leaders, advocates, or service providers. At the same time, a call for informants was made via

Facebook to personal contacts, agencies and organizations who were known to me or who advertised work with battered women. While soliciting informants, individuals were encouraged to share this information with others who may be interested in interviewing. I interviewed three personal contacts via this method. Two participants were recruited via snowball sampling for this category. Facebook generated two participants via this method.

Informants who were identified as practitioners were required to meet two criteria: (a) be at least 18 years old, and (b) be a current/former provider of services to African American women who were battered by a male partner while they worked/volunteered in the church. To recruit participants, e-mails were sent to individuals and church leaders who were known to me or who advertised work with battered women. At the same time, a call for informants was forwarded via Facebook to personal contacts as well as agencies and organizations who advertised work with battered women. While soliciting informants, individuals were encouraged to share this information with others who may have been interested in being interviewed. I was able to interview four personal contacts via this method. Facebook generated two participants via this method.

### **Informant Demographics**

The seven participants categorized as survivors were on average 51 years old. All participants identified as African American. They held various positions in and external to the church from choir member, Sunday school teacher, Pastor's wife, pastor, to victim advocate, or CEO of a faith based group whose mission is to address domestic violence. All survivors were women who experienced physical abuse. All survivors are currently

married except one, Carol. All participants were assigned pseudonyms after the interviews were transcribed.

The six participants categorized as practitioners were on average 54 years old. All participants identified as African American. They held a variety of positions within the church from pastor, social worker, CEO of Advocacy Initiatives, or overseer of multiple churches. All practitioners are African American and have experience providing services to African American battered women. All practitioners are married except one, Kylia. There were three men and three women in the practitioner group. All participants were assigned pseudonyms after the interviews were transcribed.

### **Data Collection**

The main forms of data collection for 13 informants (survivors and practitioners) were interviews, personal notes, and examination of Biblical text references mentioned by informants. Interviews on average lasted 42 minutes. The shortest interview with survivors was 23 minutes and the longest was 85 minutes. The shortest interview with practitioners was 26 minutes and the longest was 66 minutes. Interviews were conducted at The Flame Outflow Center, a community center where I oversee outreach work and provide spiritual intervention to others. The interview room utilized was comfortable, warm, and inviting, and is normally used for sessions with clients that seek to share personal and private information. If it was not possible to meet in person, interviews were conducted over the phone. Nine interviews were conducted in person. Four interviews were conducted by phone. Prior to beginning the interviews, participants gave consent in alignment with IRB requirements. Interviews were semi-structured (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) and were guided by a set of open-ended questions related to: (a)

individual standpoint and experience with domestic violence, (b) organizational conditions, and (c) organizational implications. Interviews flowed according to how participants responded to questions and in relation to the need to further explore specific responses and probing.

The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim in trint.com. Immediately following each interview, an hour was dedicated to write up any researcher responses, feelings or thoughts as it related to the interview conducted in order to keep my assumptions up front and distinguish my thoughts from those of participants. This was also done to assist in contextualizing the narrative of the interview when needed. Texts were also examined when informants mentioned scriptural biblical references that pointed to certain ideologies or views surrounding the issue of domestic violence in church. Notes were also written accordingly.

To gain a clear understanding of the problematic from the standpoint of battered women, the first round of interviews was conducted with survivors. This allowed me to seek understanding of the problem and determine additional questions for exploration when interviewing other survivors and practitioners. When conducting subsequent interviews, I began to pay more attention to institutional ideologies, practices, and responses from the institution in cases where women disclosed the abuse. When women disclosed to their church or their pastor, it allowed me to follow or trace a more specific set of organizational responses useful for this study as opposed to instances where women did not disclose to their church or assumed indirect disclosure because of the evidence of abuse that was visible on their bodies.

Although the study began in interviews with seven women, knowledge building surrounding African American battered women's experience in Christian churches was extended through round two interviews with six practitioners of varied backgrounds. Four of the practitioners are currently pastors. One is a former pastor turned advocate. Another is an elder in a church. Round two interviews with practitioners asked similar questions to those of the survivors (See Appendix A). This helped to add another layer of perspective to the study and to help locate the ruling relations that impact battered women.

The focus of the questions for practitioner interviews required them to reflect on their experiences and interactions with African American battered women who worked or volunteered in African American Christian churches. Following the thread of information gained in earlier interviews with survivors, probing questions were used to understand and focus more attention toward allowing practitioners to elucidate information that would either confirm or extend information provided by survivors around institutional ideologies, practices, and responses where women disclosed the abuse. Interviews with practitioners seemed to provide a clearer articulation of language surrounding women's institutional experiences in a way that the battered women themselves had explained from a narrative perspective, though battered women could not necessarily provide succinct language for understanding what was shaping the experience. This focus on multilevel data and analytics increased the researcher's faith in the value of the data and the analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1970).



## **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Preliminary data analysis occurred throughout the interview process and formally, after both rounds of interviews was completed. In the analysis phase, I engaged in five steps. The first step was considered a preliminary analysis. After each interview, I spent up to an hour responding to the interview to reflect on the interview and to begin writing preliminary notes. Preliminary themes began to emerge and were noted. This was done for each of the 13 interviews conducted.

I engaged in a more formal analysis once all of the interviews were completed. Each listening is considered steps two through five. As is consistent with the listening guide approach (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), I listened to each interview four times, each time for a different purpose. I played the audio version of the interviews while simultaneously reading through each transcript. In each listening, nodes were created in NVivo relative to the theme. Nodes signaled the occurrence of specific information, keywords, or phrases assigned to the text around a certain idea. I listened to and read the transcripts the first time to reflexively ask what was happening, which elements repeatedly occurred, and to examine my interpretation of those elements (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) in order to become aware of what influenced my knowledge construction. The first listening and reading was to understand the plot or stories of the battered women; and to keep at the forefront any of my own constructs that would influence my knowledge construction and interpretation (Balan, 2005). I created a node and labeled it as plot in NVivo for each part of the transcript that reflected the plot of the informants' stories. The second listening and reading was to understand the various voices and perspectives held by survivors within their social worlds individually and ultimately

collectively. Nodes were created in NVivo for perspective and voice. Both the first and second listening and reading focused on micro level perspectives.

The third and fourth listening and reading of the transcripts revealed the macro level institutional relations. The third listening and reading was designed to uncover the social relations that were key components in understanding organizational dynamics (Woodcock, 2010). Several nodes were created in NVivo surrounding institutional relations as themes emerged. Finally, the fourth listening and reading of interview transcripts was done to examine the “structured power relations and dominant ideologies that framed the narratives of informants. The fourth reading located the “contrapuntal voice” which were tensions in the voices and experience of the battered women and how these were interwoven to uncover the social relations found in the stories (Woodcock, 2010), which is the focus of this paper. By the fourth reading of the data, themes and corresponding relationships emerged that helped to inform the study and provide clues to how the experience happened as it did. Several nodes were created in NVivo surrounding additional institutional relations which later informed theme generation.

