CHAPTER 5

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Structural Inequalities and (In)visible Violence in the Lives of African American Women

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> *...it is easier to talk about violence as an individual pathology than it is to think about violence as a product of systemic inequalities that act on and through individuals in ways we don't yet fully understand*
>
> —Jones (2004, p. 23)

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is all too common in the United States (US). According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 32.9% of women and 28.1% of men have been victims of physical violence (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014). Defining IPV can be complex; however, a comprehensive definition includes physical aggression, ranging from less injurious violence, such as slapping and shoving, to more lethal forms of violence, including beatings and assaults with weapons. Sexual violence can include forced or drug-facilitated attempted or completed rape in the form of oral, vaginal, or anal penetration as well as reproductive coercion (e.g., pressuring a woman to become pregnant). Other frequently reported forms of violence include stalking and psy-

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chological aggression, in the forms of name calling or threats (Breiding et al., 2014).

Victimization can involve men, women, and transgender individuals of every racial/ethnic background, socioeconomic status, age and sexual orientation (West, 2012). Yet, researchers have consistently documented gender, race, and social class differences in the rates of victimization. For example, more women than men reported having been raped (9.4% vs. 2.2%), severely physically assaulted (24.3% vs. 13.8%), or stalked (10.7 vs. 2.1%) by an intimate partner during the course of their lifetime (Breiding et al., 2014). When compared to their White and Latino/a counterparts, African Americans[1], whether as individuals or couples, consistently reported higher rates of overall, severe, mutual, and recurrent past year and lifetime physical IPV victimization and perpetration (see West, 2012; West, in press for a review). Finally, when compared to their more economically advantaged counterparts, women who earned less than $25,000 and women who experienced food and housing insecurity reported higher rates of intimate partner rape, physical violence, and stalking (Breiding et al., 2014).

Taken together, a demographic profile of the most vulnerable group emerges: African American women who are young, single or divorced, impoverished, and live in rental property that is located in urban areas (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). In the general population, nearly 4 out of 10 Black women (43%) have been raped, physically abused, or stalked in their lifetime. This prevalence rate translates into an estimated 6,349,000 victims (Breiding et al., 2014).

Despite their vulnerability, African American women's experience with violence is "hidden in plain sight" (Collins, 1998, p. 920) and, ironically, so hypervisible and pervasive that it has become "obscured, routinized, and thereby legitimated" (Collins, 1998, p. 926). More simply put, Black women are the target of so much violence that their victimization has become normalized, such that it is no longer visible or as I prefer to call it: (in)visible. The purpose of this chapter is to explain this paradox. First, I will review the research on IPV in the lives of Black women. By contextualizing Black women's use of violence, I will make the gendered nature of IPV more evident. There is rich demographic diversity among Black women. In order to make these subpopulations more visible, I will use intersectional analyses that considers the victims' social location in terms of age, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The focus on individual acts of visible physical aggression renders other forms of violence invisible. Accordingly, in the third section, I will highlight the similarities and parallels between various forms of coercive control that are perpetrated by intimate partners and by agents of the state and service providers. Next, I will explore how structural risk factors, including poverty and concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, contribute to higher rates of IPV in the lives of Black women. To conclude, I will discuss how the criminal justice system and the economic system can better serve this marginalized population.

OVERVIEW OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

High rates of victimization and perpetration have been documented among African American women in general population studies. The lifetime prevalence rate of IPV was 26.3% in the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and even higher, at 40.9%, in the more recently conducted National Intimate Partner Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) (Breiding et al., 2014). Ideally, both IPV victimization and perpetration should be measured in couples over time. This was accomplished in the National Longitudinal Couples Survey (NLCS) by interviewing both male and female partners in 1995 and 2000. The rate of male-to-female partner violence (MFPV) among Black couples was 23%. The most common forms of violence was pushing, slapping, and hitting with something (Caetano, Cunradi, Clark, & Schafer, 2000). At follow-up, these violent couples continued to experience both minor (15%) and severe (4%) MFPV (Caetano, Field, Ramisetty-Mikler, & Lipsky, 2009).

