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Using an African American Lens to Explore the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to apply Critical Race Theory to investigate whether differences exist between African American women and Caucasian women on constructs measuring conflict negotiation and parenting attitudes for female perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Using the lens of critical race theory, we hypothesize that there are statistically significant differences between African American women and Caucasian women for indicators of parenting attitudes (measured by the AAPI-2) and intimate partner negotiation (measured by the CTS-2). The study employed a non-equivalent, control-group design and involved secondary data analysis. Data on 133 women was collected by a batterer intervention program in a metropolitan area in the Southeastern U.S. Binary logistic regression suggests that (1) the women in this sample who were more likely to score high on the CTS-2 physical scale were more likely to belong to the African American cohort; and (2) those women who scored in the high risk parenting category were also more likely to fall in the African American cohort. Findings indicate that critical race theory is a useful theoretical framework for understanding macro conditions in which women perpetrate IPV.

Keywords: critical race theory, intimate partner violence, female perpetrators, batterer intervention

1. Introduction

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS), 50% of women and 20% of men in the U.S. experience violence victimization other than rape over the course of their life. This victimization, in turn, leads to 27% of women and 12% of men who are victimized to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among other short-term and long-term negative health consequences (CDC, 2014). These victims have perpetrators who are often mandated to treatment or seek out treatment to address their use of violence in their intimate relationships. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious social problem and, to combat it, batterer intervention programs (BIPs) have become the most prevalent treatment mechanism for perpetrators after a criminal domestic violence plea or conviction (Carney and Buttell, 2006; Price and Rosenbaum, 2009). However, only recently, has a growing body of literature begun to investigate the motivations, experiences, and treatment of female perpetrators (e.g., see White and Dutton, 2013; Follingstad et al., 1991; Archer, 2000; Williams, Ghandour, & Kub, 2008; Desmarais, Reeves, Nichools, Telford, & Fiebert, 2012). Relatedly, many scholars argue that the majority of IPV is bi-directional (see for an extensive overview Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012).

Specifically, recent scholarship on parenting and IPV has investigated how the relationship among parenting attitudes, race, and BIP program completion translates into actual parenting behaviors (e.g., Burnette, Ferreira, & Buttell, 2015; Ferreira, Lauve-Moon, and Cannon, 2015; Valentino et al., 2012). Lastly, some scholarship has shown that African American women use violence in their intimate relationships differently than white women (West, 2016), and in their parenting attitudes (Dorsey, Forehand, & Brody, 2007). To further this emerging body of literature, this study applies insights garnered from Critical Race Theory (CRT) (e.g. Abrams & Moio, 2009; Bell, 1995; Bakan & Dua, 2014; Crenshaw, 1991, Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Price, 2009) to frame if and in what ways there may be differences between African American and white women's use of violence in their intimate relationships for women receiving treatment at a BIP located in the Southeastern United States. This research is unique in using CRT to theoretically frame IPV perpetration for women mandated to such a treatment program. Binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to test hypotheses drawn from relevant literatures and findings are explained using CRT. Filtering the lived experiences of African-Americans through the CRT framework will help us gain further understanding of the role of macro conditions in the perpetration of IPV by African American women.

2. Literature Review

2.1. African American Female Perpetrators of IPV

A majority of IPV literature subscribes to a white heteronormative narrative, where white cisgender men are primary perpetrators and white cisgender women are primary victims. However, in recent years, the landscape of IPV research has begun to evolve to account for non-white, non-heteronormative relationships (Dutton, Hamel, & Aaronson, 2010; Cannon & Buttell, 2015; Cannon, Lauve-Moon, & Buttell, 2015). It is imperative to fully acknowledge the scope of IPV in various communities, due to the regularity of its occurrence and its impact on these communities. The National Crime Victims Survey indicates that African-Americans, regardless of sex or relationship status, regularly report higher occurrences of severe, mutual, and chronic incidences of IPV than their peers of other races and ethnicities (West 2012; West 2016). As far back as 1975, the National Family Violence Survey indicated that African American couples report higher occurrences of IPV. African Americans are 2.5 times more likely to acknowledge an initial IPV event and twice as likely to acknowledge chronic instances of IPV (Cateno, Field, Ramsietty-Mikler, & Lipsky, 2009; Williams, Oliver, & Pope, 2008). Even though the prevalence of IPV in the African American community has been documented, the unique dynamics of this issue in the community remain undertheorized.

One of the most troubling findings from these national statistics concerns African American women as perpetrators and African American men as victims. According to a national household survey conducted from 1995 to 2000, African American households noted higher levels of female-to-male violence (FMPV) at 30%, compared to male-to-female violence at 23% (Cateno, Field, Ramsietty-Mikler, & Lipsky, 2009). African American males reported being victims of FMPV at a rate 2.5 times greater than their peers of other minorities, and a rate 62% higher than their white peers (Rennison & Welchans, 2002; West 2012; West 2016; Williams et al., 2008). In African American relationships where IPV was present, 61% reported that the aggression was mutual in nature, resulting in bidirectional IPV (Cateno et al., 2009; West 2012). In relationships where IPV was reported, African American women identified themselves as perpetrators more readily than African-American men, who more often reported themselves as both perpetrators and victims (Cateno et al., 2009; West, 2016). The unique and complex relationship African American females have with IPV is due in part to the high rates of victimization, perpetration, and even higher rates of bidirectional IVP they report (West, 2016). African American women who identified themselves as perpetrators tended to attribute their use of violence to certain contributory factors. African American women tended to use violence to preempt violence from their partners, as retaliation, or as self-defense during MFPV (West, 2016). However, typically, the use of physical violence by African-American women is contextually related to their individual experiences with victimization, which does not differ dramatically from their peers of other races and ethnicities (West, 2016). Several studies indicate that female perpetrators and female victims have comparable levels of exposure to trauma, which influences their relationship with violence (Babcock, Miller, & Siard 2003; Clift & Dutton, 2011; Graves, Sechrist, White, & Paradise, 2005; Kennedy, 2008; Pinchevsky & Wright, 2012).