Themes emerged from participant narratives that informed us as to what conditions were impacting women’s individual experiences. Emerging themes were synthesized for coherency. To synthesize the data, I reviewed informants’ verbatim transcripts, my personal notes, examined the themes that emerged from the transcripts, and reviewed Biblical scriptures. I created a rule that specified, in order for a theme to appear in the findings, the overarching theme had to be mentioned by more than four informants. I grouped and regrouped categories in order to produce a clear analysis. Categories were combined if they were interrelated to form larger categories. Personal

notes were reviewed and used to inform the final analysis; and to remain conscious of researcher thoughts as distinguished from informants.

To ensure that the analysis properly represented the participants' experience, a member-checking package (Balan, 2005) was reviewed with the informants. The package consisted of their verbatim transcript, a set of I-statements that arose from their transcripts, a review of the findings and overarching themes generated, and my interpretation of the social relations surrounding their experience. The themes assisted me in ultimately understanding how institutional ruling relations shape African American battered women's experiences at work in Christian churches. Work is considered paid or unpaid as most African American women dedicate a substantial amount of time to religious service, involvement, and service roles (Sahgal & Smith, 2008).

The following section provides an analysis of the collective plot of African American women within the church and subsequently discusses the themes and points of tension arising from women who disclosed. My study mainly follows the thread of data surrounding the ways that disclosure around abuse engages women in a wide array of institutional relations and actions that impinge upon and shape the lives of African American women working in Christian churches.

### **Battered Women's Collective Plot and Voice**

The study began in interviews with seven women of varied backgrounds who all shared the commonality of working and serving in Christian churches while in an abusive relationship. The collective plot or sequencing of events was formed after the first reading of the interview transcripts as is consistent with the listening guide approach. There were a set of sequential experiences lifted from the women's standpoint that helped

me to understand the junctures at which their lives were being shaped by institutional relations. One such experience was the act of disclosure. The act of disclosure initiated their lives into a wide nexus of ruling relations within the church that were basically controlled by the institution's voice. I define the institution's voice as the constructs or messaging that were provided back to the women after disclosure. There were two categories of disclosure: (a) direct disclosure, which is women directly telling someone in the church about the abuse and (b) assumed disclosure where women assumed the church was aware because physical marks of abuse were observable to others. There were five women who disclosed directly to the pastor or pastor's wife. The remaining two women either disclosed to a friend within the church; or assumed the church was informed.

Below is a diagram that outlines how women entered the institutional regime through direct or assumed disclosure. Figure one outlines the course of actions that ensue once disclosure took place to an authorized representative. The institution, by way of its institutional representative, provided a response to African American women. In the study, the response to abuse was either patriarchal, spiritual, or silence. This was labeled as the institution's voice. Once the institution responded, women experienced personal, internal tensions in the areas of identity, ideology, and action; as well as institutional death because the woman's humanity and her abuse diminished behind institutional ideals about marriage, women's roles, and institutional expectations. The concepts in the diagram are discussed more thoroughly in the discussion that follows.

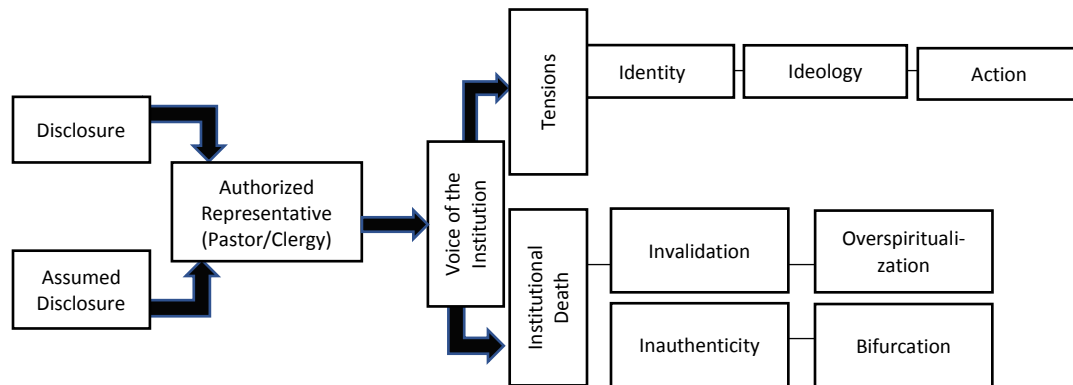


Figure 1. Battered women’s collective plot from disclosure to impact.

## Disclosure

When women directly disclosed, they were approaching what they perceived to be an authorized representative of the institution, a pastor, pastor’s wife, or clergy member who would be capable and qualified to address their concerns. The fact that women were disclosing to sources within the organization is key, because these individuals had been given power by the battered women to speak into their situation and help them navigate a change for their situation. Patrick, an advocate and CEO of an organization that works with victims of domestic violence, lost three co-workers to domestic violence, all of whom were African American. He expressed that women come looking to the church for relief.

There's no other place. Secular research says in a time of crisis and trouble where do people turn first? It's still the church and law enforcement. It's still the church. So the church, in some sense, still has some relevance even if it is by default. But who wants to go to a pantry that's empty? Who wants to do the parable of the fig tree all over again? You come and the tree looks good; full of leaves but there's no fruit on it. A person is coming to church and the only thing we leave out with is a cosmetic type of look. The word or help I'm looking for is a catharsis experience. But we have not left out with healing.

The fact that the women were hitting brick walls launched the reality of their experience within the institution of church. Sandy, a Pastor's wife, was in an abusive relationship said this of her experience over 20 years ago, as she was seeking counsel about leaving the abusive relationship...

And when I went to my pastor's wife about it. It was funny, she looked at me with no emotion as if I was talking to a ghost or something like no expression. I was telling her what I was going through and then she just looked at me. She had nothing to give me, you know? And I was like, you not even going to pray for me. All she said is "you sure you made the right decision. So, you're going to stick with that decision?" And I said yeah and she said "Ok." And that was it. I'm 20 at that time and seeking counsel because I felt my parents were too close to me. They really, really sheltered me. I wanted someone that was neutral who I respected and believed in to kind of pour into me but I didn't get any good information.

For women who did not directly disclose, they felt that the nature of the institution and the nature of the visibility of their abuse was in fact disclosure. These women placed a responsibility upon the church to know what was going on. Janice, a 54-year-old women, said this of her experience when asked if she told her pastor.