African American women actually reported higher rates of female-to-male partner violence (FMPV) than MFPV (30% vs. 23%). Almost one-third of Black wives used minor or moderate physical aggression against their husbands, such as throwing something; pushing, shoving, and grabbing; and hitting with something (Caetano et al., 2000). However, mutual, also referred to as bidirectional violence, was the most frequently reported pattern of relationship violence, with 61% of couples acknowledging that both partners had used physical aggression. One-third of Black couples who reported bidirectional partner violence described it as severe, defined as beat up, choked, raped or threatened with a weapon. Five years later, 17% of Black couples continued to engage in mutual violence and 11% of these couples progressed into severe IPV (Caetano, Raimisetty-Mikler, & Field, 2005).

Interestingly, some Black women did not deny their use of violence. In fact, they were more willing to identify themselves as perpetrators than Black men were willing to identify themselves as victims (Caetano, Schafer, Field, & Nelson, 2002). Other African American women, sometimes proudly and unapologetically, used aggression as a form of self-defense, in retaliation for past abuse, or to preempt future abuse. One battered Black woman described her role in a mutually abusive relationship: "I was a spirited co-combatant" (Potter, 2008, p. 133).

Although not to minimize Black women's use of violence, these gender patterns must be contextualized. First, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) has been the most frequently used measure of overall, minor, and severe rates of physical aggression[2] (Straus & Gelles, 1990). When compared to Black men and women of other ethnic groups, African American women were overrepresented among victims of nonfatal strangulation (Thomas, Joshi, & Sorenson, 2014) and intimate partner femicide (Glass, Laughon, Campbell, Block, Hanson, Sharps, & Taliaferro, 2008). The CTS does not measure these two serious forms of gender-based violence. Thus, rendering them invisible.

Second, mutuality of violence does not mean that women's and men's violent acts are equivalent. While both members of the couple may use violence, when contextualized, it is evident that frequency and severity of assaults are seldom equal. These relationships may be better characterized as *bidirectional asymmetrical violence* (Temple, Weston, & Marshall, 2005). To illustrate, Janay Palmer and her fiancée, now husband, Ray Rice, a running back for the National Football League's (NFL's) Baltimore Ravens, was described as having "little more than a very minor physical altercation." However, in later video footage, Rice could be seen dragging her limp body from an Atlantic City casino elevator after he had allegedly knocked her unconscious (Boylorn, 2014). Although both partners used violence, at least in the case, the woman sustained more serious injuries.

Finally, women's use of physical aggression typically occurred in the context of their own victimization (Potter, 2008). Thus, these women may be more appropriately characterized as *Abused Aggressors* (Swan & Snow, 2003). Despite their violent behavior, these women seldom felt a sense of control, independence, or power within their relationships; rather, they reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress (Swan & Snow, 2003). Beyond the mental health consequences, a disproportionate number of Black abused aggressors become victim-defendants after they use violence against abusive partners (West, 2007). Consider the case of Marissa Alexander, a Florida mother of three. She was arrested after firing a "warning shot" at Rico Grey, her abusive husband, who had beaten, choked, and punched her, causing injuries that required hospitalization (Lee, 2012).

In conclusion, Black women reported high rates of both victimization and perpetration, and even higher rates of mutual violence in national studies (West, 2007). However, it is too simplistic to conclude that men and women's use of IPV is equivalent. Three factors have led to the misperception that men and women are equally combative: the failure to include more comprehensive measures of IPV, the failure to acknowledge bidirectional asymmetrical violence, and the failure to consider motives, injury, and the consequences that are associated with IPV.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Although there is rich demographic diversity among Black women, it has been obscured in national samples. In order to make these subpopulations more visible, Black feminists have called for intersectional analyses that considers the victims' social location in terms of age, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Crenshaw, 2012; Potter, 2008). For example, special attention should be paid to the unique forms of violence that Black women experience across the age spectrum. Black adolescent girls, particularly those who are poor, are at risk for dating violence in their intimate relationships, family violence in their homes, and sexual harassment in their schools or neighborhoods (Kennedy, 2008; Tonnesen, 2013). At the other end of the age continuum, older African American women are at risk

for financial abuse from their adult children and for physical and emotional abuse from their husbands (Paranjape, Corbie-Smith, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2009).

There also are variations in the violence that Black women experience across social class and ethnicity. Much of the research in this area has focused on impoverished Black women; yet, their middle-class peers also face challenges. Revealing that they were victims of IPV could jeopardize the status and reputation of professional Black women and their partners. Moreover, their disclosure of abuse or request for services may be met with skepticism because they appear to be financially secure (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Potter, 2008). In addition, the prevalence rates and risk factors that are associated with IPV differ between US born African American women and second-generation or immigrant African and Caribbean women. A growing body of literature has sought to make these populations more visible (Lacey, West, Matusko, & Jackson, in press).