Relatedly, research has shown that an individual's history with violence acts as a predictor of IPV, presumably because one learns that physical aggression is a highly effective strategy for resolving conflicts in their interpersonal relationships (Clift & Dutton, 2011; Dutton et al., 2010; Graves et al., 2005; Swan & Snow, 2006; White & Dutton, 2013; Williams et al., 2008), although it comes at the expense of relationship quality. The experiences of African American females as victims, and their exposure to violence, serve to normalize aggression and violence as a part of daily life. Adolescent African American girls are in jeopardy of being victimized and exposed to violence at school, home, by a romantic partner, and in their community. As they age, the risk persists, culminating in elderly African American females being in jeopardy of elder abuse from relatives and caretakers through financial abuse and IPV (West 2012; West 2016). The normalized existence of violence, aggression, and victimization creates yet another daily stressor in lives already stressed by virtue of operating in a society in which they are marginalized due to their race and gender. Ignoring connections between victims and perpetrators further propagates the racist, ethnocentric, and heterosexist stereotypes that allows the idea of both a perfect blameless victim, typically a white woman, and identifiable perpetrators, typically non-whites, to flourish (Crenshaw, 1991; MacDowell, 2013). For instance, African American women are susceptible to high rates of victimization regardless of age, but are rarely seen as or treated in the same way as blameless white victims (Crenshaw, 1991). The convergence of these subjugating factors results in African American women being stereotyped as masculine, angry, untrustworthy, and hypersexual individuals who play a significant role in their own victimization (Crenshaw, 2012; MacDowell, 2013). In order to understand why an African American woman perpetrates violence in intimate relationships, it is imperative to identify the complex space they occupy in a theoretical sense, through the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Traditionally, research on IPV has been dominated by a debate between two major, yet distinct theoretical perspectives: traditional feminist theory and family violence theory. One perspective is grounded in feminist theory where IPV is a gendered, sex specific crime that defines perpetrators engaging in this behavior as exercising their patriarchal dominance and reinforcing their view of women as victims (Archer 2000; Buttell et al., 2012; Gertsenberger & Williams, 2013; Straus, 2011). The second perspective subscribes to a family violence theoretical framework, which offers empirical evidence that patriarchy is not the catalyst for IPV (Gertsenberger & Williams, 2013; Straus, 2011). Rather, this framework suggests that IPV is a result of various factors, including a desire for power and control, which is not gender specific (see, for instance, Gertsenberger & Williams, 2013). However, neither framework gets at the specific day-to-day macro and micro conditions African American women face in the same way as intersectionality theory. Intersectionality approaches seek to account for the ways gender, race, and class combine to contribute to behaviors and experiences (Smooth, 2013). The hierarchical arrangement of power in our society results in the dismissal of individuals, who belong to multiple overlapping, and intersecting marginalized categories. Examining how these intersections interact with each other to create distinctive identities and experiences for African American women allows for a better understanding of their experiences with IPV (MacDowell, 2013; West 2016). Compounding factors such as race, gender, socio-economic level, marital status, and number of children shape the experiences and identities of African American women and serve to further disadvantage them (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 2011; Crenshaw, 2012). Due to their lack of structural power, African American women may resort to physical aggression as a means of protection and out of a sense of frustration because they feel the system designed to protect them is failing (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw 2011; Crenshaw, 2012). Due to such acts of physical aggression, African American women become perpetrators who are more apt to be subjected to social punishments such as incarceration and court-mandated BIPs than their white peers (Crenshaw, 2012). The increase in social punishments experienced by African American female perpetrators contributes to African American females being incarcerated at a rate 6.9 times higher than their white peers. The disproportionate incarceration rates for women of color amplify the accretion of advantage and disadvantage as evidenced by the operation of social power and vulnerability in society (Crenshaw, 2012). By exercising their agency through the use of physical aggression, African American females become further ostracized from the dominant culture and lose even more power through their exclusion (MacDowell, 2013). The constant exclusion of African American women from the IPV discussion highlights how pivotal intersectionality is to understanding what living on the margins of race, class, and gender means. Intersectionality offers the tools to examine how living at this nexus creates an atmosphere with an elevated risk for African American women to resort to violence. To further explore these systems of marginalization, we argue Critical Race Theory offers a uniquely relevant paradigm for exploring these intersections of gender, race, IPV, and parenting attitudes.

