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Testimonies of Identity and Intimate Partner Violence

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University of San Francisco

**Testimonies of Identity and
Intimate Partner Violence**

A Master's Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

By
Jamie Wallen Berrien
August 2018

Testimonies of Identity and Intimate Partner Violence

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by
Jamie Wallen Berrien
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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approved by all the members, this Master's Thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Background and Need for the Study.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	10
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Methodology.....	14
Limitations of the Study.....	18
Significance of the Study.....	20
Definition of Terms.....	20
Chapter II- Review of the Literature.....	25
Introduction.....	25
The Rights of Women.....	26
IPV & Women in the United States.....	28
Identity & Intersectionality.....	33
Significant Factors for Women in IPV Relationships.....	38
Summary.....	48
Chapter III- Results.....	50
Introduction.....	50
Findings.....	53
Common Themes Identified.....	56
Summary.....	70
Chapter IV- Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	71
Discussion.....	71
Conclusions.....	75
Recommndations.....	82
References.....	85

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

We are still learning to recognize what we see.
Traces erased. Details removed.
Letters sewn into quilts—or burned.
Self-portraits hidden in trunks—or burned.
The perishable nature of so many of our artifacts.
If in our remembrance we find the depth of our history
We will opt for description only
Or choose to ignite the fuse of our knowledge?

- Michelle Cliff, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (1980)

Statement of the Problem

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is an epidemic that has swept across our nation, in every community, in every country across the world, and cuts across all race, ethnic, and social class boundaries (Haaken, 2010, p. 19). Women of every age, race, religion, nationality, educational background, and socio-economic status can fall victim to abuse from their intimate partner because many forms of control and abuse of women has been a societal norm for thousands of years. This form of oppression of women can be found in every country, state, neighborhood, and community. IPV can be found in any given social club, church, or school community, and can be found among the wealthiest of women and can be found among women living in extreme poverty. The epidemic of IPV crosses all social and racial lines and affects millions of women around the world.

The discussion of human violence in general has many implications, depending on the context of the term. Therefore, for the all intents and purpose of this paper, my focus will be on the abusive behaviors of men against women in relation to their intimate partnership, and these abusive acts can be referred to interchangeably as intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic violence, Gender-based Violence (GBV), violence against women, and woman abuse. The

working definition of Intimate Partner Violence that I use through this research is defined by the US Department Office of Violence Against Women (2013), which states that Intimate Partner Violence is:

A pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. (Office on Violence Against Women, 2013)

Additionally, DeKerseredy and MacLeod (1997) define women abuse in intimate relationships that further explores the issue:

Women abuse is the misuse of power by a husband, intimate partner (whether male or female), ex-husband, or ex-partner against women, resulting in a loss of dignity, control, safety as well as the feeling of powerlessness and entrapment experienced by the woman who is in the direct victim of ongoing or repeated physical, psychological, economical, sexual, verbal, and/or spiritual abuse. Women abuse also includes persistent threats or forcing women to witness violence against children, other relatives, friends, pets, and/or cherished possessions...(p. 5)

Approximately 5 million women in the United States alone experience IPV every year (Rodriguez et al., 2008, p.1). 1 in 3 women globally will experience some type of violence in her lifetime (Garcia-Moreno, Heise, Jansen, Ellsberg, & Watts, 2005, p. 1282). 85% of domestic violence victims are females, and historically, females have been the most often victimized by someone they know intimately. Women between the ages of 20-24 years of age are at the greatest risk of intimate partner violence. Additionally, most cases of domestic violence are never reported to the police. Approximately one-third of reported female homicide victims that are reported in police records are killed by an intimate partner. Intimate partner violence results in more than 18.5 million mental health care visits each year in the US (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007). Violence against women is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior, and thus is part of a systematic pattern of

dominance and control and can result in physical injury, psychological and emotional trauma, and sometimes death. The consequences can last a lifetime, according to Narius & Macy (2008):

The negative sequelae of violent victimization span multiple aspects of women's biopsychosocial functioning, including poorer physical health, mental health, economic well-being, more impaired social relationships, and risk of future revictimization among abused women relative to nonabused women. (p. 391).

All women who endure IPV can experience tremendous, long-lasting physical, mental, and psychological effects. The effects on a woman vary, because each woman internalizes the abuse differently, based on their personal, cultural, racial, and socio-economic identities. Research shows that who do not identify with the dominant culture, specifically women of color, experience IPV at a much higher rate, and a woman's cultural understanding of violence are mediated through structural forms of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, economic exploitation, and heterosexism (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Many women do not report the abuse to law enforcement or seek help to escape from their abuser because they fear greater consequences for such actions such as incarceration, separation from their children, or deportation. For instance, an undocumented woman puts herself and her family in risk if law enforcement is called because of the possibility of deportation. Furthermore, partners of racialized backgrounds, such as the African American community in the United States have a systematically negative relationship with law enforcement. Many do not feel they can trust the police to fairly handle the situation safely with themselves or with their partner. Past histories as well as our current events prove that the African American community has reason to fear police. For example, research shows that African-American men in this country are incarcerated a higher rate than White men, with the current rate for AA males 7 times more likely to be incarcerated than that of White males (Toldson & Morton, 2011, p. 2). Recent current events demonstrate that police can hastily and

harshly arrest or even shoot and kill African American men for unwarranted reason, such as recent event in the killing of Stephan Clark in Sacramento. Therefore, many women have a justified fear that they or their partner will be mistreated or even taken away if they call the police, and this fear can further victimize woman who are experiencing abuse.

While the current statistics of IPV are staggering, they are underestimates to the exact number of victims that experience intimate partner violence because many women are reluctant and unable to report their abuse due to systemic, societal factors (Vidales 2010, p. 533). Thousands of women will remain in silence, unable to receive support and healing because of barriers that prevent them.

Albeit that violence continues to run rampant in homes across our world, there are powerful movements that have taken a stand against it. Since the 1970's, feminist organizations and researchers have illuminated this issue of "wife beating". By coming together, women began to share their stories and take a stand against the violence, "rather than turning to the male protectors, women sought refuge in their collective strength" (Haaken, 2010, p. 8). Shelters erected all over the United States, Europe, and Britain as safe havens for victims. In the 1980's and 1990's, movements continued to flourish as laws and initiatives were passed to protect a victim and her children. Since these movements began, communities have been educated about IPV, and mental health and social workers have learned tools and techniques to support victims and survivors of abuse. While great progress has been made in this field, there remains a tremendous need for more research that focus on the intersections of a woman's identity and systemic barriers that further contribute to women in the context of their intimate partner relationships.

Women have found a powerful form of personal healing, as well as a catalyst for societal education and change, by telling their lived experiences with abuse and violence and their survival story. Storytelling is empowering and enlightening to both the woman telling the story and to the listener. Stories can move the victim of Intimate Partner Violence into a hero and survivor of her own story. When a woman uses her own words to describe her personal and unique experiences of abuse, she can ultimately emancipate herself from the slavery of abuse by experiencing an awakening that transforms the trajectory of her life.

Women from all backgrounds can suffer oppressive systems of violence. While it may be true that women in every culture may experience oppression and violence, it is essential to draw our attention and research to the women who are not situated in the dominant culture. While digging deeper into the research of IPV, I discovered there is a concerning lack of research and support for women who identify other than of the dominant culture. I will further explore the research related to this concept in Chapter 2.

Numerous barriers can lie between a woman seeking and receiving support and healing from IPV. Societal norms, language acquisition, law enforcement, immigration policies, financial access, childcare access, and healthcare are a few of such obstacles. Many women will go her entire lifetime without reporting the abuse she endures, and therefore will not receive the healthcare and mental health support she needs to recover and thrive.

Intimate Partner Violence is prevalent in the United States and around the world. As a result of living in an abusive relationship, woman can experience physical, mental, and emotional consequences and sometimes even death. The pervasiveness of IPV among all women, and specifically women who are not situated societally among the dominant culture, is a grave issue that cannot be ignored. I witnessed this first hand while listening to the women in

my support group many years ago. I heard the personal testimonies of women who shared how they lack the resources and support needed to escape from their abusers because of structural and societal oppressions in place, and therefore they do not easily receive the support needed to overcome the effects of abuse. The experience I had in that support group solidified the notion in me that it is imperative for further research is done in this complex issue in order to provide all women the support they deserve to live a life free from violence from their intimate partner.

Background and Need

There is a great need for women to have the space and opportunity to use their voices to share their lived experiences of IPV. Creating such a space for women to tell the stories of their lives is a method of resistance against such oppression, and is exploratory research in nature because it reveals systematic patterns of oppression on a larger scale.

Aptheker (1989) believes that patterns emerge as women begin to share their personal experiences:

The search for dailiness is a method of work that allows us to take the patterns women create and the meanings women invent and learn from them. If we map what we learn, connecting one meaning to another, we begin to lay out a different way of seeing reality. (p. 39)

These types of patterns materialize from the narratives of women and serve as immensely rich data, which will help inform strategies to align with all women and ultimately resist the oppression they experience in their intimate relationship and in their daily lives in the US.

Janice Haaken (2010) writes in her book, “Hard Knocks”, that there are three different types of stories that can emerge when a woman shares her story of abuse, and depending on the story will depend on the outcome to combat violence. “Turning to these literary materials allowed us to attend more carefully to the plot and narrative structure, and to identify morals to

the stories that tended to be applied in campaigns to combat domestic violence” (Haaken, 2010, p. 84).

The first genre Haaken describes is called stories of bondage. In this genre, the woman awakens to the knowledge that she is in a household that is filled with danger and her abuser is a dark, engulfing character that traps her in marriage and family. The second genre is stories of deliverance. In this type of story, the woman is an active agent in plotting her escape from her abuser. This genre also focuses on the path the woman takes to escape. The third genre, called stories of struggle and reparation, centers on the woman coming to full realization and denounces her abusive life (p. 85).

Additionally, Booker (Booker, 2004, p. 85) writes that a woman’s story can be a quest narrative; one of the hero (woman) that undertakes a voyage of escape. Applying this storyline “makes the battered woman the hero of the story. It emphasizes her agency and her keen powers of perception. Rather than remain a passive victim, she actively battles her victimizer, who is more powerful than her in every way save her cleverness, courage, and fortitude.” The story is told in such a way “the story’s climax occurs when the protagonist (women) wakes up and is released back into the real world through the transforming power of love” (Polletta, 2009, p. 1500).