Finally, there is a dearth of research that investigates how the intersection of racism, sexism, and homophobia converge to increase the risk of physical and sexual IPV in the lives of Black lesbians and bisexual women (Hill, Woodson, Ferguson, & Parks, 2012; Richie, 2012). Although reliable official statistics are nonexistent, the website Transgender Day of Remembrance gave details of 170 violent deaths in the US between 2000 and 2012. A disproportionate number of these victims were African American transgender women. When their gender identity was discovered, perpetrators, including strangers, acquaintances, and intimate partners shot, suffocated, strangled, and sexually mutilated these women (Pilkington, 2014).

To conclude, the experiences of battered Black women can be best understood in relation to their multiple social locations and range of diverse identities. This requires intersectional analyses that considers where victims are located within the hierarchies of age, social class, ethnic, sexual orientation identities (Potter, 2008).

COERCIVE CONTROL

Definitions

It is time to move beyond single measures, such as the CTS, which oversimplify violence by reducing it to individual acts of aggression that cause physical injury and contributes to the presumption that IPV is mutual combat. Instead, IPV is better characterized as a form of *coercive control*. More explicitly, *coercion*, has been defined as "the use of force or threats to compel or dispel a particular response" (Stark, 2007, p. 228) and *control* has been characterized as "structural forms of deprivation, exploitation, and commands that compel obedience indirectly by monopolizing vital resources, dictating preferred choices, micro-regulating a partner's behavior, limiting her options, and depriving her of supports needed to exercise independent judgment" (Stark, 2007, p. 229).

As illustrated in the Power and Control Wheel, coercive control tactics used by batterers include isolation, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, using children, intimidation, and physical violence (Pence & Paymer, 1993). More recently, a Multicultural Power and Control Wheel has been created to reflect how IPV is shaped by intersecting identities (e.g., race, social class, and sexual orientation) and various systems of oppression (e.g., racism, classism, and heterosexism) in the lives of marginalized women (Chavis & Hill, 2009).

In order to capture the full range of violence that is experienced by Black women, these models need to include a discussion of institutionalized and structural violence. African American women are visibility battered by their intimate partners and invisibly battered by *institutional racism*, which are unfair polices and discriminatory practices of particular institutions that have a disparate impact on people of color (Kupenda, 2009). Similar to the (in)visibility of interpersonal violence in the lives of Black women, structural racism is so damaging and insidious because it is omnipresent. To give a more concrete example, Johnnie Tillmon, a welfare rights advocate, described the welfare system as "a super-sexist marriage" in that "you trade in *a* man for *the* man." In the Black vernacular tradition, "the man" is:

> ...not a singular person but rather to a broad array of racist practices that have clearly discernible structural effects even though their origins may be difficult to locate. This intangible quality of "the man" makes racialized power appear simultaneously as all pervasive and difficult to confront. "The man" is both everywhere and nowhere specifically. (Kandaswamy, 2010, p. 253)

Relatedly, *structural racism* is the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege White people and disadvantage people of color (James, Johnson, Raghavan, Lemos, Barakett, & Woolis, 2003).

In the next section, I will highlight the similarities and parallels between various forms of coercive control, as identified by the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymer, 1993), that are perpetrated by intimate partners and by agent of the state and service providers. In particular, I will discuss physical aggression, rape and reproductive coercion, psychological aggression, economic abuse, isolation, and stalking. Although each form of violence will be discussed individually, they are all inextricably connected.

Types of Violence

Physical Aggression. Nonfatal strangulation, which has been reported by 40% of African American women (Glass et al., 2008), is a unique form of physical aggression, which can be used, sometimes just once, to immobilize and terrorize the victim. It is a potentially lethal, but invisible form of violence, in that there is seldom immediate external evidence. Bruising and swelling may not appear until

days later, especially on darker complexions. Strangulation seems to be triggered by the perpetrator's jealousy and accusations of infidelity, the victim's attempt to terminate the relationship, or her failure to comply with his demands. Immediate and lasting fear are the primary post-event reactions to strangulation (Thomas et al., 2014).