2.2. Critical Race Theory

Little attention has been paid to the relationship between Critical Race Theory (CRT) and IPV in the African American community (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991; MacDowell, 2013; Morrison, 2006; Potter, 2006; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). This omission is troubling because in other contexts CRT has helped explain differential experiences of women of color relative to white women. For example, utilizing CRT provides valuable insights into how oppression and marginalization differently affects women who perpetrate IPV, by illuminating the kinds of cultural differences and social problems different women face due to the color of their skin. In order to tease apart these differences, CRT provides a powerful framework to examine the links among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Focusing a spotlight on the intersections of statuses and how that interplay operates, CRT acknowledges that much of this violence occurs within the context of the perpetrator's own victimization, as opposed to African American females being solely the primary aggressors (Crenshaw, 1991). CRT posits that subscribing to the notion there is objectivity, neutrality, and color blindness in law and society actually perpetuates racism by ignoring the existence of systemic and institutional racism (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Focusing a spotlight on the intersections of statuses and how they interplay, CRT acknowledges that much of this violence occurs within the context of the perpetrator's own victimization and marginalization (see Crenshaw, 1991). Filtering IPV through CRT allows for an examination of how research and policy related to IPV is dominated by white culture through the exclusion of how the multidimensionality of oppression impacts African American females as both victim and perpetrator (Morrison, 2006).

The dominant narrative in our post-racial society maintains that everyone has the same opportunities and protections in “our” democratic capitalistic society, thus delegitimizing future claims of racism, inequality, oppression, and marginalization (Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Price, 2009). Since, as Toni Morrison declared, this is a “wholly racialized world”, race organizes and refracts the world around us, which reinforces the normative nature of racism (Price, 2009; Abrams & Moio, 2009; Bakan & Dua, 2014). The very nature of our society necessitates social stratification, and race has become America’s de facto form of stratification (Bakan & Dua, 2014). The discourse concerning IPV has been racialized as white through society’s acceptance of white culture’s normative beliefs about intimate partner relationships and the nuclear family structure, which is to say that ideas of good partnership and of good parenting are not colorblind but, in fact, reflect the values of dominant white culture. This elevation of one set of cultural values and norms over all others further marginalizes a sizable portion of the population (e.g. anyone who does not identify or is not identified as white) because they are unable to readily access culturally competent services and are further damaged because they are measured and defined by a culture and norms that are not their own (Morrison, 2006; Shernock & Russell, 2012). Subscribing to this the color-blind narrative is very damaging because it permeates the macro, mezzo, and micro levels of the system with obvious negative consequences to a multi-racial society.

Presently the color-blind narrative has resulted in a racialized American criminal justice system that punishes people of color at higher rates and in a much more punitive manner than white people (Brewer & Heitzig, 2008; Larkin, 2014). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2014, approximately 516,900 African American males and 22,600 African-American women were in state or federal facilities, these numbers do not include those in city, county, or parish custody or those on probation or parole (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). African Americans comprise a significantly higher percentage of the correctional population than the general population (Alexander, 2010). These statistics create a narrative that allows the public to associate a pathology of criminality with African Americans (Soss, Langbein, & Metelko, 2003). According to Soss, Langbein, and Metelko (2003), this manufactured pathology of criminality assigned to African Americans has created a climate where Caucasians commonly associate criminality with African Americans and believe that most criminals come from racial minorities (Mears et al., 2013). The result is the spoiled collective identity of African Americans, as they are often consciously as well as unconsciously linked to crime, which negatively impacts all African Americans and ultimately society as a whole (Loury, 2002; Mears & Stewart, 2010). Empirical research suggests institutional racism contributes to various societal stressors and causational factors that influence the occurrence of IPV in the African American community (e.g. neighborhood poverty, low socioeconomic factors, etc.) (Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, & Field, 2005; Field & Cateno, 2004, Gondolf, 2007; Roberts et al., 2011). CRT also provides a framework within which to understand why the statistics in relation to IPV in the African American community are so much higher than their white peers.

When law enforcement agencies respond to domestic situations they are more likely to make an arrest of one or both parties if African Americans are involved rather than whites, because of both the structural and institutional racism present in the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010; Larkin, 2014; Schiffer, 2014; Soss et al., 2003). The criminal justice system's responses regarding African Americans and IPV are linked to how the identity of those involved shapes the responses, creating a racialized and gendered IPV legal discourse (MacDowell, 2013). The identity of those involved raises normative questions about their position in society because African American females who have been identified as perpetrators report that 61 % of the time the IPV was bidirectional, meaning that they were simultaneously the victim and the perpetrator, which serves to negate their position as victims (Cateno et al., 2009; West 2012). Given the insidious nature of institutionalized racism and unconscious racial bias, CRT is uniquely situated to address these pernicious effects due to its acknowledgement of the importance of rendering whiteness visible in framing possible differences between African American and White female perpetrators of IPV. Engaging CRT to explain relationships between IPV and African American female perpetrators does not excuse the use of violence and aggression; instead it serves to explain how various factors converge to contribute to its use. It is important to develop an understanding of the impact of IPV, because many female perpetrators are also parents and the presence of IPV may directly or indirectly affect their parenting. By understanding the complexities of IPV within the context of CRT and intersectionality, more culturally competent and effective policies and interventions can be developed and implemented.

2.3. Parenting

There is a dearth of research that investigates relationships among female perpetrators of IPV, parenting attitudes, and behaviors (Bancroft et al., 2011; Burnette et al., 2015; Cater & Forssell, 2012; Ferreira et al., 2015; Simmons et al., 2010). Much of the literature concerning IPV and parenting has subscribed to a heteronormative narrative where white cisgender men are perpetrators and cisgender females are victims (see Appel & Holden, 1998; Bancroft et al., 2011; Bavolect & Keene, 2010; Ferreira et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2010). Previous research also indicates there is a relationship between IPV and one's parental attitudes and behaviors (Bancroft et al., 2011; Simmons et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2010). Studies have indicated that the presence of parental conflict is predictive of decreased levels of nurturing and involvement, which increases the likelihood of child adjustment difficulties (Dorsey, Forehand, & Brody, 2007). Parental conflict, which tends to compromise maternal warmth and support, was found to be a far stronger predictor for most aspects of maternal and child adjustment than social support (Dorsey et al., 2007). Even in the face of increased paternal involvement, mothers remain the primary caretakers in a majority of families (Dutton et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2009). Continued research into the relationship between mothering and IPV is crucial to gain a greater understanding of the impact of the compounding effects of the intersection of race, gender, class, and power on mothers (Dutton et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2009).