A tragic fact is that thousands of women who endure IPV will never have the opportunity to leave their abusive relationship, and will never have the opportunity to tell their story of pain, courage, and survival. Far too few stories have been told of women’s oppression and their struggle for survival. Many women hide in silence out of fear of their perpetrator, societal pressures, and lack of opportunity to receive help from her abuse. The perpetuating societal norm of silence of women and their experiences of violence is unacceptable. If women remain

silent, then there will be little societal change regarding violence against women. Therefore, more sacred spaces need to be created for women to share our stories of survival. Through the telling of our survival stories, the beautiful sound of our collective voices will be heard, and our experiences and survival will be etched in history for our children and grandchildren to treasure.

Purpose of the Study

This research project consists of gathering and composing the sacred lived experiences and survival stories of six women in the Sacramento area. The purpose is to compile women's testimonies and lived experiences of Intimate Partner Violence in a narrative form and to map the complex intersections of the women's identity to further the research in this multifaceted issue. In chapter 2, I further explore the research that attempts to navigate the complexities of a woman's identity and how this can intersect with her intimate partner relationship. In Chapter 3, I analyze the testimonies shared by mapping common themes that arise from them. I do this by using a table to visually show the common themes that arise, and in Chapter 4 I will then link research gathered with of the common themes from the six participants.

Women are masters of telling the stories of their lives and the complexities that contribute to their experiences of IPV. Creating a space for a woman to tell her lived experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and the intersections of their personal identities, through artistic means of story telling, can constitute personal healing and can ignite solidarity collective resistance to the mistreatment of women in our country. Bettina Aptheker writes about the dailiness of women's lives, "By the dailiness of women's lives I mean the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labors and in the context of their subordinated status to men" (Aptheker, 1989, p. 39)

Story telling has been a form of empowerment and resistance for humans for hundreds of generation and in cultures around the world. Moreira explores the power of story telling in his research and suggests that to “create space for other stories of visceral knowledge that try to promote more dignity and respect for more people...not only to the ones who look like us; reinventing Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of hope” (Moreira, 2012). In writing his own personal memories, he is “bringing them into the public, political, pedagogical, and physical space of what otherwise would still be a blank page waiting for some fingers, I insert myself into the past and invite you, together, to create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing it” (p. 158).

Story telling is not only a way for humans share their experiences with one another as a form of empowerment and resistance to oppression, but also can assist in research analysis, which can further shed light on complex issues such as IPV.

Discourse is how language operates in real life communicative events. Discourse analysis involves the analysis of speech, text and conversation so its concerns are with analyses beyond the level of sentence”. A discourse analyst believes that through language a particular reality can be constructed by highlighting the communicator’s own ideology. The task of a discourse analyst is to ‘deconstruct’ this ‘constructed’ reality. (Hossain, 2017, p. 4)

Story telling is a way of mapping and analyzing the lived experiences of women who have endured Intimate Partner Violence and other forms of oppression. Therefore, the relationship between Intimate Partner Violence and societal marginalization of the women is explored by mapping the commonalities and themes of the stories to distinguish patterns of oppression among the women.

If we map what we learn, connecting one meaning or invention to another, we begin to lay out a different way of seeing reality. This way of seeing is what I refer to as women’s standpoint. And this standpoints pivots, of course, depending upon the class, culture, or racial locations of its subjects, and upon their age, sexual preference, physical abilities, the nature of their work, and personal friendships. (Aptheker, 1989, p. 39)

Polletta (2009) states, “To change current approaches to IPV, approaches that are so institutionalized as to have achieved the status of common sense, requires new stories. Women’s accounts of subjugation, isolation, and entrapment have to be told in a way that both is true to their experiences and capable of eliciting public understanding, sympathy, and action” (p. 1490).

Creating space for women to share their memories and lived experiences of IPV, and construct meaning of their own experiences, will further inform education, social work, counseling, and other professional practices and theory. Yet, some women, specifically women who identify other than with the dominant culture, can lack access to support and resources to leave her abuser, and they are left without a voice to speak out against the abuse they experience. “The fact that some of us cannot remember the women’s stories—the fact that some women may never have told stories to their children—is a symptom of our oppression as women” (Aptheker, 1989, p. 41)

My research paper continues to build upon the notion that there is a sacredness in a woman telling her story. Therefore, you will hear the stories of six women telling their experiences of Intimate Partner Violence, and their story telling can be a form of healing, empowerment, resistance and outcry to the oppression they have experienced. Additionally, this research can be used to further explore themes of societal oppression that can perpetuate the epidemic of IPV in our country.

My hope is that as a result of conducting the interviews, the lived experiences of these women will enable a better understanding and ingenuity of the struggle for meaning and survival. The women shared their experiences so greater exploration and understanding into the lives of women who experience IPV could be achieved. Not only is there a healing element to

sharing a personal narrative, but also by learning more about their lives, community members are inspired to resist the oppression and abuse that is so prevalent.

Research Questions

While planning for the interviews, careful consideration was taken while planning the guiding questions to ask the participants of this study that follow the Rebirth Narrative story structure that consist of three components for IPV survivors to use while telling their story. These components include “falling into a trance”, “the hero emerges”, and “staying awake” (Booker, 2004). I will unpack the Rebirth Narrative origin and structure in further detail in Chapter 2 of this research paper.

Using the Rebirth Narrative as my guide, I asked each woman the same questions, such as exploring family and cultural background, childhood experiences, events that led to meeting the abuser, the relationship, and how she came to the decision to stay or leave her abuser.

Theoretical Framework

I am using a few theories to help lay the foundation for my research study. Specifically, this research is framed by three theories. First, I will discuss how the feminist theory laid a foundational framework when discussing Intimate Partner Violence. Then, I will introduce how the Critical Race theory and methodology frames the idea that women of color experience Intimate Partner Violence in vastly different ways and must be explored. Lastly, the third theoretical framework I explore is the Intersectionality theory, which explores how a woman’s identity is complex and must be considered when researching Intimate Partner Violence.

The feminist standpoint theory lays the foundation for understanding gender oppression to women. In the 70’s, the feminist theory exposed the oppression of women in their personal and professional lives. The theory recognizes that the lived experiences of women arise from the

relationships in which they've experienced coercion and subjugation by their male partners. Early feminism theory focused on the gender oppression is largely due to the patriarchal values embedded in social and cultural mechanisms of society, which reinforces violence against women. What the theory failed to expose was the many layers of complexities that exist for women, specifically for women who do not identify with the dominant culture.

When I was considering a methodology to use in this research project, I wanted to be a methodology that is grounded in equity and critical consciousness. While doing my pre-work for this project, I was drawn to a Critical Race Theory and the qualitative methods that support this framework, defined by Solorzano and Yosso (2002). Critical race methodology uses a variety of methods including storytelling, family histories, biographies, narratives, and testimonies to learn and explain People of Color's experiences. This methodology is grounded in the following: (a) race and racism is center to all aspects of the research process; (b) challenges traditional research paradigms and theories that have been used in the past to describe People of Color's lived experiences; (c) provides a liberatory response to oppression such as racism, genderism, classism; and (d) focuses on People of Color's racialized, gendered, and classed experiences.

The critical race methodology is centered on the notion that race and racism intersect with other forms of oppression and subordination such as classism, sexism, and religious oppression that affect people of color's lived experiences Using CRM challenges the dominant ideology, White Privilege, and deficit-based research approaches (ASHE Higher Ed Report, 2015, p. 35).

The critical race methodology framework and methodology resonates with my past experience of the day I sat in the IPV support group and heard the lived experiences of the women while sitting together in a circle. Through hearing their stories alone, I was moved to

further examine how race, racism, and other forms of oppression tie together and create the soil for women of color to be trapped in violent relationships.

In this research study, themes emerge that include each participant's racial, social, and gender identities. Since I am a white woman, and because the dominant narratives in current research are that of whiteness, I am an outsider to many of the complex issues such as experienced race, racism, and power. Therefore, I rely on the research of others who have laid the foundation for exploration into how identity and systems of oppression and power play a significant part in the lives of women who experience IPV. I rely on Freirian Feminism, or also known as Critical Race Feminism, which seeks for the liberation of oppressed women.

Freire's Critical Pedagogy, also known as Critical Race Theory (CRT), is the foundation of Critical Race Feminism (CRF). Both theories come from "a collection of activist and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 2). Critical Race Feminism places "women of color in the center, rather than in the margins, of the research, discussion, debate, contemplation, reflection, theorizing, and praxis as ...co-exist in dominant culture. It also utilizes narratives, or storytelling as counterstories to the master narrative, the dominant discourse (Berry, 2010, p. 23).

Additionally, this study is also tied to Crenshaw's Intersectionality theory. Intersectionality theory understands that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity (Crenshaw, 1993). While all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are differentially oppressed by the varied intersections in their lives, depending on how they are situated within the simultaneous, interlocking social structures of race, class, and gender, for example. Intersectionality helps explain the complexity

of the lives of each woman that is interviewed in this research project, and to help identify the themes that emerge from the women who are interviewed.

Methodology

I have had numerous women share their stories with me while sitting in my office, giving context about their family and children in the school where I serve. Since I have endured my own experience with IPV, on many occasions, I have had the opportunity to share my own experiences, which has built a strong solidarity with many of the women, despite our racial, cultural, and class differences.

While preparing for this study and identifying the women I would interview, the Aspire Public Schools Human Resources department advised me to not work with anyone currently in my school community. Thus, I relied on the strong and trusting relationships that I had built with many people over the four years that I have been in the community. I was able to network and reach five women by phone and in person. These women are no longer in the school, and they have remained in contact with me. I approached each person with the opportunity to share her story of Intimate Partner Violence and asked each woman to consider participating. After reviewing the requisite research overview documents approved by the Institutional Review Board, each woman agreed wholeheartedly to share their story. The participants all chose to use a pseudo name in order to keep their identity hidden and confidential throughout the project. This chapter is my presentation of findings. These sections present the themes that from within my findings.

Careful planning went into the methods used while engaging with the participants. It was my intention to create a comfortable, positive environment in order to create an environment where the participants felt comfortable to share their stories of Intimate Partner Violence.

Careful planning of the setting of the interviews, the timeline, and other logistics are all important components to this study, and yet there always is the possibility that limitations and unforeseen circumstances which can alter the interview with the participants because sharing memories of IPV can be difficult and can bring up memories that are painful to speak about, thus altering the duration of the interview or the questions that are asked.

