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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to further "widen the lens" by identifying future research directions. In the first section, I will briefly define intersectionality and highlight the survivors' identities that warrant further investigation. When compared to other ethnic groups, Black women experience multiple types of victimization. In the second section, I will discuss the importance of situating IPV, especially non-fatal strangulation, reproductive coercion, and domestic homicide, in the context of family violence, community violence, historical trauma, structural violence, institutional violence, and cultural violence. Despite their elevated rates of victimization, Black women are remarkably resilient. In the final section, I suggest that we widened the research lens by focusing on protective factors, help-seeking, and resilience among Black survivors.

According to the U.S. Census, in 2019 there were 46.8 million people in the United States who identified as Black,[1] which reflects a 29% increase over almost two decades (Tamir, 2021). Although the Black population is remarkably diverse, they are disproportionately overrepresented among victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV). In the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 45.1% of Black women reported that they had experienced sexual violence, physical aggression, and/or stalking that had been perpetrated by an intimate partner (Smith et al., 2017). Based on these prevalence rates, more than six million Black women are survivors of some form of IPV during their lifetime (Black et al., 2011).

In this special issue, Gillum (2021) reviewed the current research on Black survivors of IPV. The purpose of this current article is to further "widen the lens" by identifying future research directions. In addition to ethnicity and country of origin, Black Americans vary in terms of racial identity, educational and socioeconomic status (SES), religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and gender identity. By utilizing an intersectional approach, we can make these

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[1]The term "Black" will be used to refer collectively to individuals of African and Caribbean ancestry and "African American" will be ued to refer specifically to those of African ancestry who were born in the United States.

Black subpopulations more visible (Rice et al., in press). In the first section I will briefly define intersectionality and highlight the survivors' identities that warrant further investigation. When compared to other ethnic groups, Black women experience multiple types of victimization. In the second section, I will discuss the importance of situating IPV, especially non-fatal strangulation, reproductive coercion, and domestic homicide, in the context of family violence, community violence, historical trauma, structural violence, institutional violence, and cultural violence. Despite their elevated rates of victimization, Black women are remarkably resilient (Jackson et al., 2018). In the final section, I suggest that we widened the research lens by focusing on protective factors, help-seeking, and resilience among Black survivors.

Use an intersectional lens

Rooted in Black feminist scholarship, Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality*, which posits that people simultaneously occupy multiple social identities. Each of these identities intersects with one another to form a person's unique experience of the world, particularly as it relates to their marginalization and encounters with oppression and discrimination. As an individual's disadvantaged societal statuses multiply, so does their experience of societal discrimination, which increases the probability that they will experience IPV. Rice et al. (in press) offer a visual representation of the multiple intersecting identities of victims and the complex ways that various forms of oppression can co-occur in the context of IPV.

To further illustrate, imagine a survivor of IPV who self identifies as a low-income, Black lesbian with a history of mental health challenges who resides in an under-resourced urban community. This configuration of identities means that this hypothetical survivor may simultaneously experience racism, classism, homophobia, and discrimination based on her perceived mental disability as she navigates her daily life, including how she experiences the partner abuse (Simpson & Helfrich, 2014).

Black Americans are not a monolithic group. As this population becomes more diverse, there is a critical need for more research on IPV among Black subpopulations. For example, 3.7 million, or 8%, of the U.S. population indicated that their race was Black and another race (most often White) and another 2.4 million, or 5%, self-identified as both Black and Hispanic (Tamir, 2021). In the NISVS, 53.8% of multiracial women (some of whom also identified as Black) reported the highest rates of IPV (Breidling et al., 2014). This indicates a need for more research on partner abuse among biracial and multiracial women.

The foreign-born Black population also has nearly doubled in the last two decades from 2.4 million in 2000 to 4.6 million in 2019, with the majority of immigrants born in Caribbean nations (46%) or African countries (42%)

(Tamir, 2021). Due to their presumed similarity in race, scholars have often engaged in the practice of "ethnic lumping" by aggregated Black ethnic groups (U.S.-born African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and African immigrants) into a single combined category. Consequently, it has been difficult to detect important differences in prevalence rates of IPV and risk factors across ethnic groups (Lacey et al., 2021).

Scholars should begin to focus on the prevalence rates and correlates of violence between African Americans and Caribbeans (Lacey et al., 2021). In addition, more scholarship should focus specially on the historical context and theories that account for the elevated rates of domestic violence among survivors of Caribbean descent (Lacey et al., 2021). Among African immigrants and refugee pre- and post-migration IPV and family violence has been neglected in the research and warrants much more scholarly attention (Corley & Sabri, in press; West, 2016a).

Based on their elevated rates of victimization, there is an urgent need to investigate intimate partner abuse in the lives of Black sexual minority individuals, such as Black lesbians and bisexual women (Rice et al., in press) and Black gay and bisexual men (Brooks et al., in press). When compared to their cisgender counterparts, transgender individuals and those who identify as nonbinary, people whose gender is not exclusively male or female, are at especially high risk of IPV because they experience multiple forms of discrimination based on their marginalized identities, including racism, sexism, and transphobia (King et al., in press; Rice et al., in press). Therefore, future researchers should define intimate partner abuse beyond the traditional male-female gender binary, which will capture the unique forms of violence experienced by these marginalized, often invisible, populations (Yerke & DeFeo, 2016).