They knew because the assistant pastor, she saw the blood on my neck and she saw the scratches. She saw the scars, but nothing happened. It's like they not going to say anything. She never asked me the question but she knew how I got it.

References by other survivors shared that, in a spiritual environment, they expected that the individuals in their church knew. It was assumed because of the church's spiritual intuitiveness, that they also would discern if something was happening with their people, especially leaders and knew how to respond. This however, was never specifically proven to be the case although it was an unspoken expectation. What did surface in these women's experiences, was that in every case of disclosure, whether direct or assumed, women were unknowingly entering a set of relations that constructed

or shaped the rest of their institutional and personal life. Women's personal, private experiences became institutional experiences the moment that disclosure or assumed disclosure took place because the women now expected the institution to respond.

### **Voice of the Institution**

Women, in disclosing, met the voice of the institution. In other words, it brought them into knowing or beginning to intentionally observe the institution's response to their abuse. The institution's response to the abuse is what I call the *voice of the institution*. It is this voice that spoke back or didn't to the women; and actually became the ruling factor in shaping these battered women's work experiences within the church. The institution's voice was patriarchal, spiritual, or silent. In some instances, the church reiterated dominant ideologies surrounding the submission of women and the need to honor the sanctity of their marriage and the man's role in the home. The church professed according to scripture that the man is the head of the wife.

In other scenarios, the church overspiritualized the abuse, recommending reliance on God and prayer as the solution to change all the while neglecting the criminal nature of the violence or the women's need for safety. Morris, a 50-year-old pastor of a mega church who was interviewed as a practitioner posited this.

I haven't found the church to be very supportive at all, of hurting women many different scenarios including domestic violence. In most cases, I haven't seen that support translated. Spiritual support is more emotional support but it's not the kind of support that reaches in and actually helps to correct the situation, to remove the violence, ever.

Patrick, a 55-year-old advocate explained that scriptural and cultural misunderstandings of the scriptures lead to a denial of the need to address the real issue.

We have to take those things [scripture] and use them in their proper context because if we don't, what we're doing is that we're continuing to perpetuate a lie. Let me put it in these terms. There's nothing more binding in bondage than having a scriptural batterer; a person who uses the scripture to justify behavior. So, you have a lot of women, a lot of victims that suffer in silence because; guess what, these things are in their minds. They want to please God so much that they believe, "Well, I'm just suffering for Christ sake." Or, "I made my bed and I've got to just lay in it." I think these things come from a cultural misunderstanding of the scripture... Often time pastors won't deal with domestic violence. A person comes and they want to lay hands on them or they say, "We'll be praying for you baby..." We have to ask how can we facilitate healing beyond me just saying that I'm going to pray for you because to facilitate healing may mean I need to connect you with other resources.

Unfortunately, there are other cases when there was no response by the institution. Even still, their silence spoke volumes to these women. These areas of institutional response created tensions for the abused woman. For the first time, I believe these women either realized the institution they once relied on, would not help them or they encountered not agreeing with the voice of the church, where they once upheld its voice as prominent in their lives.

My adult life I went to my pastor and I told my pastor what was going on. They gave me scriptures based on submitting to my husband and obeying my husband - things of that nature. Looking back on it, there are a lot of women that were abused in the church and they were told the same things. So "Little Miss Rebellious," me who don't follow the rules. And I'm saying what they would say, I didn't follow the rules because everybody else was submitting to the abuse and praying and using all the Scriptures and that wasn't working for me so in my opinion I was abused double because I didn't follow the rules. (Carol)

Yes, I was involved in church. When I transitioned to Tulsa, Oklahoma I was involved in a non-denominational church at that time. As the domestic violence became more physical, every other day I was going and talking with the pastors. They basically told me that "no matter what you know stay in and work through it. God can always change a person." So, I believed that- not knowing that nobody is really listening to me. Who can I trust, who can I reach out to if I'm listening to pastors tell me that I should stay in it and go to seek counseling. You know I hear the right direction to go get help. I hear you telling me this, but in my head the vows don't say thou shall beat thou wife. (Rimmie)



Ryan, a 60-year-old Pastor, from the practitioner interviews, oversees a large network of churches echoes the reality of the women and brings to the surface all three voices of the institution (patriarchal, scriptural, or silence in this response.

I think the church today still has a challenge with women and their role and their positions you know and so forth. Their views on domestic violence were probably very, very cloudy, very murky, and very few of the church leaders that I know actually took a position or took a stand. You know there's this mentality that comes from probably a scriptural principle. If a man doesn't rule his own house well how can he rule the house of God. So, the idea of that ruling man and that submissive woman really makes the reality of domestic violence and domestic abuse distorted in the minds of church leaders.

This distortion created a distortion, not just in the mind of the leaders, but in the ears and hearts of the women. This distortion turned into a tension that battered women had to navigate within and external to the institution of church.

### **Tensions**

In engaging the institution, the element of distortion caused women to confront and untangle three areas of their institutional experience: identity, ideology, and action. Women now began to ask the identity question, who am I supposed to be here at church and who am I supposed to be at home? Ideological tension caused them to ask what am I supposed to believe institutionally and what do I believe personally? In regards to action, how am I supposed to act or navigate here at church and how am I supposed to navigate at home?

As far as church, I lost faith in church because to me if I'm coming to you and crying out for help. And you telling me the opposite like to go along with this, it showed me something totally different. I started questioning how many other people are wearing the mask. Are they really wearing a mask themselves?... I really lost it like I don't know who to really turn to now or what to really believe. Because to me you're teaching one thing but you live a different lifestyle. And the reason why I say that is because later on even though I no longer attend that particular church, I've found out that the same co-pastor that told me to stay is the

same co-pastor that is now a divorced due to domestic violence in her own marriage. (Rimmie)

First of all, I went to people that I actually thought were stronger than me in the faith, and when I went to them I realized that a lot of them were not where they either portrayed to be or they didn't have the knowledge and during that time period with domestic violence people didn't want to get involved... It wasn't really addressed. It was like, "We're just going to keep it under cover. We're going to keep this in the closet. That kind of thing, like deal with it on your own. You'll be OK. Say a prayer." That kind of thing. (Deidra)

Table 2 below describes the responses from Rimmie and Deidra that enumerate tensions in the areas of identity, ideology, and actions, as noted in italics by the researcher.

Table 2.