Timeline & Setting

Research interviews began on April 1, 2018 and were completed by April 15, 2018. Each interview took between one and three hours. The compilation of the narratives was completed by April 25, 2018, and the data analysis and write up was complete by June 15, 2018.

My research took place in several settings throughout the Sacramento area due to the logistics of living and working in the area. I conducted the interviews in locations that were chosen by the women. The goal was to conduct the interviews in a location that ensured the women felt at ease while sharing their stories. The women's stories were recorded over the span of three separate interviews.

The first interview session established trust between the participant and myself as the researcher. I provided each woman with an overview of the project, including the purpose and goals prior to engaging in the interviews. I then asked questions to get to know the participants better. I used this opportunity to briefly share my own personal story of IPV and how it connects to the current research project. My personal storytelling was an attempt to establish trust and continue to build a deeper relationship between the participant and myself.

The second interview session consisted of the researcher asking specific questions. These questions were provided to each participant prior to meeting a second time so that she had time to prepare for the interview. Some of these questions included inquiries about her family

and childhood, upbringing, when she met her abuser, when and how the abuse began, and how she escaped (if applicable) from the relationship. The questions helped guide the participant in sharing her lived experiences of IPV and other significant factors that contributed to her lived experiences. Data was collected via note taking.

The third session was a wrap-up session that allowed the participant to add or omit elements of her story. The women were also provided an opportunity to ask questions, and/or debrief their experience of sharing their stories.

This study was designed to contribute to the existing, but limited work on how Intimate Partner Violence affects women from diverse backgrounds, and to explore forms of systemic oppression that contribute to their experiences. The project presents the personal testimonies, through qualitative interviews, of six women who currently reside in the Sacramento area and who have endured Intimate Partner Violence at some point in their lives.

My research consists of qualitative interviews, using Critical Race Theory as the framework to gain a thorough understanding of each woman's unique and complex experiences with intimate partner violence. Furthermore, I incorporate Crenshaw's conceptual framework on Intersectionality to help make sense of the complexities of a woman's experiences with IPV and in relation to other oppressive factors in their lives. I strategically chose to use personal testimonies of six women in order to further explore the relationship between Intimate Partner Violence and other significant and complex experiences, including systemic oppression. By mapping the commonalities and themes of these stories, I am able to distinguish significant factors and complex intersections which contribute to women who not only endure Intimate Partner Violence but can include other various patterns of oppression.

The methodology of this research is both feminist and qualitative. Five women, all whom identify themselves in various ways, volunteered to share their lived experience of IPV with me. All of them are either acquaintances of mine or they are close friends, and each has openly shared their stories with me as trust was formed. I had developed trust and friendships with the women, since over the past several years they had all initially shared their IPV experiences with me, and I had shared my experiences with them. When I made the decision to focus on this research study, I approached the five women with the opportunity to re-share their story to be a part of this research. All participants willingly chose to share their experiences.

I also have included my own personal story of IPV survival as the sixth narrative included in this study. I chose to be a part of this study as a way of documenting my own experience and survival from IPV, to stand in solidarity with other women survivors, and to document how my experiences with IPV as a white, middle class woman bears dissimilarities, and therefore, attempt to illuminate systemic barriers for women of color in intimate partner violence relationships. I do not claim to be an insider on these complex topics. I humbly acknowledge that while I do not understand many of these complex issues of systemic oppression based on one's identity, I hope continue to shed light on such things so that further research can be done in efforts to eradicate IPV for all women.

Participants have been identified with a pseudonym of their choosing, and these pseudonyms shed light on the strong and tenacious spirit of each of the women. I asked each participant if they wanted to use their names or a pseudo name. Each of the five women chose to have a pseudo name and all chose the name they wished to use, based on the meaning the name represented. Edrei (strong and powerful), Maliha (beauty and strength), Elda (warrior), Tesha

(survivor), and Delmira (noble protector) graciously told their stories and allowed me to learn from their experiences. These women ranged from 25-46 years of age.

Once the women committed to participate in this research project, I coordinated and scheduled two interview block times of 2 hours for each woman. These two sessions provided adequate opportunity for the women to share her narrative in a safe, comfortable, and calm environment of her choosing, while a relationship of trust and solidarity was established over time. The women were given a choice of their preferred interview setting and they chose to conduct the interviews in their homes.

I transcribed the stories of each woman into narrative form. Once the testimonies were compiled, the stories were coded for themes in an effort to arrive at possible findings.

I found it imperative to analyze the stories by mapping commonalities in the lives of the women. The purpose therefore was to distinguish patterns of Intersectionality and oppression that perpetuate Intimate Partner Violence and other forms of abuse in their lives.

Limitations to the Study

My research was limited in three ways: the stories of the six women are unique to them and do not claim to explain speak for the other millions of women who experience IPV; my own personal limitations as well as insight into IPV based on my identity and background; and future research limitations of IPV based on the researchers identities and experiences.

Additionally, my research does not claim or strive for generalizability, but rather offers in-depth, qualitative insight, through narrative, in order to maintain the rich complexity of women's lives. My research looks at the lives of six women, yet, millions of women silently cry out for the opportunity to share their experiences. Yet, the deep structural oppression of women goes beyond Intimate Partner Violence, and continues to run rampant in our society. The

oppression of women deserves rigorous exploration and further research to find the core causes of the many forms of oppression that systemically push women into the margins of society. These issues require urgent research that includes the analysis of structural oppression and how it perpetuates victimization among many women.

Furthermore, every woman's survival story is different in some manner, due to the complexities and intersectional experiences of a woman's life, as well as her personal and cultural definitions and understanding of violence and abuse. While these stories may have common elements and themes, each vary from the others. Every violence experience differs from one woman to the next, and I must continually be conscientious of my own positionality and not generalize or categorize women based on race, class, or status. However, I recognize that my own identity as a white woman informs my research, and yet I also have experienced many forms of oppression in my own life, which has allowed me to be an insider on the issue of IPV on a few levels. Yet, I am still a white woman that has not experienced forms of oppression such as race, culture, or socio-economic disparities. Therefore, by engaging in this research using a critical race perspective, I can continue to interrogate my own racial conceptualizations and how they continue to frame my research of women and IPV.

As a researcher, my position and social identities influence my research, and therefore I must be cognizant of those factors while working with the participants and analyzing the data. "The scholar's position indicates the influences of the scholars social identities on the research process and aids the audience in understanding how the scholar's position and identities influence the research process" (ASHE Higher Ed Report, 2015, p. 38). Therefore, the subsequent research of this study will be explored with a critical lens to the role that race and ethnicity plays, especially as a researcher who identifies as White and who explores the

testimonies of women of color. I am deliberate in being critical of the role of identity in exploring testimonies. Additionally, I thoughtfully approach this because I do not want to paint a picture that the people in communities are in any way inferior, and further perpetuate oppression and the hegemonic mindset of white superiority to other races and cultures.

Not only is it imperative that I keep critical race theory as the foundation to this research study, it is also essential that future researchers maintain CRT at the center of their work we continue this important work of researching IPV. Using critical race theory as the anchor will allow the researcher to be aware of their own race, background, identity, and limitations in drawing on the notion that every woman lives complex a life, each with variations and experiences of abuse, and each with complexities, which can include race and identity at the core. Using critical race theory is essential for researchers to find effective strategies to reach all women and eradicate violence against women in our society.

Significance to the Field

My hope is that this research and the compilation of the lived experiences of these six women will continue to inform future academic inquiry about Intimate Partner Violence and the mistreatment of women in our society. Specifically, this research also should stimulate community members to consider and discuss such injustices against women, which can included physical, mental, verbal, psychological, financial, or sexual abuse. My hope is by using and analyzing the data collected, I can continue to inform and shape further research on Intimate Partner Violence and its impact on women. Lastly, my goal is to provide a space for women to share their experiences, and therefore, continue to expose the systemic barriers that exist for women, which can vary based on the complexities of their lives, but can include their racial identity, unique cultural norms, childhood experiences, and religious upbringing.

Definitions

The definitions of terms referring to violence against women require serious and careful consideration. The definitions are critical to every aspect of understanding the phenomenon of violence against women. They serve as the cornerstone of measurement instruments and methods that are used to establish the prevalence and breadth of the problem. A main problem with respect to current definitions is that they may not be appropriately broad to capture the full range of ethnic minority women's experiences (White, Yuan, Cook, & Abbey, 2012). Therefore, the definitions below are used to define violence against women; however, these definitions are emerging as scholarly researchers are paying closer attention to the differences in the practices of violence, depending on the culture of the woman. This diversity of cultural backgrounds shapes how women understand, describe, and report their experiences with violence. Each of these definitions are included below.

Violence Against Women - the United Nations 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, which later would be used to construct CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) outlines the definition to be:

The term violence against women means any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. (The United Nations, 1995)

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) - sexually, psychologically, and physically coercive acts used against an intimate partner (Department of Reproductive Health and Research, World Health Organization, 2013)

Gender-based Violence (GBV) - defined by the UN Declaration of Elimination of Violence Against Women (1994), "is the act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of

such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (p.3).

“It is sometimes called gender-based violence as it is both maintained by, and in turn perpetuates, gender inequality that puts women and girls in subordinate positions. This violence has many devastating consequences for women’s lives and their health, including their sexual and reproductive health, and their human rights” (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005, p. 144).

Domestic Violence - the term Domestic Violence has been defined by many different people and organizations. For the sake of this research, I will use the definition as defined by The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (1995), which states, “Domestic Violence is considered to be any act that has the intention or is perceived as having the intention to cause physical and/or emotional injury, not accidental” (acog.org).

The US Department Office of Violence Against Women expands on the definition of domestic violence more specifically as, “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone” (2018, <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence#Resources>).

Coercive Control - a term coined by Evan Stark to describe the systematic and extensive control of a women’s everyday life that deprives her of their human rights and constitutional liberty. This can include the tactics of using intimidation, isolation, and control over the woman. (Cowan, 2011)

Counterstories - central to learning about People of Color's lived experiences, these stories are a way for those whose experiences are not often shared to have the told and heard. They deconstruct the master narrative and offer alternatives to the dominant discourse, while providing a means for understanding socially constructed and cultural identities. They give "voice" to People of Color's lived experiences and are a "tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 24).