The racialization of parenting styles in America must be addressed in order to understand how maternal stressors influence the relationship between female perpetrators and parental attitudes and behaviors. Research asserts that Caucasian parenting is characterized as too laissez-faire and African American parenting as too authoritarian (Dixon, Brooks-Gunn, & Gruber, 2008; Rodriguez, McKay, & Bannon, 2008; Thompson, 2011). White children are allowed to move through society with a certain inherent degree of entitlement and ownership because of their privilege, which does not necessitate the use of strict discipline because the world is more amenable to their bad behaviors (Avison, Ali, & Walters, 2007; Chao & Kanatsu, 2008; Margolin & Gordis, 2003; Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Taylor et al., 2009). Conversely, African American children necessitate stricter discipline due to their subjugated status, so their parents will take more stringent corrective steps because they worry if they do not then society will, which could result in their incarceration or death (Avison, Ali, & Walters, 2007; Chao & Kanatsu, 2008; Margolin & Gordis, 2003; Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Taylor et al., 2009). Some studies have found that corporal punishment, a method of discipline that has been criminalized and criticized, is seen as a cultural norm widely used and accepted by many ethnic and racial minorities (Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Rodriguez, McKay, & Bannon, 2008; Taylor, Moeller, Hamvas, & Rice, 2013). Given the compounding nature of maternal stressors such as poverty, crime, victimization, lack of resources, and lack of structural supports (Dorsey et al., 2007), it seems likely that, through the invalidation of cultural norms, racial and ethnic minorities are exposed to additional parental stressors due to the added burden of conforming to societal norms associated with parenting and discipline in particular.

Researchers contend that African Americans are exposed to more stressors than their Caucasian counterparts, but little research has determined how or if these stressors have an impact on the levels of parental stress experienced by African American and Caucasian women (e.g. Avison, Ali, & Walters, 2007; Chao & Kanatsu, 2008; Margolin & Gordis, 2003; Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Taylor et al., 2009). African American mothers are in a more disadvantageous structural position than their Caucasian counterparts because they are more likely to be young mothers, involved in less traditional relationships, and have more children (Nomaguchi & House, 2013). These factors, coupled with the marginalization of traditional African American parenting styles involving corporal punishment, contribute to an increased level of parental stress (Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Taylor et al., 2009). While Caucasian mothers are less likely to be employed than their African American peers, they experience a reduction in parental stress because they often have more access to resources and are able to better navigate through society because they are members of the dominant culture (Nomaguchi & House, 2013). The aim of our analysis is to examine how CRT can help explain racial and ethnic disparities in relation to gender, IPV perpetration, and parenting attitudes.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine whether differences exist between African American women and Caucasian women when it comes to conflict negotiation and parenting attitudes for female perpetrators of IPV. All participants were undergoing treatment at a BIP in an urban center located in the Southeastern U.S. Given the research reviewed above, we hypothesize that there are statistically significant differences between African American women and Caucasian women in this sample on several key dimensions. We hypothesize that: (1) African American women are more likely to be in a lower social economic class than white women; (2) African American women are more likely to fall in the high risk parenting category than white women; and, (3) African American women are more likely to use conflict to negotiate their intimate partnerships than white women. To test these hypotheses, we ran a series of logistic binary regressions.

4. Methods

This descriptive research involved analysis of 133 women in a batterer intervention program (BIP) in a metropolitan area in the Southeastern U.S. All women who participated in the BIP were invited to join the study. No identifying information were collected by the researchers to ensure anonymity of all clients. Like many BIPs described in the literature, this BIP is cognitive-behavioral in orientation integrating confrontation, therapy, and educational components (see Buttell & Carney, 2005). Of the referring programs, 12.5% were referred by criminal domestic violence court, 30.1% from regular court, 24.3% were referred from pre-trial intervention programs, 9.22% were referred from other services (such as Department of Social Services). The intervention program is a defined, concentrated 26-week group treatment program that focuses primarily on anger management and skills development. The intervention incorporates three phases: (1) orientation and intake interview (2 sessions), (2) psycho educational classes (20 sessions), and (3) group therapy regarding program conclusion (4 sessions). Female only groups consist of approximately 15 clients and meet once a week for two hours. In this model, the events that surround the act of domestic violence (e.g. preceding, during, and after) are directly addressed with clients in order to help make changes for themselves that will constructively affect their personal relationships.

Clients completed the following assessment process in the first two intake sessions. They were administered a demographic questionnaire, the revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2), (Straus et al., 1996; Straus, 2013) and the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory – 2 (AAPI-2) (Bavolek & Keene, 2010) by a staff member at the agency. Demographic (e.g. employment status, number of children), parenting (e.g. AAPI-2 scores), and IPV indicators (e.g. scores on subscales of the CTS2). Of the 146 women in the group, 133 women were included in this analysis as only those who identified as African-American and White women were compared to test the research hypotheses.