*Tensions in Identity, Ideology, and Action*

<b>BATTERED WOMEN TENSIONS</b>			
<b>Battered Woman</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Actions</b>
Rimmie	I started questioning how many other people are wearing the mask. <i>Including myself, who else is not living in the real world?</i>	I lost faith in church. Who do I believe in this institution? <i>The people I should believe are not authentic.</i>	I really lost it like I don't know who to really turn to now or what to really believe. <i>How am I supposed to keep turning to the church? Should I turn somewhere else if I am being giving advice that the advice-giver isn't following?</i>
Deidra	I went to people that I actually thought they were stronger than me. <i>If they are not stronger than</i>	I went to them I realized that a lot of them were not where they either portrayed to be or they didn't have the knowledge. <i>Am I being confronted with the fact that I can't be helped by</i>	It was like, "We're just going to keep it under cover. We're going to keep this in the closet. That kind of thing, like deal with it on your own. You'll be OK. Say a prayer." <i>Is</i>

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*me, then where the church?  
do I pull  
strength from?  
Am I stronger  
than where I  
am serving?*

*church not the place  
that I am supposed to  
deal with this? I  
thought church was  
the place for solutions.  
Should I depend on  
God but not the  
institution that  
represents God? Do I  
act at church like  
everything is fine  
while I go home to  
deal with this on my  
own?*

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### **Institutional Ruling**

The internal actions that caused battered women's experiences to be nullified were shaped by set of enactments by the church which I have termed as the process of *institutional death*. This process explains how, once women disclosed, they become dead within the institution in one of four ways. Findings indicate that the institution's voice shaped the death process. The institution's voice is formed through patriarchal ideals and/or Biblically inspired principles. The next section discusses the findings of these institutional processes and the implications for how battered women work and navigate both private and public space.

### **The Institutional Death Process: A Discussion of Findings**

To properly situate the findings of this research, I had to consider the narratives of the survivors, the context provided by practitioners, and the references to the Bible as a means of answering the research question, how do institutional ruling relations shape African American battered women's experiences at work in Christian churches? "Smith uses the concept social relations [ruling relations], to refer to the processes by which

people's lives are shaped by dominant ideologies" (O'Neill, 2014, pp. 132). Since analysis does not stay in individual experience, but moves to explore those social relations organizing the experience, analytic attention was given to the Bible because it is the text that shapes the voice of the church institutionally; and ultimately initiates African American battered women's institutional death processes. O'Neill (1998) and Smith (1987) assert that social relations flow from texts and play a significant role in ignoring and invalidating the experiences of marginalized groups.

The church, built upon scriptural constructs, have misapplied, misinterpreted, and ultimately miscommunicated the ideologies surrounding women's positionality and Gods' mind on domestic abuse and the preservation of marriage. Speaking through the voice of spirituality, patriarchy, or silence battered women who work for churches have found their existence as both victims and workers extinguished. The church has contributed to the *institutional death process* of its workers in one or more of the following ways: (a) invalidation, (b) overspiritualization, (c) inauthenticity, and (d) bifurcation.

To understand the themes related to the *institutional death process*, analytic attention was given to the ways that narratives from survivor and practitioner accounts spoke about African American battered women's experiences working in Christian churches. In other words, topics were cross-examined as they became frequent occurrences in the voices of both survivors and practitioners. While survivors spoke from a very ground level explanation, practitioners articulated more of an institutional context for how survivors' accounts came to be. Understandably so, most survivors only went through abuse one to two times over an extended relationship or two, whereas

practitioners had more experience in understanding how abuse is framed from an outsiders' perspective because they have handled multiple incidents with a cross section of individuals. All six practitioners highlighted that the use of scripture, the consideration of patriarchal ideologies, or ignorance in handling these types of issues were the influences for how the institution gave voice to domestic abuse within their churches. The following discussion explains how women became dead within the institution as volunteers and workers. In some cases, concepts overlap.

### **Invalidation**

African American battered women's experiences are invalidated when church institutions continue to perpetuate and enforce the ideologies of scripture as well as cultural and patriarchal mindsets that regard violence as normal, marriage preservation over safety, women's positionality in submission to man, and the minimization of the violence as temporary while God worked on turning things around. Both survivors and practitioners in some aspect of their narrative articulated these concepts as a part of women's experiences in churches. The preeminence given to these ideologies without consideration of progressive scriptural understanding, shaped the ways that women's disclosure surrounding abuse was handled, mishandled and disregarded. While the survivors were unable to explain, in most cases, what they believed the catalyst for their experiences within the church were, practitioners such as Veronica were very clear that scriptural misapplication and the church's ideologies were at the helm of women's outcomes.

I believe it's the misconception of marriage in the guidelines. And that a man owns the woman- that male chauvinist interpretation of that biblical scripture of the woman being the weaker vessel and the woman must submit to her own

husband and reverence him and all that. Many men have taken that and twisted it to meet their ideas of what they believe is the authority in the home. So, if I slap you I own you. (Veronica)

In addition to the burden of overcoming the challenges of the aforementioned mindsets, survivors discussed how being labeled as non-submissive or as rebellious invalidated their influence within the ranks. Because following the rules is somewhat of a religious expectation, when women disobeyed publically, they became shunned and forcibly disconnected or excluded from the life of the institution (Carol).

Being labeled as non-submissive or as rebellious prevented battered women from continuing to work or provide service without the stigma and without the pressure of undue scrutiny that wasn't present before disclosure. Where church was once the sanctuary away from the abuse, it was now another source of contention that women had to fight through. For the battered women who had higher level executive level positions or who were the pastor's wife, the organization, instead of championing the woman, championed the man by being angry or unbelieving of the woman's claim. The man's external persona outranked the wives, thus invalidating the truth of her claims. Women who were pastor's wives came into the job knowing that their own identities would be hidden behind the lead man. However, pastor's wives didn't expect that if real life problems, came up, that the church would turn a blind eye. Pastor's wives who exposed the abuse became institutionally invalidated and most often, lost privilege, status, and power regardless of the workload she carried in the church. In other words, when battered pastors' wives exposed the abuse they were sent the message that they were replaceable or their work was less valuable because the institution pushed them on the margins rather quickly.

We need settings that are protected where the women you know have privacy. Where their confidentiality is secured. Then they can say, “Yes, he curses me, he slaps me.” Then, you could get them the help they needed without bringing attention. Because even when the wife exposes the husband, mostly everybody got angry with the wife. I know plenty of pastor’s wives that have been shunned by the church. The man is forgiven or the church never believes that he would do that sort of thing. (Veronica)

There were other survivors (Sandy, Rimmie, Carol) who felt abandoned by the institution after disclosing because all of the attention was redirected to the man and toward the encouragement of his involvement in church. The woman’s issue of abuse faded into the background while the church made the men their spiritual project. The point of disclosure was to help the women out of the situation, not to necessarily begin to develop relationship or engage the abuser in spiritual training at that time. Survivors felt betrayed and abandoned.