African American women also are subjected to various forms of physical aggression by state agents. For example, according to Richie (2012), they include: "excessive use of force by police officers toward women during an arrest, physical abuse while in the custody of state agencies, and battering by public employees upon whom women depend for protection and resources, including child welfare workers, employees in public assistance offices, and drug treatment counselors" (p. 48). A less overt aspect of direct physical assaults of Black women by state agencies, is how the state's lack of response to acts of male violence leaves Black women vulnerable to further victimization. Consider the case of Deanna Cook, a 32-year old Black women in Dallas, who made repeated calls to the police reporting her drug-addicted, ex-husband for stalking, attempted murder, and domestic violence. On her final 11-minute 911 recording, she could be heard pleading for the dispatcher to send help as he strangulated and drown her in the bathtub. Officers arrived nearly an hour later, found nothing amiss, and left (Eiserer, 2013).

Rape and Reproductive Coercion. Perpetrators use sexual violence to injure and control their victims. Approximately 1 in 5 Black women (22%) has been raped during their lifetime (Black et al., 2011). Among Black couples, the overall rate of male-to-female sexual assault (MFSA) was 23.2%, which most commonly involved pressuring the partner (without the use of physical force) to engage in sexual intercourse, often without a condom. Although categorized as "minor," sexual coercion frequently occurred in conjunction with psychological abuse and physical violence (Ramisetty-Mikler, Caetano, & McGrath, 2007). Perpetrators also used reproductive coercion (25.9%) and birth control sabotage (27%), which were associated with high rates of unintended pregnancy (49.9%) among Black women (Miller, Decker, McCauley, Tancredi, Levenson, Waldman, et al., 2010). In addition to gaining access to the victim through joint custody arrangements, perpetrators were motivated by the restrictions that they perceived that children would place on a woman's economic and social future. For example, one Black battered woman felt imprisoned because "He would say that I couldn't do anything with two kids" and, in reference to future partners, "Let's see if they want you now knocked up" (Potter, 2008, p. 98).

Similar to abusive intimate partners, institutions deny and minimize the pervasive sexual assaults that are perpetrated against African American girls and women. For example, school personnel and Title IX policies, that are required to address gender-based violence in academic settings, do not adequately protect Black elementary and high school girls from sexual harassment. For example, boys' sexual advances may be perceived as flirtatious, or even as gender appropriate, while girls who use physical aggression in self-defense, self-protection, or

retaliation are punished (suspended or expelled from school under "Zero Tolerance Polices") (Tonnesen, 2013).

Regarding reproductive coercion, *family caps* or *child exclusion* policies prevent Black women on welfare from receiving additional financial assistance if they have another child. Without additional economic resources, it can be difficult, or impossible, for victims to escape from their abusers (Flavin, 2007). The medical community has a long legacy of reproductive coercion. Between 1929 and 1974, under the authority of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina, an estimated 7,600 people, many of them poor Black women, were sterilized by force or uniformed consent. Deemed "promiscuous" and "feebleminded," medical providers preformed a "*Mississippi appendectomy*" (involuntary sterilization and hysterectomy) (Flavin, 2007), on 14-year-old Elaine Riddick, who was raped and impregnated by a neighbor. Now 57 years old, Riddick, in her lawsuit said, "I was raped twice, once by the perpetrator and once by the state of North Carolina" (James, 2012).

Psychological Aggression. Perpetrators maintain control by bombarding the victim with severe psychological, verbal, and emotional abuse. In the NCLS, 36.7% of Black women had been called fat or ugly, had been accused of being a lousy lover, had their property destroyed, or had been threatened (Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2007). Although it is less visible than physical violence, emotional abuse can be pervasive, severe, and can leave lasting emotional harm. In reflection, one participant said: "That verbal abuse is hard. You can fight off a fist; you just block it or run away. But when you hear that stuff, I don't forget it" (Potter, 2008, p. 96).

Importantly, "Psychological violence occurs when other forms of structural violence become accepted, promoted and integrated into the collective psyche often forming stereotypes about particular groups" (James et al., 2003, p. 132). For example, cultural representations that depict Black women as aggressive, domineering, and violent can be a form of institutional psychological aggression, which is subsequently internalized by service providers, and directed toward Black battered women when they seek help. For instance, domestic violence shelter workers may engage in various forms of *microaggression,* or subtle racial invalidations or insults (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, in press).