4.1. Measures

The primary variables of interesting this study were race, relationship status (single, married, unmarried, divorced, separated), educational level, number of children, CTS2 and AAPI-2 scores. These variables were identified from relevant literatures to ascertain whether there were differences between African American and White female perpetrators of IPV receiving treatment in a BIP.

4.1.1. The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2)

The CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996), the latest version of Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979; 2013), is a widely used self-report measure of psychological and physical assaults and negotiation strategies in domestic relationships (see Sherman & Fredman, 2013). The CTS2 consistently shows sound psychometric properties, with internal consistency reliability ranging from .79 to .95 (e.g. Straus et al., 1996; Strauss 2013). According to Straus (2013), the CTS2 was constructed to gauge the range and frequency of tactics used in response to conflict in a personal relationship. The CTS2 is a thorough 39-item (78 question), self-report inventory calculated to measure five scales: Negotiation (which includes emotional and cognitive subscales), Psychological Aggression, Physical Assault, Sexual Coercion, and Injury, each of which include minor and severe subscales. Negotiation incorporates actions to work out conflict through dialogue; psychological aggression assesses nonverbal belligerent acts; physical assault incorporates physical violence; sexual coercion emphasizes pressuring a partner into undesired sexual activity; finally, injury incorporates partner-caused bodily damage (Straus, 2013). Respondents rank each item for the scales mentioned above on a 7 point Likert scale (0 = this has never happened before; 1 = once in the past year; 2 = twice in the past year; 3 = 3-5 time in the past year; 4 = 6-10- times in the past year; 5 = 11-20 times in the past year; 6 = more than 20 times in the past year; and 7 = not in the past year, but it has happen before). To generate intelligible scores, values 1 and 2 were kept the same, and values 3 through 6 were recorded to their midpoints (3 = 4, 4 = 8, 5 = 15, 6 = 25) (see Straus, 2013). CTS2 reported scores are the mean and standard deviation of chronicity scores, or how often the participant engaged in the behavior described by each scale over the course of a year (for more information on chronicity scores see Carney, Buttell, & Muldoon, 2006). Each subscale was run in analyses, however only the physical subscale was statistically significant (see Tables 2 and 3).

4.1.2. Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2)

To assess the parenting and child rearing attitudes of adult and adolescent parent and pre-parent populations the AAPI-2 was used (see Bavolek & Keene, 2010; Valentino, Nuttall, Comas, Borkowski, & Akai, 2012). By assessing the level of agreement or disagreement with maladaptive parenting behaviors, the AAPI-2 is considered a corroborated and consistent inventory of parenting attitudes related to child abuse and neglect across the field (Bavolek & Keene, 2010). The AAPI-2 indicates high, medium, or low risk parenting attitudes in relationship to child abuse and neglect based on responses from participants. To do this, the AAPI-2 utilizes five scales to evaluate parenting attitudes considered to be associated with cases of child abuse and neglect: (a) improper expectations of children; (b) parental deficiency of empathetic mindfulness towards children's needs; (c) strong belief in the use of corporal punishment as a means of discipline; (d) parent-child role reversal; and (e) oppressing children's power and independence (Bavolek & Keene, 2010). With over 30 years of research, the AAPI-2 is regarded as a validated and reliable inventory of parenting attitudes relating to child abuse and neglect (Bavolek & Keene, 2010).

Variables were included in the binary logistic regression based on their relevance cited in previous research (see literature review). Descriptive statistics were run on all available variables (see Table 1), and all variables were tested with those that were thought to be the best predictors were employed in logistic binary regression models (results reported in Tables 2-4). Logistic binary regression was the optimal analytic strategy due to its ability to assess smaller sample sizes as well as variables that exhibit some collinearity. Bivariate correlations were run and variables passed multicollinearity tests (all VIF numbers were below 10). To test the research hypothesis, the binary dependent variable was membership in the African American sub-group of the sample of 133 women in the BIP. The most robust independent variables include single marital status, number of children, less than 12th grade educational attainment, physical score on the CTS2, and a high AAPI score (given the high percentage of women who scored in this category, high AAPI score was dummy coded such as it was the referent category compared to low and medium risk categories).

Logistic binary regression was chosen given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable and to test whether African American women negotiated differently than white women in their intimate partnerships and whether their parenting attitudes reflected such differences as expressed in their intimate relationships.

5. Results

For a detailed breakdown of the sample (e.g. number of children, completion rate, referral source, income, etc.) by racial category see Table 1. The sample was mostly women who identified as white (57.5%), with African American women making up 33.56% of the sample and those who identified as racially other were 8.9% of the sample. 84% of the sample had at least one child. 34% of women in the sample were single, whereas 37% of the sample lived on less than \$15,000 a year. 49% of the sample had adverse childhood experiences (measure for experiences of child abuse), whereas 59.6% of the sample scored in the high risk AAPI-2 category.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for 146 women in the batter intervention program