### **Overspiritualization**

Both survivors and practitioners discussed overspiritualization in the context of their narratives. Overspiritualization is when, instead of identifying and examining issues for what they were, a lens of spirituality is placed on the issue and spirituality is seen as the only context in which the issue can be interpreted, addressed or resolved. In viewing battered women’s situations this way, women were often situated in a false reality instead of being conscious that the abuse was indeed a criminal act, not just a spiritual deficit. When women were constantly told by the church that something was wrong with their faith that their husband isn’t changing, women kept trying to fix their faith instead of abandoning the abuse. Spiritualizing the abuse distorted the context and ultimately the response to the violence.

In the context of work and service, survivors also discussed their self-esteem being impacted because they just couldn't get it right. So, as women were drawn to church work to escape the abuse, it was also the place where psychologically they could not measure up to the spiritual standards that would change their situations. The church never assumed responsibility for empowering the resolution. The church only empowered for spiritualization.

And in some cases, to be very frank the religious influence encouraged women to stay in situations that they should have left from and gave them in some cases false hope. It was almost an unrealistic view of what was taking place. So, the tolerance for loyalty was sometimes lethal. You know religion, especially in our culture, can become almost like a drug that women would come back to the church and they would get encouraged but also kind of removed from reality. And they would go back into situations expecting things to change. And consequently, put themselves and their children at risk. And then the church was not always prepared to properly counsel them you know. So, there was prayer and there was just that stick to it you know kind of advice that was not always the best advice (*Ryan*).

More often than not, there is misunderstanding on the part of the responsibility of the church. Most churches think that you're only supposed to pray, fast to persevere about domestic violence. And most don't have a standard of intervention that says, this is pretty simple, "If you harm me or attempt to harm me, you have to deal with a greater authority," in terms of socially and that is civil authority, which is to keep order (*Morris*).

Morris is explaining that overspiritualizing the issue of domestic abuse left women trying to overcompensate spiritually for a situation that required natural and legal remedies. Sometimes this overspiritualization kept women volunteering excessive hours as they bathed themselves in being in a spiritual environment to cope. While working at church helped survivors escape the abuse temporarily, two practitioners (*Ryan and Morris*) explained that excessive work at church turned into another frustration for the abuser. In a strange way, it sometimes contributed to the violence.



## **Inauthenticity**

African American battered women's work experiences were also shaped by the inauthentic voice of the church. By inauthentic, I mean a voice that does not reflect the church's broad mission for healing and restoration or a voice that encourages the value of being fake. Both survivors and practitioners converge to agree on three aspects of the church's inauthenticity, although this isn't what they called it. First, the church encouraged individuals to be fake, to not show signs of weakness, to be strong in the midst of adversity. The church also operated in an inauthentic voice when the church turned a blind eye and regurgitated scriptures on submission and marriage, but abandoned other sections of the scripture which discuss the responsibility of the church to not just be an institution, but to be a ministry of healing and transformation.

They don't see the ministry part of it. Yet and still it's very clear that it is a part of it inside of scripture. You know, we read it all the time whether we're reading Isaiah's account of it or we're reading the account there in Luke. And we talk about the fact that "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me," and He's done what?... "He's anointed me?" And we love that part, "He's anointed me, yeah!" Everybody likes that part..."to preach the gospel to the poor. He sent me to heal the brokenhearted; to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind and we set at liberty them that are bruised." Even Stevie Wonder could see that that's abused people there and people that are hurting. But we don't see it that way because we always are looking for something else. (Patrick)

Too many instances, in survivor and practitioner accounts, it was found that women were given one set of principles to live by to later find out, the advice givers broke the same principles. The church operated in an inauthentic voice when its clergy gave advice based on what they believed they should say, and not what the individual authentically believed. Most survivors who encountered inauthenticity in the institution ended up transitioning to another church or abandoning church for a little while (Sandy). Women

found it unconscionable that they were in life threatening situations, dying internally while trying to hold on to false counsel, only to find that the people at the top didn't believe in what they were requiring others to uphold.

### **Bifurcation**

In the case of battered women working in Christian churches, women experienced a bifurcated consciousness. Bifurcation is to live between two parts. Survivors and practitioners collectively overstated the dilemma of wearing the mask at work and navigating like everything was ok. Equally challenging, was the required separation of home and church, or private and public life. Women had to die to their personal situations in order to try to effectively serve at church. While most survivors used church as an escape, and felt that they wore the mask well, many did identify that it was a point of stress for them. Practitioners unanimously alluded to the difficulty women faced in serving by having to come in to church like they had it all together.

Practitioners like Veronica continued her reiteration of the additional burden placed on pastors' wives in the hierarchy. There was a greater requirement for bifurcation in a pastor's wife's world. If she lost her composure, it would mean the entire institution could be in danger of failing. So, while trying to work through their own issues, pastors wives who were abused, found themselves dying in their own struggles and need for safety in order to preserve the prosperity of the institution.

Survivors worked hard at keeping the persona perfect so that others' faith and perceptions about God would not be shaken. As survivors navigated work, they also had to navigate faith and resolve their newfound challenges with what the institution said that God required versus what they personally perceived God was instructing them to do.

Survivors who worked for churches continued working for institutions they no longer believed in. Survivors died to the institution, but personally drew closer to God. For the first time, survivors reported that they made a separation between the voice of God, their inner voice, and the voice of the institution. Prior to this awakening, however battered women struggled to find their voice. Their voice became hidden behind denial. Once women were forced to shove the abuse in a corner, it made them disassociate with the fact that anything was really happening. “Well. I think the biggest stressor is to keep up the facade. You know denial is huge. And so, you know it is stressful to keep up that facade. Pleasing others, you know” (Ryan).

Survivors sometimes vacillated between being the victim while at the same time advocating for others in similar situation. Some became advocates while still in their own abusive situations. I believe this was a search to eliminate the tensions that they experienced and to find which voice would be the voice of significance. It appears that the survivors chose a happy medium between their inner voice and the voice of God. These women, in most cases began to try to become a voice in the institution by ultimately advocating for other women.

### **Implications for Adult Education and CHRD**

The findings of this study bring to the forefront several issues that have implications for research, policy, and practice in adult education and human resource development (HRD). In both churches and other workplace organizations, it may be fruitful to look into research that explores the gendered dimensions of workplace violence, the ways that women construct knowledge about domestic violence through spirituality, and organizational social processes within and external to the church that

have implications for women's workplace learning and performance. Women who work in churches are in a highly charged feminized profession, but the power dynamics and structures are upheld and perpetuated by men. These power structures often lead to increased victimization of women by men. In cases where a woman is abused at home, she may ultimately find herself victimized by the institution.