Narrative - Merriam-Webster defines narrative as "a spoken or written account of connected events; a story" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2013). Also referred to as a "lived experience", "storytelling", "testimonios", or "dialogue", or "personal history".

Rebirth Story Line - coined by literary critic Christopher Booker (2004), it is a story telling genre that emphasizes on a state of imprisonment and sleep state, from which the protagonist is liberated in the story climax

Intersectionality theory - Kimberlé Crenshaw, law professor and social theorist, first coined the term Intersectionality in her 1989 paper "Demarginalizing The Intersection Of Race And Sex: A Black Feminist Critique Of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory And Antiracist Politics" (1989)

People of color (communities of color) - This term refers to nonwhite, non-Anglo ethnic minorities who historically have been the victims of discrimination by the dominant majority group. The concept is inclusive of all people whose skin color or other physical features are not commonly perceived as white. The term specifically includes African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans and other Latino people such as Puerto Ricans and Central and South Americans. The term "people of color" is neither politically

loaded nor derogatory; in fact, it is both neutral and respectful in referring to the combination of these ethnic and racial groups (Fernandez, 2014).

Women of color - The political term “women of color” surfaced in the violence against women movement in the late seventies to unify all women experiencing multiple layers of marginalization with race and ethnicity as a common issue. On the Women of Color Network, Inc. website, they state, “the term “women of color” is intended to transcend and embrace shades of color and is intended to unite those of us with the following shared global experiences with relationship to varied Western and European-based cultures” (Women of Color Network, Inc., 2014-2019)

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Many scholars have taken on the challenge of researching Intimate Partner Violence, yet more research must be done in order to peel back the complexities of this important issue. In order to lay the groundwork for the stories of six women participants in this research, I will lay the foundation to some of the research that exists on the subject.

First, I will discuss how Intimate Partner Violence is a direct violation to the basic human rights of a woman. By laying this foundation of a woman's basic right to be free from violence, we can see that Intimate Partner Violence is a direct violation of her human rights. The literature will show that women's emancipation from oppression and violence is paramount for our society's success.

I will then build upon the notion of IPV as a human right violation and will explore the research about women in the United States who experience IPV, specifically about women who come from different cultural, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds. Women can experience IPV very differently, depending on their racial and/or socio-economic status and background. Shedding light on the complexities of IPV in relation to a woman's identity is imperative if we are to address the great needs of all women in our communities.

Next, I will explore how the intersections of a woman's identity, also known as Intersectionality, create barriers that can prevent women from seeking solace from an abusive partner. I will also discuss how there are many other forms of oppression and barriers, not just gender inequality, that can significantly impact a woman's experience and survival of IPV. Some of the factors explored include fear of law enforcement, fear of losing one's children, lack

of economic resources, one's immigration status, and language barriers. By exploring these barriers, I hope to lay the foundation for the stories told in this research.

Ultimately, it is my intention to use the previous research of other scholars to help shed light on the complexities that women can face when in a violent relationship so that the myths and misconceptions about woman in IPV relationships can be destroyed.

The Rights of Women

Intimate Partner Violence violates a woman's very basic human right to safety, equality, peace, and freedom and it has been recognized by the United Nations as a violation of human rights. The UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women calls on governments to thoroughly address all forms of violence against women and its consequences, and to implement prevention, protection, and responsive measures (Sangoi & Goshin, 2013).

Yet, in the thirty-nine years since this declaration and the CEDAW was adopted, violence against women continues at staggering rates. Violence against women continues to be one of the most widespread human rights violations as well as a public health problem in need of urgent attention. IPV perpetuates gender inequality that puts women and girls in subordinate positions (Garcia-Moreno and Stockl, 2009). The inequality and mistreatment of women has many devastating consequences, which can include physical, emotional, mental, sexual, and reproductive harm.

The preamble of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted on December 18, 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly address the fact that women's rights are human rights and must be brought into focus.

As long as the rights of women are violated, the prosperity of a country and of the family unit will be void.

Recalling that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity. (p. 1)

In a report written by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Radhika Coomaraswamy (1997) says, “Throughout a woman’s life cycle, there exist various forms of gender-based violence that manifests themselves at different stages. Most of this violence is domestic, occurring within the home, perpetrated by those to whom the woman is the closest” (p.7). This form of oppression can be the most terrifying, because the notion of “home” becomes a place of abuse and uncertainty for the woman who experiences IPV.

In addition, domestic violence is as a powerful instrument of oppression because violence against women is used to control women in the one space traditionally dominated by women, which is their home. Violence against a woman, occurring within her intimate partner relationship, takes away her power to control her domain in what has traditionally been the safe place where she can make a home, raise her children, and provide for her family. This form of oppression strikes at the core of a woman and her ability to feel safe in the place which is suppose to be the securest place for her and her family.

Violence against women occurs all over the world and can manifest itself in various ways. “Although the distinct social, cultural and political contexts in which domestic violence exists give rise to different forms of domestic violence, it is continuously prevalent, transgressing national borders and cultural identities” (Coomaraswamy, p. 15). Violence against women is an issue that affects women all over the world, from all cultures and contexts. With that in mind,

woman experience violence differently, and in different contexts, which mean that intervention and support will look differently for women depending on their social and cultural context. These complexities are imperative to consider while looking at the statistics of women in the United States.

IPV and Women in the United States

Vidales (2010) states that violence against white women in the U.S. has been well documented. Even though IPV is prevalent for all women around the United States, and though scholars have presented many theoretical perspectives concerning the dominant culture, few have addressed the issue of IPV with women who do not identify with the dominant white culture, who fall into the hands of abuse at a disproportionate rate.

People of color have been oppressed and silenced since the birth of the United States, and so it is not surprising then that Campbell (2016) asserts, “Racial and ethnic minority women, however, are often excluded from intimate partner violence discourse and research” (p. 65). It is not surprising then that many researchers of intimate partner violence often fail to incorporate the personal narratives and experiences of racial and ethnic minority women survivors of intimate partner violence. Though there is a lack of research and data on the women most impacted by IPV, some data reveal the disproportionate rates of abuse that continues to occur.

A report written by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2014 shows that woman of color die at the hands of their abuser far more than white women. Additionally, women who identify as African-American and native/indigenous experience the highest rates of homicides among all women in the United States, and an intimate partner committed over half of those homicides. The study also shows that homicides occur in women of all ages and among all

racess/ethnicities by their intimate partners, but young, women of color are disproportionately affected by Intimate Partner Violence (Petrosky et al., 2017, p. 1).

Women who identify as indigenous and/or as Native American in the U.S. are another example of a community that deserves focus and further research. According to the Southwest Center for Law and Policy, Native American women are victims of rape or sexual assault at more than double the rate of other racial groups. The National Violence Against Women Survey, 37% of women is victimized by IPV, which is a higher rate than other women of other racial and ethnic populations (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Exact rates are difficult to estimate due to underreporting, however, researchers agree that Intimate Partner Violence among native women is more widespread than any other racially defined group in the United States.

The continued oppression of Native women is evident by the lack of attention and research that is conducted and available to this point. Native women's IPV experiences are highly misrepresented in current research (Burnette, 2015, p. 532), and yet the demand for such research is evident.

Native women have suffered oppression and violence since white colonizers came to the US hundreds of years ago. Scholars suggest that violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women directly relates to historical victimization. According to proponents of this idea, domination and oppression of native peoples increased both economic deficit and dependency because of the denial of tribal rights and sovereignty. Consequently, the American Indian and Alaska Natives of today are believed to suffer from internalized oppression and the normalization of violence, which can contribute to the perpetuation of violence in intimate relationships (Burbar, R., & Thurman, P.J., 2004).

The long lasting effects of the oppression they have suffered continue to play out in their daily lives, including the lack of attention from researchers on the topic of IPV in their native communities. The lack of research on IPV in Native communities means lack of intervention and support for Native women, which perpetuates the cycle of thousands continuing to suffer violence in silence.

African American women also suffer violence from family members at rates higher than other racial groups in the United States. African American females experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). The National Family Victim Survey found that married African American women were 2.36 times as likely as married White women to experience severe partner violence (Al'Uqdah, Maxwell, & Hill, 2016, p. 878).

Murphy (1993) claims that there is indeed a direct correlation between the high rate of IPV and racial disparities in the US, specifically with African-American women.

Since 1959, there has been little change in the percentage of African-Americans living in poverty and while some middle class African-Americans prospered in the 1970-1980's, the black-white income gap has widened over the last 15 years. The rate of impoverishment for households headed by African-American women is even greater. Further, the health and life-expectancy of African-Americans is 4-6 years shorter than that of white Americans, and the African-American infant mortality rate, which is substantially higher than the rate at which white infants die, continues to rise at an alarming rate. The question is then, how do these disparities contribute to the prevalence of victimization of African-American women in the context of Domestic Violence? (p. 1250)

Despite tremendous efforts by social activists, the oppression of African-American women continues to this day today, long past the times of slavery, past the civil war, past the turn of the 19th and 20th century, past the great depression, past the civil rights movement, past the 70's and 80's, and continues into our present day. The intersection of race and racism, social inequities, class discrepancies, and other intersectional factors contribute to the fact that African

American women continue today to be at high risk of continued victimization, which is evident in the statistics stated above that African American women are 35% more likely than white women to experience IPV (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

Native/Indigenous and African American women are not the only ones who experience IPV. Latina/Chicana women in the United States are also among those who suffer IPV at much higher rates than White women. In 2002, The Texas Council on Family Violence conducted a survey to determine the prevalence of IPV among the Latino communities. In this particular study, 77% of all Latino/Latina Texans indicated that they, a family member and/or a friend have experienced some form of Intimate Partner Violence. According to this survey, approximately 5.2 million Latina/Chicana Texans are personally affected by abuse from their partner. Of these families, 64% indicate that they or a member of their family have experienced at least one form of domestic violence in their lifetime (Texas Council on Family Violence, 2002).

The severity of IPV increases significantly for Latina/Chicana women who immigrate to the United States and their current immigration status. Some women who do not have legal immigration documentation can suffer in deafening silence because they do not know that they have access to resources needed to escape their violent relationship. Many undocumented women carry tremendous fear that they can be deported and possibly be separated from their family. Additionally some men who engage in violence against their partner use their partner's immigration status as a way to entrap, threaten, and manipulate the woman to stay with him. Each of these factors adds to their disadvantage and entraps them further in situations of intimate violence (Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000).