Economic Abuse. Batterers can directly and indirectly interfere in the economic livelihood of their victims. First, they can create disfiguring or disabling injuries, which prevent the woman from seeking employment. Another method is to sabotage the victim's aspirations and achievements: get her expelled from job training programs by stalking her at work or fail to provide reliable childcare. In addition, the long term consequences of battering can include physical, mental, and emotional damage that can impair a woman's ability to prepare for, obtain, and maintain family supporting employment. Furthermore, battering and its consequences may make it difficult for currently or formerly battered woman to focus on specific job duties, plan for the future, manage fear, perform in high pressure

settings, respond appropriately to criticism, avoid depression, and conform to the professional culture or their organization (Kandaswamy, 2010).

When they seek assistance for social service agencies, the economic abuse may continue. For example, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), or welfare reform, requires recipients to meet strict work requirements. Rather than being offered job training programs and educational opportunities, battered Black women were compelled, with the loss of benefits, to work in low-paying service jobs, mostly as day care workers, home health care aids, and cashiers. Without economic resources, they remained entrapped in abusive relationships (Davis, 2004).

Isolation. Isolation is a particularly powerful form of coercive control. Among Black couples who exhibited mutual violence, male abusers were more prone to restrict their partners' use of the car, telephone, or her access to family and friends. Male perpetrators also prevented the female partner from leaving the house, seeking medical care, or obtaining employment. Despite their use of violence, when Black women attempted to use this form of coercive control, they used fewer controlling acts, and were less successful in controlling their partner's behavior (Swan & Snow, 2002).

The criminal legal system, also referred to as the *prison nation* or *prison industrial complex* (Richie, 2012, p. 3) because of its pervasive reach, is one of the most powerful forms of structural isolation and segregation. Recall the case of Marissa Alexander, the victim-defendant who was described above. After a jury deliberated for 12 minutes, the judged sentenced her to a lengthy prison sentence because "under the state's 10-20-life law, a conviction for aggravated assault where a firearm has been discharged carries a minimum and maximum sentence of 20 years without regarding any extenuating or mitigating circumstances that may be present, such as those in this case." Jacksonville congresswoman Corrine Brown described the sentencing as a product of "institutional racism" (CNN Wire Staff, 2012). In 2013, an appeals court overturned her conviction. At retrial, the prosecutor threatened her with 60 years in prison if convicted again (20 years, to be served consecutively, for 3 counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon). In November 2014, Alexander agreed to a plea bargain that included time served for the three years she had already spent incarcerated, an additional 65 days in jail, and two years house arrest (Law, 2015).

Stalking. Perpetrators stalk their victims with repeated harassing or threatening behaviors, such as following a victim, appearing at her home or workplace, making harassing phone calls, leaving written messages or objects, or vandalizing her property. According to the NISVS, 14.6% of Black women have been stalked by an intimate partner in their lifetimes (Black et al., 2011). What's more, poor Black women who lived in urban areas reported that their whereabouts were monitored by their abuser's relatives and associates, which is referred to as "third party stalking" (Tamborra, 2012).

Increasingly, "third party policing" is used as a method to monitor and control the behavior of Black battered women. That is, "The police began convincing and coercing community actors (landlords, business owners) to assume some responsibility for correcting misconduct" (p. 117), For example, after repeated 911 calls to report serious IPV, Milwaukee police deemed the tenant and property, which were often located in distressed Black urban areas, to be a "nuisance." Police then asked landlords to use some form of "abatement" strategy, which generally consisted of an eviction. Thus, the victim had two undesirable choices, both which could further embolden the abuser. If she doesn't report the abuse, he maintains power and control over the victim. If she calls the police, she faces eviction and possible homelessness, which can propel her into a cycle of residential instability, poverty, and greater dependency on the abuser (Desmond & Valdez, 2012).

To conclude, after reflecting on her personal and family history of IPV, Kupenda (2009) concluded that "in many ways, the condition of Blacks in America is analogous to the condition of a battered wife in an abusive relationship" (p. 35). In this section, I highlighted the similarities and parallels between various forms of coercive control that are perpetrated by intimate partners and by agents of the state and service providers. It is clear, that Black battered women are frequently battered by institutions that should service them.

STRUCTURAL RISK FACTORS

There are two structural risk factors that have consistently predicted higher rates of IPV among African Americans. In particular, couples who reported higher rates of poverty (Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002) and who lived in neighborhoods that were characterized by concentrated neighborhood disadvantage and economic distress experienced rates of IPV (Pinchevsky & Wright, 2012). The purpose of this section is to explore the pathways by which these structural risk factors contribute to higher rates of IPV in the lives of Black women.