Intersectionality, as a critical framework (Byrd, 2014) could be used in conjunction with IE to explore the ways that African American women self-identify as victims and later as advocates. "Intersectionality is a critical framework for explaining how an individual can be located within various social constructs that can shape and define their experiences in organizational settings" (Byrd, 2014, pp. 517). Additionally, as women found it challenging to find allies within the confines of the church, more research could be pursued around specific steps women and organizations can take to form social justice allies amongst people; as well as advocate for fostering inclusive as opposed to marginalizing environments (Collins & Chlup, 2014).

Research that is able to embrace multiple perspectives in order to understand organizational power dynamics would be fruitful for disempowering privileged groups and empowering women. While most research surrounding women, religion, and abuse is contained in the social work literature, expansion of research toward adult education and HRD frameworks can begin to help practitioners and educators consider transformative learning paradigms that deconstruct gendered activities and ideologies in favor of policies and practices that are equitable for the marginalized. This includes greater analysis of the factors influencing stress at work, the impact of worker's bifurcation, and how the idea of the separation of public and private life is ineffective as there is still a bleed over. The

research paradigms recommended for exploring these issues would be IE, CHRD, and critical adult education. Nackoney & Rocco (2008) advocate integrating critical and the strategic paradigms to provide the best of both worlds in achieving organizational results as well as considering contextual aspects of organizational and managerial power and politics that stifle an employee's ability to progressively learn, change, and grow.

From a policy standpoint, the fields of social work and government should elucidate information obtained from research to examine the ways that current legislation could be expanded to include clear provisions for victims of domestic violence. Social workers should "bridge the gap between secular advocacy and shelter service and Christian IPV victims/survivors" (Jones & Fowler, 2009). Additionally, religious organizations, with influence from governmental dollars or input, should be educated to see themselves as valid organizations and not merely a social gathering outside of real regulatory considerations. Meaning, if churches are pushed to incorporate federal policy considerations in their operations, they may begin considering paradigm and policy oriented changes in their infrastructure.

Finally, in the area of practice, the biggest need is education. There are several areas in which education would be useful. I believe that key decision makers as a whole, need to engage transformative learning opportunities that help church institutions come to terms with a clear definition of domestic violence and that deconstruct current ideologies that have normalized or spiritualized violence. Women who have been in abusive situations need clear modes and means of knowing how to disclose, to whom, and what resources are available prior to disclosing. This means that the church, in general would institute an awareness campaign that specifies what counts as violence and how battered

women would be helped by the organization if found in a domestic abuse relationship. Battered women also need opportunities for empowerment and strengthening of their self-esteem.

Since the church is also their worksite as well as their support system, educational opportunities are key. It would be useful to have trained clergy be a part of workshops that help them accurately determine the scriptural and generational misapplications that have been perpetuated about domestic abuse. Clergy should then share and work on knowledge building in their congregations and especially with the men whose lives they are responsible for. Lifelong learning opportunities for families should be instituted as the generational nature of violence was brought up by survivors and practitioners, although not discussed in this paper. Mentorship between survivors and those currently navigating the abusive relationship should be formed so that there is a sense of community building as women exit their abusive situations. Moreover, seminaries and theological schools should design curriculum that reinterprets the scriptural underpinnings causing violence; and provide clergy with counseling tools for pre-marital counseling as well as practice-oriented tools to address domestic abuse.

Specific workplace services and interventions should be developed along with ensuring that at least one to two individuals within each church has received training on providing resources to battered women or for whom at a minimal level know the available city or county resources available to them. Social workers and religious organizations could build powerful partnerships that assist women in navigating the structures that have once kept them bound.

Churches, as institutions have a powerful voice. How they use it determines the outcomes for abused women globally.

I've seen it all. And I can say that in every one of these situations that I mentioned to you, the only way I can articulate this to you is because I got involved and I became, by virtue of my oversight, I became the voice that made them do something about it. Because minus my voice, they would have allowed it. I've lost members over this because abuse is going on in the home and I told them they had until the next day to correct it or I was calling the authorities and they left our church and the abuser left the home. But they left our church behind it. But I would rather lose partners than have someone lose their life because somebody won't correct something. And so, like I said, in many cases, what my church, what our leadership team became was the voice for the voiceless. And change never happens in a vacuum. Change happens with a change agent! And one of things we decided is that we're not going to sit back and know that people are hurting and not actively and deliberately bring change to the situation. (Morris)

The time has come for adult educators to teach for social justice (Tisdell, 2002) and for HRD practitioners to understand the corporate responsibility for socially responsible practice.

### **Implications for Women**

One of the most impactful implications of this study is its benefit to women who are currently in a domestic violence relationship. Women, by understanding the scriptural misapplications, have the opportunity to resolve issues of guilt by first resolving issues of scriptural misalignment. Simple clarifications, like teachings on mutual submission between a man and a woman instead of purely male dominance; explaining the fact that God hates violence as much as he hates divorce. Women have a right to safety and the opportunity to distance themselves from unnecessary suffering. This study also helps women establish the voice of God as separate, in some cases from the institution. There are times when the institution has to move through progressive understanding of issues. In the meantime, for women who are exposed to this study, there is time to reeducate

themselves and resolve the scriptural dysfunctions in order to establish the ground women need to stand on without the feeling of failing God and their marriage. When women understand that God does not support the life of abuse they have subjected themselves to, they will experience a freedom to separate from what God does not honor.

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## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This concluding chapter consists of four sections. The first section provides an overview of findings from each study related to the overall purpose of the collected papers dissertation. The second section briefly summarizes study #1, which was a conceptual paper. The third section briefly summarizes study #2, which was an empirical study. The fourth and final section describes the overarching implications of this collected papers dissertation for theory, research, and practice.

#### **Overview of Findings Related to the Purpose of Collected Papers Dissertation**

The purpose of this collected papers dissertation was to critically examine the individual and institutional conditions that shape battered women's work experiences in church organizations. The studies in the collected papers share the provision of using a methodological and analytic tool, IE, that offers a strategic and comprehensive means of investigating issues related to institutions and institutional processes that merge a macro and micro view.

Study #1, the conceptual paper, made an important introduction to IE and explained why researchers in the field of AE and HRD should consider embracing a holistic, multilevel research tool that systemically engages research and is able to potentially solve practice issues when research is no longer viewed as merely a technical exercise, but one that sees research as social practice (Edwards, Clarke, Harrison, & Reeve, 2002). The conceptual paper emphasized the socio-political context in which adult vocation education is practiced and shared a practical means of using IE to uncover the interconnected and interdependent social processes that influence an individual's

ability to navigate structural and political subsystems that impact learning, teaching, and work. Study #1 also introduced the concept of viewing literacy as social analysis. Specifically focusing on organizational literacy, Darville (1995) illuminated how organizational literacy, which concerns knowledge of regulations, contracts, policies, licenses, judicial procedures/decisions, and discourse jargon, usually excludes those with particular cultural and social experiences. He argued that, although individuals may be versed in various forms of literacy: religious, informal community life, or organization, without functional literacy or the ability to understand both covert and overt organizational dialogue, documents, and processes, immobility will result and marginalization and exclusion will continue.