With few exceptions (e.g., James et al., 2017), large samples are not well equipped to capture the nuances of specific forms of victimization that are experienced by highly intersectionalized survivors, such as transgender individuals. Still, more studies are using an intersectional lens to analyze battered women's process of leaving abusive relationships (Barrios et al., in press) and to investigate how gender and race-based inequalities intersect at the structural and community levels to discourage women from police contact following IPV and sexual assault (Decker et al., 2019). Scholars should continue advancing intersectional approaches to explore IPV (Cardenas, in press).

Intimate partner violence in the context of other forms of violence

When compared to women of other ethnic backgrounds, Black women experienced higher rates of several forms of IPV. Consequently, their intimate partner violence should be discussed in the context of multiple forms of victimization. As illustrated in Figure 1, Black women's IPV should be situated

Figure 1. Black women's intimate partner violence in the context of multiple forms of violence.

in the context of family violence, community violence, historical trauma, structural violence, institutional violence, and cultural violence.

Intimate partner violence

When compared to women of other racial groups, Black women reported higher rates of nonfatal strangulation, reproductive coercion, and domestic homicide. Accordingly, future researchers need to incorporate these forms of violence when discussing IPV among Black women.

Non-fatal strangulation. When compared to White women, African American women were at an increased risk of attempted, completed, and multiple strangulations (Messing et al., 2018). According to Black strangulation victims, the aggression was triggered by the perpetrator's jealousy or accusations of infidelity, the survivor's attempt to leave the relationship, or her failure to comply with his demands. Immediate and persistent fear were the primary reactions to strangulation (Thomas et al., 2014).

Reproductive coercion. A frequently neglected form of sexual violence that impacts Black survivors is reproductive coercion (RC). This form of violence can include birth control sabotage (e.g., removing the condom during intercourse, destroying a woman's contraceptive device or birth control pills), and pregnancy pressure (verbal or emotional pressure to either get pregnant or to terminate a pregnancy against the woman's wishes). According to the NISVS, when compared to White and Hispanic women, Black women had significantly higher lifetime and 12-month prevalence of RC (Basile et al., in press).

Domestic homicide. Black women are overrepresented among victims of the most extreme manifestations of IPV, which is *femicide*, defined as the homicide of women. In 2018, Black women were murdered by males at a rate of nearly three times higher than their White counterparts (2.85 vs. 1.03 100,000). Among Black women who had been murdered by a known offender, 61% were current or former wives, common-law spouses, or girlfriends. Most often, Black male intimates killed their female partners with a firearm during an argument (Violence Policy Center, 2020). Furthermore, when compared to White and Hispanic women, the intimate partner homicide rate among pregnant Black women was threefold higher (Kivisto et al., in press).

Family violence

Researchers have consistently found that among Black women, childhood victimization in the form of observing violence between parents/caregivers or experiencing childhood physical abuse was associated with being the victim or perpetrator of adult IPV (for a review see West, 2016b, 2019). Future researchers need to investigate a range of other forms of family violence in the form of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including childhood abuse (neglect and physical, emotional, sexual abuse), substance abuse in the family of origin, and incarceration of household members (Lee et al., in press; Thulin et al., 2021).

Community Violence

Black Americans are disproportionately impacted by community violence, defined as experiencing or witnessing homicide, gun violence, assaults, and robberies. Exposure to community violence in any role (witness, victim, or perpetrator) has been associated with higher rates of IPV (for a review see West, 2016b, 2019). Future researchers should investigate the direct, indirect, and moderating ways that neighborhood and community environments (e.g., violence, social disorganization, and concentrated neighborhood disadvantage) impact IPV among the inhabitants of these areas (Voith, 2019).

Historical trauma

In North America, enslaved Blacks lived through acute and prolonged suffering for 250 years when they were legally in bondage as human property, which was followed by 150 years of post-emancipation disenfranchisement and violence in the form lynchings, police brutality, and high levels of racially motivated terrorism. This multigenerational violence can contribute to *historical trauma*, which has been defined as "the collective spiritual, psychological, emotional and cognitive distress perpetuated inter-generationally deriving from multiple denigrating experiences originating with slavery and continuing with pattern forms of racism and discrimination to the present day" (Jackson et al., 2018; Williams-Washington & Mills, 2018, pp. 247).

The traumatic effects of slavery may continue to manifest within African American families in the form of interpersonal violence (St. Vil et al., 2019). To illustrate, 66% of African American women who experienced partner conflict, in conjunction with a range of lifetime traumas, such as poverty, incarceration, childhood abuse and abandonment endorsed the item: "My race has a history of being oppressed, discriminated against, or threatened by genocide" (Hauff et al., 2017). This may indicate that some Black survivors situated their personal trauma within the context of their race's historical trauma. Future researchers should consider integrating measures of historical trauma into their research on Black survivors of IPV (Williams-Washington & Mills, 2018).