Characteristics	Program Participants (N=146)		
	African American	White	Other
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
Population	33.56 (49)	57.5 (84)	8.9% (13)
Age			
Mean (SD)	32	33	30
Client status			
Completer	28.8 (42)	41.7 (61)	7.5 (11)
Drop-out	4.8 (7)	15.8 (23)	1.4 (2)
Relationship status			
Single	17.8 (26)	13.7 (20)	2.7 (4)
Unmarried partner	5.5 (8)	6.8 (10)	1.4 (2)
Married	6.2 (9)	15.8 (23)	3.4 (5)
Divorced	0.7 (1)	7.5 (11)	0.7 (1)
Separated	2.7 (4)	12.3 (18)	0.7 (1)
Children			
0	4.1 (6)	9.6 (14)	2.7 (4)
1	6.2 (9)	13.7 (20)	2.7 (4)
2	9.6 (14)	10.9 (16)	1.4 (2)
3	6.2 (9)	13.5 (21)	0.7 (1)
4	6.8 (10)	4.1 (6)	0.7 (1)
5	0.0 (0)	2.1 (3)	0.7 (1)
6	0.7 (1)	1.4 (2)	0.0 (0)
7	0.0 (0)	0.7 (1)	0.0 (0)
8	0.0 (0)	0.7 (1)	0.0 (0)
Education			
Less than high school	2 (3)	19.2 (28)	3.4 (5)
High school	10.3 (15)	10.9 (16)	2.7 (4)
Some college	12.3 (18)	18.5 (27)	1.4 (2)
Grad college	8.9 (13)	8.9 (13)	1.4 (2)
Employment			
Unemployed	8.2 (12)	21.9 (32)	2.1 (3)
Part-time	6.2 (9)	9.6 (14)	3.4 (5)
Employed	17.8 (26)	20.5 (30)	2.7 (4)
Disability	0.7 (1)	4.1 (6)	0.0 (0)
Income			
Less than \$15,000	15.8 (23)	18.5 (27)	2.7 (4)
\$15,000-\$25,000	4.8 (7)	10.3 (15)	1.4 (2)
\$25,000- \$40,000	5.5 (8)	7.5 (11)	2.1 (3)
\$40,000-\$60,000	2.7 (4)	6.2 (9)	0.7 (1)
\$60,000 and greater	0.7 (1)	2.7 (4)	0.0 (0)
Referral status			
Criminal DV court	2.9 (4)	9.6 (14)	0.0 (0)
Regular court	10.3 (15)	16.4 (24)	3.4 (5)
Pre-trial intervention	16.4 (24)	23.9 (35)	5.5 (8)
Probation	0.7 (1)	0.7 (1)	0.0 (0)

Department of Social Services	0.0 (0)	2.1 (3)	0.0 (0)
Other	3.4 (5)	4.8 (7)	0.0 (0)
Adverse Childhood Experiences (whether or not respondents indicated whether they were mistreated as children binary coded)			
No	19.9 (29)	33.6 (49)	3.4 (5)
Yes	13.01 (19)	16.4 (24)	4.1 (6)
AAPI-2 High risk			
No	10.9 (16)	25.3 (37)	4.1 (6)
Yes	22.6 (33)	32.2 (47)	4.8 (7)
CTS2 Negotiation			
<i>M</i>	24.04	24.2	22.31
<i>SD</i>	3.37	2.98	7.25
CTS2 Psychological aggression			
<i>M</i>	20.98	20.39	16.61
<i>SD</i>	6.97	7.36	10.3
CTS2 Physical aggression			
<i>M</i>	11.47	8.29	8.46
<i>SD</i>	9.52	8.75	7.72
CTS2 Injury			
<i>M</i>	5.24	6.69	5.92
<i>SD</i>	7.02	8.95	7.27
CTS2 Sexual coercion			
<i>M</i>	1.8	2.27	7.0
<i>SD</i>	6.1	6.93	0.0
CTS2 Total score			
<i>M</i>	39.49	37.64	32.0
<i>SD</i>	19.86	23.16	20.35

Table 2. Logistic binary regression models, with Physical CTS2 score, predicting membership in African American cohort for the sample of 133 women who identified as African American or Caucasian in the BIP.

	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I for EXP (B)	
						Lower	Upper
Single**	1.557	.459	11.532	.001	4.745	-2.456	-.658
Less than 12th Grade***	-2.612	.732	12.744	.000	.073	1.178	4.046
Children	.220	.138	2.569	.109	1.247	-.049	.49
Physical CTS2**	.069	.024	8.062	.005	1.071	.021	.116
Constant***	-1.856	.519	12.801	.000	.156		

Note. N=133; df=4, † p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Note: The results include Pseudo R² even though statisticians disagree over the usefulness of this measure of goodness of fit. Therefore, the low R² should not be taken as indicative of incomplete or inaccurate models (Ramseyer and Rasmusen 2010). One measure of goodness of fit that can be used is the proportioned by chance accuracy rate—that is does the model estimate the model correctly 25% better than chance. This model meets these criteria.

Table 3. Logistic binary regression models, with AAPI High, predicting membership in African American cohort for the sample of 133 women who identified as African American or Caucasian in the BIP.

	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I for EXP (B)	
						Lower	Upper
Single**	1.557	.449	12.027	.001	4.744	-2.437	-.677
Less than 12th Grade**	-2.140	.670	10.188	.001	.118	.826	3.454
Children	.221	.138	2.570	.109	1.248	-.049	.492
AAPI High†	.748	.423	3.117	.077	2.112	-1.578	.082
Constant**	-1.712	.538	10.127	.001	.180		

Note. N=133; df=4, † p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 4. Logistic binary regression models, using both CTS2 physical score and AAPI high, predicting membership in African American cohort for the sample of 133 women who identified as African American or Caucasian in the BIP.