In summation, Study #1 highlighted that IE is a viable analytical tool to investigate the institutional nature of personal experiences. Secondly, it clarified that institutions have a subversive role in coordinating people's lives across space and time. Thirdly, literacy should be taught as social analysis; and individuals should be taught organizational and functional literacy. These findings were drawn from the studies examined within the context of the paper. Study #1 provided a great foundation for Study #2 and contributed to answering the research question because it allowed the researcher to remain focused on the *how* of what was taking place in battered women's lives.

Study #2, the empirical paper, used IE to help us see how battered women's needs as workers in Christian churches are hidden behind institutional ideologies and actions that invalidate their concerns while preserving their ideals. The study revealed four ways that African American battered women entered into an *institutional death process* by direct disclosure or assumed disclosure: (a) invalidation, (b) overspiritualization, (c)

inauthenticity, and (d) bifurcation. It was found, that once disclosure took place, women developed an expectation that the church would respond to their issue of domestic abuse. The type of response given by the church and the authenticity of the church's response played a major role in how battered women's issues were resolved. The degree to which women experienced internal bifurcation concerning their ideals about God, faith and the church; and the degree to which the institution required women to bifurcate their role and separate between personal and institutional life had implications for the levels of service women continued to provide or whether or not they continued work at these institutions. Practitioner responses provided clarifying language and a micro level view of how women's experiences came to be. Mainly hinting at cultural, patriarchal, or scriptural undertones, violence against women and the subsequent institutional response normalized, invalidated or ignored the abuse of women via their social processes and the degree of weight women placed upon their pastor's voice (which was the voice of the institution).

In conjunction to navigating institutional processes, women personally fought to find their own voices. They often made decisions daily about whether they were a victim, victor, advocate, or worker that day, some all within a matter of moments. These decisions were largely shaped by confronting scriptural principles they once held dearly in opposition to personal beliefs about how God really felt about the abuse and their right to leave. The notion of *voice of the institution*, for both survivors and practitioners, carried weight for how and women navigated or exited both the marriage and the church.

In summation, Study #2 highlighted the use of IE in uncovering the institutional relations that shaped women's experiences as they worked in Christian churches.

Secondly, it clarified the ways women's experiences become both marginal or irrelevant after disclosing to the church. Thirdly, whoever's voice spoke loudest was the voice that won the conflict between obeying and rebelling. Study #2 contributed to answering the research question because it allowed the researcher to utilize IE to uncover how women's work experiences in Christian churches were shaped by disclosure.

### **Summary of Study #1**

The purpose of Study #1, the conceptual paper, was to introduce IE as a useful and systematic process for examining organizations and work data through the lens of stakeholders, at different levels, and considering the different forces at play. The central premise of IE research is the idea that (a) people's individual experiences are organized, connected to, and shaped by larger power relations, known as ruling relations. The concept paper followed the format of Wright and Rocco (2007), exploring relevant literature in order to present a concept paper that addressed these guiding research questions: (a) What implications does IE have for adult education and CHRD? and (b) How might institutional ethnography be implemented as a research method in adult education or a CHRD study? In summation, the concept paper purposed to provide a clear rationale for the utilization of IE as a viable method in AE and HRD research.

Study # 1, explains the ways that IE can contribute to theory building in AE & HRD research. The examination of program planning theoretical models through the lens of IE helps to build upon previous theoretical frameworks and provide a stronger platform that (a) better explains mechanisms of power, (b) more clearly accounts for unintended consequences of the work of planning, and that (c) contributes to illuminating the ways that institutions have a subversive role in coordinating people's lives across

space and time. Study #1 introduces text and advocates that future theoretical frameworks account for the role that documents play in transferring power and organizing learning and work. Finally, utilizing IE to bring into focus institutional dimensions lends to theoretical constructs that take into account the unconscious use of power both within and beyond the borders of program planning.

### **Summary of Study #2**

The purpose of Study #2, the empirical paper, was to critically examine the institutional relations that shape African American battered women's work experiences in Christian churches. This empirical study was guided by the following research questions: (a) What are the institutional experiences of African American battered women working in Christian churches? How do institutional ruling relations intersect to shape African American battered women's work experiences in Christian churches?

This study utilized an institutional ethnographic method (Smith, 1987) to guide data collection and analysis because it allows for research "that makes visible how people's experiences at the micro level of the everyday social world are shaped and determined by the macro-level influences that enter into their everyday lives (Zurawski, 2010, pp. 15). In summation, the empirical paper, utilized IE to provide an understanding of how African American battered women's work experiences are shaped by churches.

The main forms of data collection for Study #2 were interviews with 13 informants (survivors and practitioners), personal notes, and examination of Biblical text references mentioned by informants. Interviews were semi-structured and were guided by a set of open-ended questions related to: (a) individual standpoint and experience with domestic violence, (b) organizational conditions, and (c) organizational implications.



Interviews flowed according to how participants responded to questions and in relation to the need to further explore specific responses and probing. Interviews averaged 42 minutes. Interviews were conducted at The Flame Outflow Center.

Study # 2 explained the ways that institutional ideologies, actions, and inactions have implications for battered women working as volunteers and workers. The examination of the church's ideologies reveals that the Bible, as the informing text for institutional beliefs, operates as the ruling mechanism of power that influences church leaders' responses to women's pleas for help. The Bible also, consequently operates as the guiding force to women's personal and institutional actions. Study #2 introduced several tensions that arise when women are faced with compliance with biblical interpretations in opposition to personal beliefs. Finally, tension was created in women's identity and belief systems by having to mask their abuse at work and within an institution that is designed to help and heal. All participants and all survivors spoke to the stress of having to come to work and act like everything was alright. This was not merely institutional stress, but this was also personal stress. Practitioners and survivors both indicated that batterers who attended church with the women they battered pressured the women to make sure that no one knew what was going. Doing so, could trigger an abusive outburst when returning home.

### **Brief Overview of Overall Implications of Collected Papers**

Churches represent an important institution in the lives of African American women. In the lives of African Americans as a whole, the church has been a source of instruction, hope, healing, and emancipation for most people from marginalization in the world. For African American battered women who work in the church, however, the

story is quite different. It is a story that hasn't been told. It is a story that is still unfolding. These collected papers warrant a look at research practices that can bring exposure to institutional malfunctions that are hidden to the individuals subjected to their malpractice. Beyond merely building academic knowledge, research should help to inform actionable practice in the fields of AE, HRD, social work, and religion. The implications of these collected papers are as follows.