While discussing Latina women, it is imperative to consider the cultural and ethnic differences among Latina subgroups. Latina women have different experiences and they

experience IPV differently, depending on their cultural background. Each subgroup has its own unique and complex contexts, and women from these Latin countries have their experiences and identities. Additionally, there are significant differences in the statistics of Latina women who come from different Latin countries. For example, statistics indicate that women from Cuba have significantly lower incidents of IPV, while rates are highest for Puerto Rican (Campbell, 2016, p. 68). Researchers are still exploring the nuance as to why the statistics differ. Yet, due to the significant differences in different cultural contexts in different Latin countries, Latina women cannot be put into a “one size fits all” box. Instead, it is important that we plan support and intervention with each woman’s own background and identity as the foremost important factor.

Additionally, this same caution of “one size fits all” mentality needs to be considered when discussing women who identify themselves from countries in the Asian continent and are impacted by IPV. When referring to women from Asia, the identification is broad, and can lose the vast degree of unique cultural backgrounds, histories, and cultures, such as Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, Thai, and Hmong. There is a need to dive deeper into the complexities of the cultures and honor the unique intersections of women from various Asian cultures.

There is some research being done to differentiate the impacts of IPV among women from various Asian cultures. One of the leading researchers on Asian women and IPV is Project AWARE (Asian Women Advocating Respect and Empowerment) in Washington, DC. In 2012-2013, they conducted an anonymous survey to examine the occurrences of abuse among Asian and Pacific Islander women. The survey included a sample of 178 Asian women, varying from different Asian ethnicities, including from China, India, Iraq, Japan, Pakistan, Philippines,

Thailand, and Vietnam. The study found that emotional and psychological abuse were the leading forms of abuse. It was reported that 81.1% of all the women reported experiences some sort of IPV within that year. Of the 23 women who reported not having experienced intimate partner violence themselves, 76% said they knew of an Asian friend who had experienced intimate partner violence (McDonnell & Abdulla, 2012).

Some research has been done that indicates that women of particular Asian cultures experience higher rates of IPV than others. One study indicates that Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, and Cambodian women in the United States experience higher rates of IPV than other Asian ethnicities. While it is not know the exact cause of they these communities experiencing IPV at higher rates than others, some possible factors that have impacted certain Asian communities more than others may include the lasting affects of colonization, war, familial trauma from genocide, and the psychological impacts of fleeing their country (Campbell, 2016, p. 14).

Identity and Intersectionality

Research has not always focused on women from different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. In the 1970s, as survivors of abuse began to speak up, women's shelters sprung up across the United States, and so did activists and allies who wanted to have a clearer vision of domestic violence and how it emerged within the family unit. However, the focus of this intervention to abuse was on middle class white women. Many feminist scholars have researched and presented theoretical perspectives that specifically address the dominant culture, specifically regarding the white woman and her experiences of IPV. However few, historically, have addressed the issue of violence in other racial and ethnic communities. The fact that all

other women were not considered in the formulation of such theories remains one of the main criticisms of the feminist movement.

The trend of the white feminist dominance in academia and in the early feminist movements lacked acknowledgement that women are different based on race, ethnicity, and culture. The theories associated with IPV were a good starting point to theorize about power and control over a woman, yet failed to differentiate between the diverse definitions of abuse, racial and ethnic diversity of women, and the barriers faced by women of color.

One of those theories emerged from the 70's feminist movement with a model called the "Power and Control Wheel", which originated from a small group of activists in Duluth, Minnesota. The Power & Control diagram is a tool used to understand the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which can be used to establish and maintain control over one's intimate partner (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, 2018). This model came into existence after thousands of (white) women were interviewed; their stories of abuse were heard, and common themes of male domination and control had materialized.

As a result of the stories heard, patterns emerged that power and control over women can be utilized in a number of ways, such as minimization and denial, intimidation, isolation, emotional abuse, economic abuse, use of children, threats, and assertion of male privilege over his partner. This theoretical "wheel" establishes the connections of physical and sexual violence as a way of exerting power over a woman in a traditional American, white household. Yet, because the women interviewed and considered when these theories were created were white, middle class women, the feminists that developed this model did not take into consideration the complexities of women who come from various racial, cultural, or social backgrounds.

Therefore, while this wheel can be helpful to explain IPV in vague terms, it lacks the important contexts for women of color.

Another example of single-sighted research on the dominant, white culture comes from the well-renowned feminist Myra Marx Ferree (1990), who explores gender roles and suggests that violence grows out of inequalities in a marriage relationship. She suggests that gender roles reinforce male dominance and female subordination in and out of the home. However, there is never a mention of abused women coming from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Instead, the concept of ‘woman’ was considered to be one, which many assumed referred to the white dominant, middle class woman. The white woman’s experience may be vastly different from a woman of color, and therefore, Ferree’s research is single sighted and leaves out millions of other women who may experience IPV.

Sokoloff and Dupont (2004) argue that scholars, survivors, advocates, and activists are now beginning to challenge the traditional feminist view that gender inequality is the primary factor determining domestic violence (p. 43). Though looking at domestic violence through a feminist lens provides a foundation of gender inequities and mistreatment, it can be extremely limiting in scope. A more comprehensive view of the vast issues is needed. Yllo (2005) recognizes that some have criticized and even dismissed feminist theory as being constricted and of limited utility as a theory of family violence because it lacks the scope of women from many different backgrounds and experiences (p.21). She argues that while feminist theories of violence against women have contributed to our understanding of rape, sexual harassment in the workplace, and murder, there still is a demand for theories that identify and honor the difference of women based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class, and the acknowledge the structural barriers and that continue to perpetuate IPV for millions of women.

Women are unique and beautifully complex beings, and in order to equitably research Intimate Partner Violence, the researcher must take into consideration the historical, racial, and cultural differences and distinctions among women. It is imperative to understand the dynamics of social trauma, racial oppression and mistrust, which can further complicate a women's experience with IPV (Campbell, 2016, p. 69).

The complexities of women was called out by Crenshaw (1993), who coined the paradigm of Intersectionality, and is used to conceptualize the role that race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and nativity has on a person's relationships. Crenshaw suggests that we consider both the structural and political Intersectionality of a woman. The intersection of race, class, and gender creates particular circumstances for different women.

We all exist in social contexts that are created by the intersections of systems of power, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, and of oppression, such as prejudice, class stratification, gender inequality, and heterosexist bias.

Although violence is a common issue among women, such violence usually occurs within a specific context—that often varies considerably depending on the race, class, and other social characteristics of the woman... These characteristics can be better understood and addressed through a framework that links them to broader structures of subordination which intersect sometimes in fairly predictable ways. (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 15)

Most importantly, gender inequality is altered by its intersection with other systems of power and oppression. Therefore, when researching IPV, scholars must emphasize the structural underpinnings of abuse while not denying the existence of concrete differences among women from diverse backgrounds. “We must address how different communities' cultural experiences of violence are mediated through structural forms of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, economic exploitation, heterosexism, and the like” (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2004, p. 45). Hence, we

must continue to propel the paradigm of addressing solely the white, middle-class, U.S. experiences of IPV, to now addressing the issues of women of color.

When we limit theories of IPV to only include those women who are from the dominant white culture, we perpetuate the silencing and oppression of millions of women. Yllo (2005) suggests that a feminist theory that emphasizes only the commonality of gender erases the complexity of women's lives. Intersectionality demands that we approach IPV with caution and thoughtfulness, which includes a holistic mindset to include each woman's identity and background.

Not only do different patterns of domestic violence have different consequences for different families, Intersectionality asks us to integrate into theory and practice the simple recognition that, for many families, domestic violence is not the only or primary violence shaping family life. Intersectionality also requires that we develop theories that go beyond single-factor descriptions of domestic violence, such as gender inequality. (Bograd, M., 1999, p. 283)

While the primary feminist theory will help researchers and activists, the ultimate goal will be to "transcend the divisions between those women privileged by their association with white male power and those distanced and oppressed by it" (Yllo, 2005, p. 27). So, the intersectional approach illuminates the experiences of women of color who are experiencing IPV and provides a way to legitimize their experiences as people who have been marginalized and hidden from the dominant cultural discourses in all areas of oppression.

If our society is to address the epidemic of Intimate Partner violence, then women must be looked at as dynamic, complex, and unique, taking into consideration of their personal identities, including their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Women must receive the support they need that is tailored to their needs as they escape and heal from Intimate Partner Violence.

Significant Factors for Women in IPV Relationships

I have laid the foundation above with research regarding women in the United States and how various communities are impacted by IPV. Next, I will explore possible factors that contribute to a woman's experiences of oppression and Intimate Partner Violence.

Colonialism

Colonialism has haunted people groups for thousands of years, and has brought with it tremendous pain and suffering for those who have been overtaken. The people groups who have been colonized have their own unique histories and experiences. While everyone who is colonized experiences trauma and pain, there is a common thread throughout the web of colonialism: women have been the target for mistreatment and abuse in the process. The results of colonialism have been devastating, yet the impact on the woman in her community has been traumatic and long lasting. Freire (2000) suggests that colonial tactics, such as conquest, cultural invasion, divide and rule, and manipulation aggressive acts such as rape, and selling women as sex slaves undermined a woman's status in her community.

Hilary Weaver (2009, p. 1554) proposes that European American settlers, through colonial subjugation, brought patriarchal social arrangements in which men held status and power over women. For example, women were treated as subordinate, wives were considered their husbands property, and rape was a form of power and control over a woman (Burnette, 2015, p. 534).

Since millions of people were subjected to colonialism and oppression, cultures shifted away from honoring women as a valuable part of the community, to the notion that women were property, can be controlled, and can be used for manipulation and power plays over other men. In addition, religious leaders from colonizing countries, such as Martin Luther and Saint

Augustine, declared that husbands should beat, punish, and terrorize their wife if they committed offenses against the man (Burnette, 2015, p. 534). These beliefs about women, passed from one generation to another, have lead to many cultures believing in the notion that men are entitled to physically harm their female partner (Vidales, 2010 p.537).

Due to this shift in cultural value of women in countries around the world, passed down from generation to generation, this notion that women can believe that violence is normal or acceptable in an intimate relationship which can normalize violence and enslave a woman in her abusive relationship (Stewart et al. 2012, p.1104).