	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I for EXP (B)	
						Lower	Upper
Single**	1.594	.461	11.943	.001	4.924	-2.498	-.69
Less than 12th Grade***	-2.673	.747	12.815	.000	.069	1.21	4.137
Children†	.228	.138	2.727	.099	1.257	-.043	.5
Physical: CTS2**	.066	.024	7.498	.006	1.069	.019	.114
AAPI High	.695	.437	2.534	.111	2.005	-1.552	.161
Constant***	-2.288	.599	14.596	.000	.101		

Note. N=133; df=5, † p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Results for logistic binary regressions are reported in Tables 2-4. Three models, each significant, were run to investigate relationships between IPV and race explaining .239, .206, and .253 variance respectively for Models 1-3. Model 1 shows that single women were 4.75 times more likely to belong to the African American cohort than the white women cohort in this BIP group of female perpetrators. Although the measure of children was not statistically significant, its presence was important in stabilizing the regression model. Having less than a high school education indicated that women were slightly less likely to belong to the African American cohort. Having a high score on the physical sub scale of the conflict tactics scale, meaning an individual uses physical aggression to negotiate intimate relationships, predicted an individual would be 1.1 times more likely to be a member of the African American cohort in this sample than white women. Model 2 includes the measure of high risk parenting attitudes (AAPI High) in place of the physical sub-scale of the CTS2. Model 2 shows that women who score high on the AAPI scale are 2.11 times more likely to belong to the African American cohort than to the white cohort. In Model 3, the number of children was a significant predictor of racial group membership, showing that women with children are 1.26 more times likely to belong to the African American cohort than the white one.

6. Discussion

Overall, findings indicate that African-American women in this sample were more likely to: be single, be parents, have more children, use aggression in intimate relationships, and have a more severe parenting style in comparison to white women in the sample. Rather than use these analyses to evaluate the intervention program, we consider how CRT can help explain these findings. From the perspective of CRT, we argue that the results reveal black women's experiences of systemic oppression from a society in which they operate outside of the dominant culture of whiteness and maleness.

The findings suggest ways in which every day micro aggressions African-American women experience (e.g. accused of being aggressive and hostile, not shown respect, avoidant behavior, subtle snubs, or negating their experience) and the way others view them influences the way they move through the world as expressed by conflict negotiation and “high risk” parenting attitudes (Bakan & Dua, 2014; Harris-Perry, 2011; Crenshaw, 2011; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008).

African American women are stereotypically viewed as hypersexual, unmarried, masculine, angry, welfare recipients who do not participate in society in a socially acceptable or productive manner in the eyes of dominant white culture (Harris-Perry, 2011; Shernock & Russell, 2012; Sue et al., 2008). White women have historically been viewed as more feminine and vulnerable, having more traditional gender roles assigned to them, making them worthy of empathy and protection from individuals and society (Harris-Perry, 2011; Sue et al., 2008). Both groups in the study are subjected to paradoxical views. However, African American women are doubly burdened by belonging to a gender traditionally viewed as vulnerable, which is then eclipsed by being part of a race that has historically been dehumanized socially and politically (Crenshaw, 1991; Shernock & Russell, 2012). The micro aggressions that African American women are subjected to exist and thrive because of macro aggressions of a system and society that is unjust, due to its inherent racialization and stratification (Bakan & Dua, 2014; Crenshaw, 2011; Shernock & Russell, 2012, Sue et al., 2008). Findings presented here, when framed using a CRT perspective, provide insight into the parallel relationship between African American women’s experience living in the duality and intersectionality of their race and gender in a society where they are marginalized and oppressed for being African American and female. The intersectionality of these experiences, and how these women cope, is expressed in their personal relationships.

According to the findings of this study, African American women are 4.74 times more likely to be single, and 1.26 times more likely to be parents than white women in the sample (see Table 4). Using a CRT analysis, we interpret these findings to illustrate how the relationship and parental status of African American women are indicative of the lasting effects of slavery. Slavery established a pattern of systemic institutional and intergenerational fracturing and instability within the African American nuclear family unit—understood as two partners raising children in the same household (Franklin & James, 2015; Frasier, 1939). It was illegal for enslaved Africans to enter into lawful marriage covenants because they were legally categorized as property and therefore viewed as lacking human qualities, emotions, and civil rights (Frasier, 1939). In the absence of lawful marriage, African slaves created their own familial units out of necessity, these units were not viewed as legitimate by dominant white culture (Franklin & James, 2015; Frasier, 1939). Presently, the mass incarceration of African American males is making it difficult if not impossible to establish stable and secure family structures in a manner similar to slavery resulting to a large number of single parent headed households in African American communities (Alexander, 2010; Brewer & Heitzig, 2008; Franklin & James, 2015).

The key point here is that government sanctioned containment and marginalization of African American communities in the Southeastern U.S. has evolved from slavery to mass incarceration (Alexander, 2011). African American families are still utilizing the defacto familial structures they became dependent on during slavery, and in modern society those familial units are not recognized as legitimate because African Americans theoretically have access to legal marriage. Such systematic disenfranchisement results in single African American mothers being marginalized and vilified for participating in practices such as corporal punishment of their children, in order to protect them from worse consequences in the streets or by police (see Coates, 2015), which are a direct result of the lasting effects of the oppressive practices imposed on them during and since slavery, including the Jim Crow era in the South. The findings indicate that African American participants were 1.1 times more likely to engage in physical aggression as a form of negotiation in intimate relationships than white women in the sample. Such analyses make it apparent how critically important further research and examination of IPV research through the lens of CRT is to furthering our understanding of IPV and parenting, specifically the macro factors that impact African American and white women differently in our society. African American women’s use of violence is not seen as acceptable feminine behavior, which serves to neutralize their gender and focus on their behavior, rather than their race, which removes some of the complex issues surrounding their use of violence (Bakan & Dua, 2014; Crenshaw, 2011; Swan & Snow, 2006; Wing 2003). Their use of violence is then attributed to a racially pathological inability to conform to socially acceptable forms of behavior (Bakan & Dua, 2014; Crenshaw, 2011; Swan & Snow, 2006, Wing 2003).