Poverty

Annual household income had the greatest relative influence on the probability of partner violence, with lower incomes being associated with higher rates of IPV. Specifically, Black couples who reported MFPV and FMPV had significantly lower mean annual incomes than nonviolent couples (approximately $22,838 vs. $32,685, respectively) (Cunradi et al., 2002). The pathways between economic marginalization and higher rates of partner violence is complex. According to social structural theory "those from lower SES strata may have had greater exposure to childhood violence, have higher rates of depression, experience more alcohol-related problems, have poorer coping mechanisms, and more commonly endorse the use of physical aggression as a tactic in marital disputes" (Cunradi et al., 2002, p. 386).

Poverty can shape gender roles and relationships between African American men and women. Due to systematic discrimination in the labor market, African American men experience high rates of unemployment and poverty. Meanwhile, incarceration has banished Black men from the community in staggering numbers and when, or if they return given the length of mandatory minimum sentences, they are often unemployable, have limited education and works skills, and may suffer from higher rates of mental health problems (Crenshaw, 2012). As a result, there is a gender ratio imbalance in the Black community where there are more single Black women and fewer marriageable Black men. In response, some Black women stay with abusive partners to avoid loneliness (Bent-Goodley, 2014). Other Black women stay in abusive relationships because they feel a cultural or religious mandate to emotionally support men who are "endangered" by structural challenges: "He's just upset because he doesn't have a job and he's doing drugs and that's very stressful on him...Soon as he cleans himself up and get a job, everything will be fine" (Potter, 2008, p. 108).

In addition, poverty also can contribute to conflicts around gender roles norms. Black women have historically made substantial contributions to the economic well-being of their households and may be less likely to tolerate violent partners without retaliating or engaging in defensive violence, thereby increasing rates of mutual violence (Caetano et al., 2005). In contrast, when they are unable to fulfill these traditional gender roles, "interpersonal conflicts arise between black males and black females because many black males are aware of their role failures and are inclined to counterattack any perceived challenge to their manhood with violence" (Hampton & Gelles, 1994, p. 115). These conflicts can escalate to femicide. Black women were more likely to be murdered during the course of an argument with an intimate partner (Violence Policy Center, 2012) and more likely to be murdered by unemployed partners (Campbell, et al., 2003).

Concentrated Neighborhood Disadvantage

Concentrated neighborhood disadvantage has not been uniformly measured across studies. It has been assessed by the percentage of residents who lived below the poverty line or received public assistance, unemployment rates, and numbers of vacant homes. Regardless of the measure used or the population that was surveyed, couples who lived in the most resource-limited neighborhoods reported the highest rates of IPV (Pinchevsky & Wright, 2012). Accordingly in the NCLS, nearly half (47%) of the Black couples in the sample resided in impoverished neighborhoods and those residents were at a threefold risk for MFPV and twofold increase for FMPV compared to Black couples who did not reside in poor areas (Cunradi, Caetano, Clark, & Schafer, 2000). Thus, it appears that individual economic distress in the form of low household income and residence in economically resource-limited neighborhoods work in tandem to increase women's risk for inflicting and sustaining IPV.

There are several pathways between economically distressed neighborhoods and IPV. First, living in these environments can expose residents to various forms of violence, which can spill over into their intimate relationships. Among low-income Black women (Stueve & O'Donnell, 2008) and Black men (Reed, Silverman, Ickovics, Gupta, Welles, Santana, & Raj, 2010), IPV perpetration and victimization have been linked to microaggressions in the form of perceived racial discrimination in their community (e.g., being unfairly stopped and frisked by police or followed by store clerks, called insulting names or physically attacked because of skin color or race).

Exposure to community violence in any role (witness, victim, or perpetrator) has been associated with higher rates of intimate partner abuse. For example, community violence was correlated with emotional dating victimization among young Black urban women (Stueve & O'Donnell, 2008). Black men were more likely to batter their girlfriends if they had been involved in street violence, had a history of gang involvement, or perceived that there was a "great deal" of violence in their neighborhood (Reed, Silverman, Welles, Santana, Missmer, & Raj, 2009). All these forms of violence can converge in the lives of victims. For example, exposure to community violence (e.g., getting beaten up in the neighborhood) was associated with witnessing adult-on-adult family violence, being the victim of physical abuse by a parent or adult caregiver, and being the victim of dating violence. Kennedy (2008) concluded that "these higher rates of cumulative exposure to violence can be attributed, in part, to structural issues facing African Americans living in urban settings which shape life opportunities and may influence intimate partner relationships and family dynamics" (p. 38).