Structural Violence

Historical trauma and violence has created social structural inequalities and has set the stage for *structural violence*, which " . . . includes the U.S. history of racism, sexism, and heterosexism. All incidences of gender violence, homophobic violence, and racialized violence can be understood as examples of structural violence . . . " (Fitzgerald, 2017, pp. 59). Poverty, in a variety of forms, appears to account for the elevated rates of partner violence among Africans and African Americans (Gillum, 2019). The social and economic impact of Covid-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) has been especially hard for survivors of sexual violence and IPV. Financial insecurity and inability to meet financial observations, was greatest among Black women survivors, which increased the probability that they returned to abusive partners (Ruiz et al., 2020). Concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, such as high unemployment rates and vacant homes, and homelessness, the more visible manifestations of structural violence, often co-occur and converge to exacerbate IPV in the lives of Black women (Rice et al., in press).

Structural violence also can take the form of racial discrimination, which has been measured by being unfairly stopped and frisked by police, followed by store clerks, called insulting names, or physically attacked because of skin color/race. Higher rates of relationship abuse have been associated with being a victim of racial discrimination. Among rural, low-income heterosexual African American couples, women committed more physical aggression if they experienced racial discrimination; whereas men reported more relationship instability and committed higher levels of psychological aggression if they experienced higher levels of racial discrimination (Lavner et al., 2018). These findings suggest that investigators should operationalize structural violence and include measures of structural vulnerabilities in their research on Black survivors of IPV (Bourgois et al., 2017).

Institutional violence

When survivors seek services from formal agencies, they may encounter institutional violence (Fitzgerald, 2017). Black women may experience

discriminatory police treatment in the form of having their IPV and sexual assault minimized or encountering police officers who have victim blaming attitudes (Decker et al., 2019; Richie & Eife, 2021). The most marginalized survivors, such as Black transgender women, experienced IPV in the context of mistreatment and violence by service providers in the medical, legal, and educational systems among others. Even faith communities and public accommodations could be unsafe and unwelcoming places for Black transgender women (Rice et al., in press).

Cultural violence

Cultural violence refers to the widespread attitudes or beliefs used to justify direct or structural violence, such as prejudices or stereotypes that exist in society, which are then internalized by individuals (Galtung, 1990). Law enforcement personnel may endorse specific stereotypes about Black women survivors (e.g., they are not credible and cannot be believed and that they are "angry" mutual combatants in abusive relationships) (Simmons, 2020). When service providers embrace these beliefs, Black survivors may perceive that social services agencies have little interest in their safety, and in turn, under-utilize these resources (Monterrosa, in press). Perpetrators of abuse also may endorse stereotypes about the Black women, such as the belief that they are sexually promiscuous, which they use to justify the abuse (Cheeseborough et al., 2020).

Taken together, widening the lens calls for scholars to investigate all forms of IPV, particularly those that disproportionally impact Black women, such as non-fatal strangulation, reproductive coercion, and domestic homicide. Furthermore, IPV should be considered in the context of family violence, community violence, historical trauma, institutional violence, structural violence, and cultural violence.

Protective factors

Although the risk factors that are associated with IPV among African Americans has been well documented (West, 2016b, 2019), less is known about protective factors. For example, higher levels of spirituality and greater social support were protective factors associated with resilience among Black women survivors of IPV (Howell et al., 2018). This finding indicates a need to explore resilience, defined as "the capacity to cope with an onslaught of stress and adversity, bouncing back from it or steeling oneself against it such that one's ability to function returns to approximately normal levels" (Jackson et al., 2018, pp. 1).

However, some Black women survivors are more than resilient, they experience posttraumatic growth (PTG) in the aftermath of domestic violence, which is "the process of meaning-making and is marked by profound growth"

and is "also characterized by transformative changes in an individual's perceptions of self, others, and life" (Mushonga et al., in press, pp. 3). In semi structured interviews with African American survivors of IPV, PTG took the forms of greater appreciation of life, spiritual growth, personal strength, and greater efforts to be parent effectively (Mushonga et al., in press). These results call for more research on Black women intimate partner victims' help seeking behavior to better enable them to thrive and heal after victimization (Waller et al., in press)

Conclusion

Two decades ago, the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC) began its Community Insights Project to have conversations with Black members of the faith community, the law enforcement community, human service workers, and other stakeholders. The purpose of these focus groups was to gather information about their perceptions of IPV in order to guide future research directions (Jenkins, 2021). In the third decade of the 21st century, a growing number of domestic violence researchers have begun to embrace community-based participatory research (CBPR). In this approach, researchers and community members share power, at every level of the research process, which has enabled them to co-create research that reflects the lived reality of survivors (Goodman et al., 2018). Our understanding of intimate partner violence in the lives of Black women can be greatly enhanced by using an intersectional research approach, situating intimate partner violence in the context of other forms of violence, and widening the research focus to include protective factors and resilience. The work continues.

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Disclosure of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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