### **Implications for Adult Education**

There is a call for educational initiatives and collaboration that (a) fuse the expertise of social workers, adult education professionals, and clergy to work together for awareness building, resource access and educational programming surrounding the needs of African American women in abusive relationships. Churches could be internally trained as well as externally connected to support groups, empowerment groups, and resources that are holistic in nature, eliminating the burden from just falling on any one institution.

- The field of adult education and its practitioners can engage training and collaboration that fuse the expertise of social workers, adult education professionals and clergy to understand the needs of African American women in abusive relationships and better equip clergy to provide intervention beyond spiritual remedies.
- Transformative learning experiences for women could be developed that deconstruct ideologies and biblical interpretations around abuse for the purposes of knowledge construction and making more informed choices.

- Supportive community building and confidential networks within or external to the church could be developed for African American women who are abused.
- There is potential for the creation of empowerment opportunities for African American women as a means of lifting their voices in this area.
- There are opportunities to teach churches and educate their congregants on a clear definition of domestic violence, specifying what counts as violence and what to do if they are found in an abusive domestic violence situation.
- Further opportunities for knowledge building within congregations arise out of this research.

### **Implications for HRD**

The field of HRD could use practitioners to collaborate with African American churches for the creation of policies, processes, and initiatives that provide churches with an infrastructure for more responsive programming as it relates to victims of domestic violence. Specifics are listed below.

- Workplace interventions and clear policies for churches could be developed as a part of cultivating more favorable and useful responses of African American churches in regards to domestic violence.
- Instructional designers, program planners, and facilitators have the potential to assist in course development for seminaries and theological schools that include the issue of abuse and train clergy to respond.
- There is an opportunity for dialogue to be created in CHRD that deepens discussions around religion and work and domestic violence and work for the purposes of reshaping thought and implementing usable outcomes.

## **Implications for African American Women**

The findings of this study help to provide a map so that African American women understand clearly what is organizing their experience with the hopes that they can understand how to navigate through it.

- By revealing the ideologies behind African American women's experiences, the findings of this study offer a resolution for African American women to be able to make a guilt free decision around their safety without the confusion of religious rhetoric.
- Confidential networks and specialized support services should be established for African American pastors' wives as they represent a unique subset of African American women that seem to have more to lose if disclosing domestic abuse.
- The findings of this study contribute to giving African American women a voice in an area that is underdiscussed in churches.

## **Potential Research**

There is the potential for critical research that (a) extends our understanding of intersectionality and how social constructs contribute to how experiences are defined and shaped in institutional settings (Byrd, 2014) and ultimately how abused women learn, perform, and construct knowledge; (b) helps to bring redefinition to patriarchal and scriptural misinterpretations so that it can create dialogue and provide an academic platform for inclusion in seminary and theological training; (c) helps to understand the nuisances of African American religious women in navigating abuse as workers, (d) utilizes IE as an informative and comprehensive way to view the experiences of the marginalized; and (e) examines the intersection of African American battered women,

domestic violence, church, and work beyond those who are transitioning from welfare-to-work. Research can also be extended as mentioned below.

- Further research into the ways that African American women construct knowledge about domestic violence through spirituality.
- Further research that examines organizational processes within and external to the church that shape how African American women learn and perform.
- Intersectionality, as critical framework could be used in conjunction with IE to explore ways that African American women self-identify as victims and later as advocates or how African American women construct knowledge around faith and religion.
- Research that explicates how African American women form allies within the confines of church and how that shapes their experiences in organizational settings.
- Research that distinguishes work and domestic violence between lay members and Pastors' wives.
- Expansion of research towards transformative learning paradigms that deconstruct gendered activities and ideologies in favor of policies and practices that are equitable for the marginalized.
- Expansion of research on work stressors and tensions around issues that spillover from private to public.

In conclusion, it is my proposition that human resource, management, adult educators, social workers, researchers and other professionals should focus on ways to increase awareness, improve policies, and change institutional mindsets within the church to the

benefit of all, without the marginalization of some. While I do understand the need to uphold value systems that are a part of religious beliefs, I think we have to reinterpret the true intent and meaning of the scriptures as they are holistically meant.

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## **Appendix A**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDES**

#### **Survivors**

##### **PERSONAL STANDPOINT AND EXPERIENCE**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. Describe your experience with domestic violence.
3. In your experience, where and who did you turn to when seeking help for domestic violence?
4. In your experience, how would you describe the impact that domestic violence had on your faith? relationships? home life?

##### **ORGANIZATIONAL CONDITIONS**

1. How would you describe your church and its views on the domestic abuse of women?
2. How would you describe your church's policies on domestic violence?
3. How would you describe the ways that your church responded to you as a domestic violence victim?
4. How would you describe the spiritual services or intervention tools that your church provided to you as a victim? as a worker?
5. How would you describe your church's support systems for you while a victim of domestic violence?
6. How would you describe your church's support systems for you while a victim of domestic violence and a worker? For other employees or volunteers who were victims of domestic violence?

##### **ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

1. How do you believe that domestic violence impacted you at work?
2. What stressors did you encounter as both a church member and an employee/volunteer of the church while you were in a domestic violence relationship?
3. Is there anything that surprised you about the church that you worked for while a victim of domestic violence?
4. What resources or services do you think churches should provide to victims of domestic violence?
5. What resources or services do you think churches should provide to employees as victims of domestic violence?

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Practitioners**

#### **PERSONAL STANDPOINT AND EXPERIENCE**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. Describe your experience with the domestic abuse of women, as perpetrated by the men in their lives.
3. Based upon your experience, how would you describe the impact that domestic violence had on battered women's faith? relationships? home life?
4. Based upon your experience, where and who do domestic violence victims turn to when seeking help for domestic violence?

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL CONDITIONS**

1. How would you describe the church and its views on the domestic abuse of women?
2. In your experience, how would you describe the church's policies on domestic abuse of women?
3. How would you describe the ways that the church responds to the domestic abuse of women who work for them?
4. Based upon your experience, how would you describe the spiritual services or intervention tools the church provides to domestic violence victims as workers?
5. Based upon your experience how would you describe the church's support systems for employees or volunteers who are victims of domestic violence?

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

1. Based upon your experience, how do you believe that domestic violence impacts the workplace?
2. Based upon your experience, what stressors do battered women encounter as both church members and an employee/volunteer of the church?
3. Based upon your experience, what resources or services do you think church organizations should provide to victims of domestic violence?
4. Based upon your experience, what resources or services do you think church organizations should provide to employees as victims of domestic violence?



## VITA

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- 1992-1995 Bachelor of Science (B.S.)  
Criminal Justice  
Florida International University  
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Miami Dade County Public Schools  
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