Immigration & Migration

While all women are affected by the ideologies of patriarchy in the United States, it is necessary to examine the distinct barriers that bind many women of color to remain in their violent relationship. One of those barriers is the political climate of the United States today and the treatment of immigrant and migrant women.

Migration is dramatically changing the face of countries around the world, and the United States is a leader as one of these countries dramatically impacted by this trend. “As the country grows more ethnically diverse, many localities are encountering such diversity for the first time since the Great Immigration of the early twentieth centuries” (Sokoloff & Dupont p. 785). Stewart, Gagnon, Merry, & Dennis, (2012) research suggests that much less is known about migrant women, which includes refuges, asylum seekers, and non-refugee women, who have experienced violence. Research shows that among migrants who had arrived in the US within the last two years were more vulnerable to violence, both during the migration process and after arrival (p. 1104).

Many migrant women face many difficult issues while adjusting to life in a new country because of extreme cultural differences from their home country. Yet, migrant women who experience violence in her home have even more significant barriers to safety. Migrant women are disempowered on many levels as they enter a new host country and all of its structures in place, which is due to many factors, including state and federal immigration policies and regulations (Montalbano-Phelps, 2003).

Immigrant IPV survivors are victimized in multiple ways. Vidales (2010) says, “in addition to experiencing vulnerabilities common to all victims of domestic violence, immigrant women are victimized by the larger, white, English-speaking population when they seek assistance” (p. 534). Many women experience multiple barriers to receiving support due to the legal ramifications of women who are undocumented in the United States. If an undocumented woman calls the police during a violent altercation, her partner and herself could be ultimately deported from the US. Additionally, if an undocumented women files for a restraining order and/or family law paperwork to get custody of her children, fear of deportation for both her and her partner can arise. Undocumented women may also fear losing custody of her children if she is deported.

Moreover, women immigrating to the US who have had previous exposure to violence in their home country, due to war and government brutality, are at a higher risk than other women because of their lack of trust of government workers to protect them from violence in their home:

Many immigrants arrived from previously colonized countries where police had been specifically trained to suppress the local population; after independence, these same practices of police tyranny continued, resulting in people having a distrust of these authorities. (Pearce and Sokoloff, p.787)

The social conditions to which immigrant women arrive to in the new host county plays a significant role in her life and impacts the decisions she makes once she arrives. There can be

issues for women who immigrate/migrate to the US, including isolation from friends and family, immigration laws, unwelcoming public attitudes, and lacks employment opportunities, which can intertwine together to compound and perpetuate violence toward her.

Language

Language can be a primary barrier of seeking relief for many women experiencing IPV:

Frequently, officers dispatched to domestic violence calls within Latin American neighborhoods speak only English. If the batterer/husband speaks more English than the wife, his version of the incident is more likely to be accepted on this wife's behalf. Indeed, often the Spanish-speaking Latina is literally speechless because she cannot communicate with the police officer. (Vidales, 2010, p. 539)

Many women experience difficulty accessing support and interventions due to the inability to communicate in fluent English. Language barriers, along with understanding laws and policies may also be a challenge. Many women can also lack the comprehension or awareness of policies, which can protect survivors of domestic violence (Campbell, 2016, p. 73). The lack of access of information can cause a woman to remain in her abusive relationship.

Law Enforcement

Many women of color are often hesitant to call the police because they are unwilling to subject their private lives to uncaring strangers who might aggravate the situation by discriminating against them or by using extreme force against their partners (Vidales, 2010, p.539). Also as discussed above, many women fear calling the police in fear of the legal ramifications that may have on her and/or her children due to their immigration status.

Furthermore, the role of race must be addressed among police and law officials while interacting with domestic violence victims: “the casual attitude of the police response to domestic violence complaints constitutes an obstacle to effective change, especially for women of color who disproportionality rely on the public sector for relief” (Rivera, 1994, p.244). To

adequately address the issues of law enforcement and the communities of color, an emphasis on the poor must combine with a focus on the role of race, including the racism inherent in police agencies across the nation, to address the experiences of [women] as they seek legal redress in violent situations” (Vidales, 2010, p. 544).

In Pearce & Sokoloff’s (2013) research, they found that the fear of police was mentioned in every focus group they conducted (p.799). They found that one of the primary factors is the fear incarceration, of deportation, or losing their children: “the most frequently experienced barrier was the fear of deportation or detention, which trumped all other fears—even partner violence” (p. 798). Women who are undocumented, but their children are native born, fear they will be separated from their children. In the *Shattered Families Report* written by Seth Freed Wessler (2011), it was uncovered that thousands of children were placed in the US foster care system following a parent’s detention or deportation, never to be reunited. The fears of being separated from their children and/or families keep many women silent in their abuse.

Law enforcement has long been dealing unjustly within communities of color, and these atrocities have had negative consequences such as mass incarceration of men of color, increased use of force during routine traffic stops, etc. (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

These consequences create tensions for women of color between the need for some kind of state intervention to protect them from abuse in their homes and the recognition that many of the women most in need of such protection are made more vulnerable by these very interventions. (p.55)

Pearce & Sokoloff reiterate that women of color have a lack of trust in law enforcement in their research findings in Baltimore City. They found the issue of police brutality against communities of color as a significant barrier to victims seeking help. “More broadly, American society is not a stranger to police brutality and abuse toward the native born—particularly those in lower socioeconomic classes and communities of color” (2013, p.799). The women

interviewed explained that women are taught and encouraged to not trust the police, and therefore, did not trust them to help keep them safe from their violent partner.

If a woman cannot trust law enforcement to keep her safe when she finds herself in an abusive situation or relationship, then whom can she trust?

Economic disparity

Many women of color face tremendous financial insecurity. Montalbano-Phelps (2003) suggests, based on her extensive research and interviews with domestic violence victims, that many times a victim of abuse remains silent because of financial dependence on the abuser (p.163). Many women fear not being able to support themselves, their children, and maintain financial security, and these fears are often times intensified by the abuser's controlling behavior over the woman. Often, women are isolated, unable to work outside the home, sometimes due to their immigration status, and often times do not have the educational background to develop or sustain job skills. The financial barriers can perpetuate the abuser as the sole financial provider, which can prolong the power and control the abuser wields over the woman "Without the ability to provide for them and their dependents, victims may not be able to leave their abusive partners" (p.163).

Vidales (2010) concludes that female economic instability and inequality is a significant factor in maintaining the cycle of violence. Economic structures often times disempower women, which in essence continues to victimize women. Sokoloff & Dupont (2005) writes specifically about African American women, stating that domestic violence is interrelated to low socioeconomic status: "one major underlying reason for the greater level of domestic violence among African Americans is not attributable to racial and cultural factors but to the high and extreme levels of poverty in Black communities" (p.48).

Oppression of many communities of color in the United States, hegemonic structures, and poverty cannot be ignored while analyzing violence in communities. “Thus, age, employment status, residence, poverty, social embeddedness, and isolation combine to explain the higher rates of abuse with in African American communities, not race or culture, per se” (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005, p.48). These important complexities are essential to consider while working with women who are experiencing Intimate Partner Violence.

Other potential factors to consider

Finally, there are many other issues to consider when researching and supporting women of color who are in a violent relationship. The possible issues can include lack of childcare, lack of adequate healthcare, lack of social support from friends and support providers, lack of knowledge of domestic violence, lack of access and knowledge to resources in order to protect themselves, attachment to the abuser because of their migrant experiences together, and mental-health issues, can prevent the woman from accessing help (Steward et. al, 2012; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Patricia Hill Collins (1998), a well-renown Black feminist, says that in order for antiviolence movements to be successful, participant’s beliefs of violence cannot assume that “men dominate women, whites oppress people of color, and oppressors victimize the oppressed. Violence constructed within binary logic fosters solutions to violence that rely on more violence” (p.936). Collins calls for researchers to recognize how the intersection of race and gender affect antiviolence movements in more emancipatory ways. She also calls for us to examine the possible ways in which they both experience victimization and bear some responsibility for systemic violence targeted at other groups. She contends that it is not sufficient for antiviolence movements to assume that victimization is the same among all women (p.934).

Furthermore, successful antiviolenace coalition building requires a view of violence substantiated in Intersectionality, which requires a critical self-reflection by participants regarding their own responsibility for perpetuating oppression, and empathy for the suffering that violence has manifested. She quotes:

It becomes more difficult, for example, for white women to retain moral credibility as survivors of sexual violence without simultaneously condemning the benefits that accompany racial violence enacted on their behalf. Similarly, claims by some African-American men that racial oppression is more fundamental than gender oppression sound hollow in a context of shirked responsibility for their violence against African-American women. Both cases reflect how white women and African-American men both experience victimization that can serve as a foundation for building empathy with other groups, and bear some responsibility for systemic violence targeted at other groups. (p. 934-935)

Along the same lines, Sokoloff & Dupont (2013) state that although white women and women of color share a group history of domestic and sexual violence against them by men, white women must recognize the benefits that they receive from their white skin privilege. It is only in this realization that women can truly come together in solidarity to support one another and stand up together to fight against Intimate Partner Violence.

Storytelling as a Method of Healing and Resistance

So what can be a method of healing and resistance? Arthur Bochner (2001) writes that narrating serves an important function of sense making in our lives, and therefore can be an fundamental tool while helping liberate women experiencing IPV. "The call of stories thus inspires us to find language that is adequate to the darkness and obscurity of experience. We narrate to make sense of our experiences and ourselves over the course of time" (p. 154).

Storytelling has been at the center of human existence from the beginning of time as a valued means of communicating and sharing histories. Storytelling has been a way for Black People/African Americans, Latinas/os, and Native Americans/Indigenous Peoples to share their

experiences of oppression (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Storytelling is also a way for communities of color to share their counterstories with White people to bring about enhanced or greater level of awareness to the majority culture ("ASHE Higher Ed Report," 2015, p. 37).

Delgado (1989) sees counterstorytelling is a powerful way to challenge the stories that have permeated research for hundreds of years in regards to communities of color and oppression:

Counterstorytelling is both a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told (i.e. those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse -- the majoritarian story. (p. 2411)

Storytelling has also been central to women to struggle for cultural integrity and physical survival, specifically in their intimate relationships. "Stories serve as an analogous purpose because in a male-dominated society women's ways of seeing, women's culture both in an artistic sense and in the sense of beliefs and values, are systematically erased, denied, invalidated, trivialized" (Aptheker, 1989, p. 43).

Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their truth and experience must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression (Freire, 2000, p.88). Aptheker suggests then, that by allowing women who have experienced subordination and oppression to tell their stories, we are able to gain insight into the structural oppression and subordination they may face:

We are also able to see patterns that women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labors and in the context of their subordinated status to men. If we map what we learn, connecting one meaning or invention to another, we begin to lay out a different way of seeing reality. (p. 38)

Stories can only be effective if told of the deep-rooted issues of IPV as well as the other forms of oppression such as slavery, colonialism, patriarchy, and continued segregation that a

woman has experienced. Both the storyteller and the listener can be impacted by the story of abuse. Storytelling not only does it gives the woman a voice where her voice has been previously silenced, but storytelling can empower the storyteller by allowing the narrators to move their experiences into public attention and receive understanding of others (Montalbano-Phelps, 2003).

A woman's story or testimony provides truth to her experiences of violence and abuse. "Through individual Testimonios that provide a more nuanced and robust, mixed methods approach to understanding, we are able to ground truth— a type of localized and temporal knowledge – to explicate the patterns of gender injustice" (Vélez and Solorzano 2017). Stories told by women who have experienced IPV are powerful and effective in personal healing and collective resistance to gender injustices, as well as resistance to other forms of oppression.

Under conditions of enslavement, persecution, and subordination, women have had no way of articulating, and handing on a systematic, collective, sustained way of knowing. Women's ideas, artifacts, writings, heritage have been fragmented, uprooted, interrupted by these conditions...[yet] women have always labored to give meaning to their experiences. In these ways the notion of an alternative way of seeing has been kept alive...their stories preserve the evidence that there is and always has been an alternative to the beliefs, priorities, and values of the dominant cultures we have endured. (Aptheker, 1989, p. 74)

In order for true societal change to occur in the United States in regards to the treatment of women, the narratives of all women, women from all different racial and cultural backgrounds, must be heard. No longer is it acceptable for the dominant narrative of Intimate Partner Violence to only be that of the white woman, but must include the plots and subplots of women of color. Haaken writes in her book *Hard Knocks: Domestic Violence and the Psychology of Storytelling* (2010):

As the oppressed become active agents in history, stories that sustain these efforts inevitable bring moral conflict into tales of suffering and deliverance. In moving through

these stages, women in the anti-violence movement must continue to generate narratives that foreground the sheer pervasiveness of violence against women. But if these are the modal stories that circulate, relaying as they often do on the stock script of virtuous (white) maidens and smarmy villains, too many plots and subplots [of women of color] are left behind. (p.101)

Each woman who shared her lived experiences of IPV comes to the narration table representing indisputably unique experiences: “these personal and family narratives intersect with the cultural and racial narratives and discourses which in turn shape both her identity and the meaning she constructs for her relationship and the abuse with it” (Allen, 2012, p. 113). She is located in the center of her intimate relationship of abuse, yet also located within the wider sociocultural, political, societal system. “She comes to this [narrative] encounter with her experiences of abuse, resistance, identity, and meaning constructions” (p.113).

Summary

In summary, women in the US are experiencing IPV at a staggering rate, and women of color experience it at higher rates than white women. While there are many factors and complexities to IPV, it is imperative that we consider the historical, cultural, and current barriers that exist for women of color. The complex factors of a woman’s experiences must be considered when finding safety, support, and intervention for women survivors. Storytelling then, is a way for women, specifically those who have not been a part of the dominant narratives of IPV, to share their lived experiences of violence. Storytelling can be a powerful act of solidarity for both the survivors and those supporting survivors of IPV, and as a way to change the rhetoric in the communities of color regarding IPV.

The hope is that women’s stories of IPV will help us better understand the depths and ingenuity of the struggle for meaning and survival. By telling their stories, their voices can be a means to an end, an end of unhelpful and uncritical professional interventions, such as the pure

feminist approach, that may factually further stigmatize and even endanger abused women
(Allen, 2012, p.12).

CHAPTER III RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the results and findings of the common themes among women based on the interviews I conducted with five women participants. The themes that emerge from their stories of IPV are graphed and discussed below.

My Personal Survival Story

The idea for this research was developed out of my own experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and my personal healing journey after escaping my abusive marriage of ten years. My primary research focus is an exploratory research project to study Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among women from various ethnic and racial backgrounds and with various components of identities. Before becoming a researcher of IPV, I myself experienced abuse throughout a 12-year relationship. The many forms of coercive control, violence, manipulation, and humiliation that I endured made a lasting imprint on my life and negatively affected me for many years after I had left the relationship. It has taken me years of counseling as well as solidarity with other women to experience healing and strength in my own life, because the lasting effects of IPV are profound, complex, and lasting. Still, at this moment, I would like to offer blessings, peace, and gratitude to these experiences, for without them, I would not be the woman I am today, nor would I be impassioned to conduct this important work with other IPV survivors. These difficult experiences nonetheless have allowed me to be an insider while connecting with women who have experienced similar abuses.

Upon leaving my abusive husband, I sought support through WEAVE, inc, which is a non-profit committed to empowering people who are or have experienced abuse. I enrolled in WEAVE's eighteen-week counseling group specifically for women coming out of abusive

relationships. After my initial intake interview, they placed me in a therapy group that consisted of twelve women participants. Upon arriving for my first day of therapy, I sat in a sterile room located at the Sacramento Social Services building. I looked around and noticed that I was the only white woman in the group, which initially caused me to feel shame for my own experiences and participation in therapy. I felt like I didn't deserve to be there because my privilege was so great, and my experiences, while terrible, didn't compare to the oppression and pain that the other participants had endured solely because of their race, culture, and socio-economic status. These initial feelings were a catalyst for my personal awakening to my own privilege as a white woman.

During our weekly two-hour sessions, we sat in a circle and shared our testimonies of Intimate Partner Violence, including how we ended up in the relationship, the abuse we endured, the barriers we faced when trying to escape, the impact on our children, and the deep feelings that we felt as we processed and attempted healing. While I listened to their testimonies of violence and abuse, I became acutely aware of my privilege as a white woman. It was in those moments that I awakened to the fact that there were systems of oppression at play in their lives that contributed to their unjust experiences of Intimate Partner Violence. The systemic factors included more than just gender and religious oppression like my own experience. In those moments I saw clearly how other substantial things were at play, including other forms of oppression/subordination including racism, cultural bias, and classism. The participant's stories revealed common themes the women experienced, every woman except myself. The themes included poverty, racial profiling from outside agencies, and extreme fear of law enforcement, undocumented immigration status, lack of financial resources, barriers to health care, CPS involvement, incarceration, and lack of family support.

Since that experience ten years ago, I continued my education and became a school administrator and I have continued to work in the educational settings in the Sacramento area. Although I am in education, Intimate Partner Violence continues to surface all around me in the community that I serve, and common themes of systemic oppression intersecting with Intimate Partner Violence continues to glare at me. I see how systemic racial inequities, class, poverty, and many other inequities in our society continue to permeate the daily lives of our community members. I also see how these things cause deep barriers for women who are experiencing violence in their relationship.

It is imperative however to recognize that I am still an outsider on so many levels of this issue. I was first made aware of this fact while I attended an eighteen-week Intimate Partner Violence survivor support group with WEAVE, Inc. in Sacramento, California. I was one of twelve women attending the group, and I was the only woman in attendance that identified as a white woman. It was at that time that I grew in my understanding of the deep impact that intimate partner violence can have on women in general. I also began to see the impactful and complicated layers of intersections of race, class, status, and other factors that contribute to tremendous oppressive barriers that affect women's journey from IPV and healing. Through listening to the testimonies of the participants, I realized that I had little understanding of Intimate Partner Violence and its effects on women in my community outside of my own personal experiences. I also recognized that there are many complex societal barriers that millions of women experience simultaneously with Intimate Partner Violence because of their identities, including but not limited to race, class, gender, and status. Yet, despite my lack of personal experience with many of the above societal barriers based on my own identity, I firmly believe that it is my duty to continue the research in this complex area of study of Intimate

Partner Violence as a way to stand in solidarity with women in my community and to further the work in effort to eradicate this societal epidemic.

While in the role of a school Principal, dozens of women have shared with me their personal experiences of Intimate Partner Violence. When given the opportunity to conduct this study, I was moved to action to give former school community members the platform to share their testimonies with the world around them as a way to continue to shed light on how Intimate Partner Violence is infecting the lives of so many women. More specifically, this study's purpose is to continue to illuminate the barriers and inequities that women of color face while enduring Intimate Partner Violence.

I am not an expert on these matters however. I have not experienced many of these oppressive inequities, which is because of my racial identity as white and I have grown up in the middle class. Therefore, my role in this project is merely a facilitator, while the five other women who generously share their stories are the experts of their own personal experiences. They are an example to the world of beauty, strength, resilience, courage, and grit.

Findings

I had the privilege of spending time with five women, who all graciously shared their testimonies with me. I spent several hours with the participants, in various settings, getting to know each of them and building trust with one another.

Table 1 below gives an overview of the women who participated. Each participant self-identified their race/ethnicity, and each participant selected their own pseudo name.

Table 1		
<i>Participants Table</i>		
Pseudo name	Age	Race/Ethnicity Identity
	40	African

Edrei		American
Delmira	34	Italian
Maliha	26	Mexican/White
Elda	37	African American
Tesha	26	Mexican
Jamie	41	White

Edrei

The first participant is a woman who identifies as African American, and her pseudo name is Edrei. She is a single mom of five children, including three biological children and two adopted children. She has three grandkids from her oldest daughter. She has worked in the food serving industry for many years, and hopes to go back to school eventually and open a non-profit organization in the Sacramento area. She has been single for the past nine years, since she divorced her abusive husband.

Delmira

The second participant is known as Delmira, and she identifies as Italian. Her parents emigrated from Italy and she identifies as a first generation Californian. She has a son and has worked in a doctor’s office for fifteen years as a medical records filer. She divorced her abuser 12 years ago and is now remarried.

Maliha

The third participant, known as Maliha, identifies as mixed: half white and half Mexican. Her father is an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, and her mother is a native of Sacramento. She is currently in a marriage where Intimate Partner Violence is a part of their relationship. She has three young children. Her husband and his family are prominent members

of a Sacramento gang. She agreed to tell her story as long as her identity was hidden and parts of her story were left out so that she could not be identified.