According to these analyses, African American women are 2.11 times more likely than white women in the sample to have a severe parenting attitude. There may appear to be dissonance in these findings on the surface, but they are culturally relevant. Employing the lens of CRT, suggests African American mothers experience more stressors and have a more heightened awareness of the way their children are viewed by and will experience society than their peers. Thus, they may be more apt to adopt a more authoritarian parental role to protect their children (Avison, Ali, & Walters, 2007; Chao & Kanatsu, 2008; Margolin & Gordis, 2003; Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Taylor et al., 2009). In an effort to protect their children they may use what some consider corporal punishment, which is culturally normative in some African American communities, and is not viewed as child abuse because there is no intention to cause injury to the child. Rather, the intention is to inflict pain as a way of correcting and controlling behavior, it is used as a form of conditioning (Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Rodriguez, McKay, & Bannon, 2008; Taylor, Moeller, Hamvas, & Rice, 2013). Generally, African American mothers acknowledge the existence of child abuse and do not endorse it, but culturally child abuse is seen as occurring when the child is injured and or neglected, not giving a child a spanking (Franklin & James, 2015; Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Rodriguez, McKay, & Bannon, 2008; Taylor, Moeller, Hamvas, & Rice, 2013). That African American women reported lower occurrences of child abuse as children in the study is not surprising given what they have been conditioned culturally to view as abuse and by that definition corporal punishment does not constitute abuse. Rather the punishment is viewed as a corrective and seen as conditioning a child for future interactions in a society, which can be dangerous for African Americans (Franklin & James, 2015; Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Rodriguez, McKay, & Bannon, 2008; Taylor, Moeller, Hamvas, & Rice, 2013).

Culturally, some African Americans use corporal punishment as a preventative measure, due to the awareness they have of the societal constraints placed on their children. Most African American parents are aware their children are not permitted to move through society with the same level of freedom and obliviousness as their white peers, due to the systemic and institutional forms of racism that permeate all facets of American society (Bakan & Dua, 2014; Crenshaw, 2011; Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Rodriguez, McKay, & Bannon, 2008; Taylor, Moeller, Hamvas, & Rice, 2013). In this way, many African American mothers often view corporal punishment as a form of protection, affection, and love. However, in U.S. society, the dominant white culture creates a social norm wherein values deemed important by white parents become the standard by which all parenting is measured and defined. The parenting styles of some African American mothers are a result of their cultural relationship with corporal punishment, which is viewed by dominant white culture as violent and abusive towards children no matter what the circumstance or the perceived experience of the child or what such practices might protect the child from in society. Applying a CRT lens to understand the findings of this study render visible the veil of whiteness that influences what is culturally acceptable parenting and what is not. Consequently, the accepted and preferred form of parenting becomes that of the dominant white culture, which serves to further invalidate African American culture and various historically accepted forms of African American parenting.

6.1. Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the sample used is not representative of general society, but is informative of the experiences, attitudes, and motivations of women in a BIP, and those that are referred from agencies represented here. Second, although not all women in the sample were mothers at the time data was collected (see Table 1), we argue it is informative to investigate these women's perspectives given they may become mothers and have experiences with IPV, while keeping in mind their attitudes might change. Some studies have used parenting attitudes with non-parents in similar settings (e.g. Burnette, Buttell, & Ferreira, 2015; Ferreira, Lauve-Moon, & Cannon, 2015).

7. Conclusions & Future Research

The analysis presented here suggests that further research should be conducted to examine the multifaceted societal treatment of women, specifically African American women, who perpetrate IPV in order to develop policies that adequately address the needs and concerns of this population. As scholars utilize innovative ways of conceptualizing and analyzing IPV, the policies and the treatment options they dictate and promote must also continue to adequately address the complex nature of IPV. Alternative standpoints, like the one taken here, are necessary to advance the pervasive therapeutic models based on a white hetero-normative model (Pence & Paymer, 1993; Price & Rosenbaum, 2009), because they do not meaningfully address a large portion of the population affected by IPV and do not fundamentally take into account the social contexts in which IPV is perpetrated.

This study bridges macro insights garnered from CRT with experiences of female perpetrators of IPV in a BIP located in the Southeastern U.S., in order to begin to fill the gap in literature on race, parenting, and female perpetration of IPV. Using CRT to frame these findings reveals two major conclusions: (1) African American women suffer the residual effects of systematic oppression in a still unequal society, and their likelihood of using physical aggression may be less about a propensity for abuse and more an attempt at self preservation resulting from their lived experiences in a society that devalues many of their cultural norms; and, (2) that the parental norms in the U.S. are based on the dominant culture, which is white. This research serves to inform research, policy development, and treatment interventions in a way that addresses institutional and systemic oppression experienced by those most marginalized (e.g. African American women) by society so that they may receive the services and protection to which they are entitled. Finally, this research does so by foregrounding the particular experiences of the intersection of African American and female identities and the specific context of oppression these women face, rather than the violence they use in their intimate relationships.

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