Finally, when faced with extreme, persistent, economic and social inequalities, individuals are more likely to use and abuse drugs or alcohol. General population studies have provided substantial evidence that alcohol-related dependence indicators (e.g., withdrawal symptoms and alcohol tolerance), alcohol-related social problems (e.g., job loss, legal problems), and greater mean male and female alcohol consumption were especially strong predictors of IPV among African American couples, independent of who in the couple reports the problem. As the density of alcohol outlets increases in the community, so does the risk of MFPV, particularly among couples who report alcohol-related problems (McKinney, Caetano, Harris, & Ebama, 2009).

CHANGING SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Rather than individual-level solutions, there is an urgent need to changing the social systems that contribute to elevated rates of IPV against African American women. Indeed, these structural changes should also reduce all forms of violence perpetrated against them. The purpose of this section is to discuss how the criminal justice system and the economic system can better serve this marginalized population.

Criminal Legal System

Black women and their communities have historically been "overpoliced and underprotected" (Crenshaw, 2012, p. 1420). The criminal legal system can begin to listen to the voices of battered Black women. They have clearly articulated their needs. For example, Black women expressed a desire for alternatives to incarceration: mandated counseling, anger management, or substance abuse treatment. In some cases, incarceration was too brief to provide meaningful safety. They also were concerned about their interactions with court personnel—they wanted them to file paperwork in a timely fashion, follow-up when abusers missed their court appearance, and keep victims updated on their partner's probation and incarceration status. They wanted court personnel to be "nice" and "friendly" rather than hostile and dismissive, and to connect them with local resources that could help (e.g., domestic violence shelters, information on child support). In short, victims wanted to feel like they had a voice in the process (Bell, Perez, Goodman, & Dutton, 2011).

In addition, the courts and police can take more care when investigating cases of what appear to be mutual violence. Black women are more likely to be arrested themselves for behavior that may be consistent with self-defense, but are interpreted through the lens of stereotypes as overly aggressive. Mandatory arrests and sentencing laws have had a devastating economic and emotional impact on Black victim-defendants. To name a few, they may be denied access to victim assistance programs, welfare benefits, crime victim compensation, and employment opportunities in childcare, teaching, and education (West, 2007). Finally, easy access to guns can facilitate, escalate, and amplify anger and conflict, which makes nonfatal violence into a homicide (Violence Policy Center, 2012). When possible, they can increase the safety of victims, particularly Black women, by removing guns from these violent homes.

Economic System

Access to financial resources is a key component to helping Black women escape poverty, resource-limited neighborhoods, and abusive partners. According to statistics that were compiled by the African American Policy Forum (2013), African American women had the highest unemployment rate among women nationwide. When Black women are employed, they earn less than other racial groups. What's more, single Black women have the lowest net worth among all racial and gender groups, only 100.00! Coker (2000) has suggested that every effort to combat gender-based violence be subjected to the "material resource test":

> Domestic violence laws and policies may directly provide women with material resources such as housing, food, clothing, or money, or they may increase resources indirectly through the availability of services such as job training, childcare, and transportation...We should always prefer assessment that is informed by the circumstances of those women who are in the greatest need. In most circumstances this

> will be poor women of color who are sandwiched by their heightened vulnerability to battering, on the one hand, and their heightened vulnerability to intrusive state control, on the other. (p. 1011)

In addition, raising the minimum wage to a living wage, helping women make the transition from welfare-to-work, and investing resources in economically resource-limited neighborhoods could be other important structural changes.

To conclude, Black women's intimate partner violence, and its devastating impact on the larger African American community, will remain (in)visible until there is a substantive policy-focused and data-driven public discourse on this topic. Perhaps, it is time for battered women's organizations, civil rights groups, anti-poverty organizations, survivors, and other stake holders to form coalitions, across their ideological and political spectrums. Together, they must act as institutional reformers to address all the forms of violence in the lives of Black women that remain "hidden in plain sight."

NOTES

1. African American and Black will be used interchangeably.
2. In the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) minor aggression has been defined as pushed, slapped, and hit with an object. Severe violence or wife battering has been defined as kicked, bit, hit with fist; hit or tried to hit other with an object; beat up the other; choked other; threatened with knife or gun; used knife or fired a gun. The "overall" violence rate was any form of relationship aggression, regardless of level of severity (Straus & Gelles, 1990).

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