Elda

The fourth participant is known as Elda, and she identifies as African American. She is a mother of three and is in the process of finalizing her divorce from her abusive husband. She is currently in graduate school herself to be a credentialed teacher and hopes to have her own classroom next year. She is focused on her career and her children.

Tesha

The fifth participant chose the pseudo name of Tesha and she identifies as Mexican American. She is a mother of two sons and is still married to the man who abuses her. She came to the United States eight years ago and she does not currently have US citizenship. She works full-time for a local family as a cook/housekeeper.

Jamie

The sixth participant is myself, and I am using my given name in this research study. I identify as a white, middle class woman. I am a mother of three boys, two of whom are twin boys from my first marriage, and the other boy is my stepson. I divorced my abusive husband ten years ago and I remarried two years ago. I felt that it was important to include my own testimony of Intimate Partner Violence and to include it in the analysis of commonalities and/or differences between the women.

Common Themes Identified

The lived experiences of the women in this study reveal how their lives intersect with systems of power, including racial inequality, class stratification, and gender inequality. These systems of power are played out in many different ways in the women's lives. While each

woman came from diverse backgrounds and had vastly different experience that lead to their abuse, they shared similar themes in their lives.

Common themes were noted and mapped as they emerged during the women sharing their testimonies (see Table 2 & 3). The highlighted themes on both Table 2 and Table 3 indicate that four or more of the women shared a similar experience. I present my findings from this research within each of these themes of lack of family support for various reasons, including strong religious messages of heterosexism, incarceration of the partner, the involvement of Child Protective Services, a strong fear of law enforcement, employment, poverty income, education, teenage pregnancy, experience of sexual abuse and/or rape prior to meeting partner, and a prevalence of drugs and alcohol by their partner during the relationship. Additionally, I will highlight one or more stories from each section that shows the impact that the factor has on the woman and how it plays a part in her experiences.

Table 2								
<i>Significant Factors that can contribute to IPV</i>								
Pseudo Name	Possible Significant Factors							
	Lack of Family support	Religious upbringing	Incarceration of partner	Undocu-mented	CPS involvement	Language barriers	Gang affiliation	Fear of law enforcement
Edrei		X	X		X			X
Delmira	X	X	X					
Maliha	X	X	X		X		X	X
Elda	X	X	X		X		X	X
Tesha	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jamie		X	X					
Total number of factors	4	6	6	1	4	1	3	4

Table 2 cont.										
<i>Significant Factors that can contribute to IPV</i>										
Pseudo Name	Possible Significant Factors									
	Unemployed or lacked access to \$ during IPV	High School Graduate	College Graduate	Poverty income	Sexually abused as a child	Physically abused as a child	Teenage pregnancy	Ran Away	Raped	Drugs & Alcohol use of partner
Edrei		X		X	X		X	X	X	X
Delmira	X	X						X	X	

Maliha	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Elda	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
Tesha	X	X		X	X		X		X	X
Jamie	X	X	X							X
Total number of factors	5	5	1	4	4	2	4	3	4	6

Gender Inequality

The mistreatment of women and girls has been an epidemic for thousands of years. While we have made great progress in our county to provide laws that protect women from inequalities, many practices and mindsets about women permeate. The continued mistreatment and inequalities towards women were evident as I interviewed the participants in this study.

Sexual Abuse and Rape

When Elda was seven years old, her uncle sexually abused her. She remembers the moment the abuse began as if it happened yesterday. She told the story of her family having a birthday party for her cousin. Many family members came into town and were staying for the weekend. She remembers the birthday party with fondness, with lots of playtime with her cousins and delicious food that she helped her mother and auntie prepare. Those fond memories were tainted by the event that took place that night when her uncle snuck into her room and touched her body. She shared the feelings of extreme fear and confusion, especially when he told her that she couldn't tell anyone or else she would be in big trouble. From that moment on, her uncle would visit the family regularly. The sexual abuse continued every time he visited Elda's family, which became frequent. The abuse didn't stop until Elda was fifteen years old when her uncle was incarcerated for robbery.

Elda shared that because of the sexual abuse her uncle had inflicted, she carried a strong sense of shame and guilt. She accepted a strong belief that she was unworthy to have a man that treated her with love and respect because she felt “dirty”.

Elda isn't the only one that shared of her abuse. Three of the other women in this study acknowledged that they had been sexually abused as a child. Two of the women shared they had been detrimentally impacted by the abuse in profound ways. They both felt that their self-esteem was destroyed when they were abused at such young ages. Delmira shared that she grasped for love from men wherever they could find it in attempts to make her feel loved and valued. Maliha shared that the sexual abuse chipped away at her soul and she believed that she was incapable of having a good relationship with someone because she was damaged.

In addition to sexual abuse, four out of the six women exposed that they had been raped either prior to being with their partner, or have been raped by their partner. Tesha shared that her abusive husband has forced her to have sex on multiple occasions, which she believes has caused her to be resentful, depressed, and angry towards him. Elda revealed that prior to being with her partner, she was date raped by an older boy she dated from her neighborhood. Maliha shared that a gang member had raped her at a young age. Additionally, while with my abusive husband, I also was forced to have sex on multiple occasions, and was told that this was my “wifely duty” to comply whenever he needed/wanted sex.

Lack of Family Support

Edrei told me of a time when her husband had hit her and threw her out of the house without shoes on her feet and without any money. All she had with her was her cell phone. She called her dad and told him what happened and he said he would come to the house to see what happened. When he got there, he told her to get in the car with him. When she sat down

on the seat, he told her that he loved her very much and that she will always be his girl. He told her that family is the most important thing in the world, and she needed to “not be so stubborn, but go back in there and make things right with him. Tell him you are sorry and that you will do better. You don’t want to break up your family over something so small, do you Edrei?” Her eyes filled up with tears when she shared this story with me. She told of the deep love she has for her family, but disappointed that they didn’t do more to protect her during those times of abuse.

I acutely connect with Edrei’s story and the lack of support from her father because I also lacked the supported need to escape the abuse for many years. As I shared previously, I come from a family that loves and cares for me, but it took me seven years into my marriage to share with them about the abuse I was enduring. I chose not to tell them for those many years because I felt that they wouldn’t agree with a decision to leave him because of their religious beliefs about divorce. Surprisingly, after a violent fight I had with my husband while on vacation in Wisconsin, my parents helped me escape back to California, and I moved into their home in the Bay Area. I will never forget my dad walking down the stairs every morning, looking at me with a solemn look, and say, “Poor Casey. I know he must be hurting right now and I feel so bad for him. I think you need to give him one more chance”. These discussions continued daily, and after living with my parents for three months, my dad and my father in law met to discuss the situation. They sat me down in my parent’s kitchen to inform me they made the decision that I had to go back to Casey based on the Bible’s laws about marriage and divorce. A week later, I moved back to my house with my husband and stayed with him for three more years.

This pattern of lack of family support was shared by four of the six women in this study. While many of the women shared they had/have families that love them, four women felt they

lacked family support before or during their relationship with their abuser. Tesha share that she has no family support because her family lives in Mexico and is unable to come to the United States due to immigration status issues. She is not able to visit them in Mexico for the same reasons. Edrei on the other hand has a loving family who lives in the area, but because her father was a prominent minister in the community at the time, her parents distanced themselves from “the drama”. Maliha on the other hand grew up in the foster system from the age of 10 and currently does not have family that would support her in any way, specifically to help her escape her abuser. At the time of Elda’s abuse, she had a mother that lived in the area, but her mother was unable to financially support Elda’s escape from her abuser.

Religious upbringing

Every participant grew up in a home where strong religious beliefs were taught and practiced. As I shared above, Edrei and I have fathers who were full-time Protestant ministers at local churches at the time of our relationships. We both grew up reading the Bible and were explicitly taught that women are to behave submissively to their husbands at all times. We were also taught from the Bible that women are to stay in a relationship at all costs, unless of course our husband cheats on us, and then we had the right to divorce. Delmira, Maliha and Tesha grew up in homes where Catholicism was practiced, but they were not taught about gender and relationship roles based on biblical teachings. Elda’s mother taught her about faith and trusting God to help her through hard times, but did not use the Bible to teach her about gender roles.

One strong theme for all participants is that they were explicitly taught that God demanded for them to remain celibate until they were married. This particular theological framework was a catalyst for some of the women to remain in their relationship despite initial signs of abuse because they were engaging in a sexual relationship. Despite early signs of abuse,

Edrei's father insisted she marry her partner after she got pregnant when she was just sixteen. My parents discovered that my boyfriend and I were engaging in sexual intercourse and encouraged us to marry quickly, before I became pregnant or before someone would learn about our "sin".

Another Christian norm that was taught to all six women is the notion that divorce is a sin and is unacceptable. There is a strong stigma around divorce for all six women, which can include alienation from their community and from family members, shame messages told to the women, and the concept that God would be disappointed in us as women if we left our husband.

My experience growing up in a deeply religious household played a profound role in how I processed my abusive relationship. I grew up as a pastor's daughter, with parents that loved and cared for me deeply. While I am grateful for this love, I was detrimentally taught from a young age that women were subservient to a man/husband. I was explicitly taught how a wife should behave, and I observed this daily by the way my mother was treated and how she lived her life. The notion of subservience came from the strong religious beliefs that my parents held sacred. The Bible was their guide to life, and they used verses to teach us how women should behave, such as "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22).

The Bible also declares:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7, The New King James Version)

The religious framework I grew up with contributed to my own partner choice when I was just twenty-one years old. From our first date together, he demanded my allegiance and submission, which ultimately kept me with him for twelve years.

Racial Inequality

The testimonies of the participants in this study sheds light to the fact that racial inequality in our country plays a significant impact on a woman's experiences in her relationships with men.

Incarceration

Maliha has watched her husband come and go from prison many times in their relationship. The last time he was incarcerated was two years ago, serving time for a conviction of drug charges and domestic battery. Maliha shared her story that led up to this conviction.

My husband is a great dad, he loves us a lot, but sometimes he gets really mad. When he does drugs, that's when it gets really bad. What happened was...one day we got in a fight about money. We were really broke, but that day I asked him for money for diapers because I knew he had just been paid from a job. What I didn't know is that he relapsed and spent our money on crank. When he told me, I was really mad, really mad. He was so high, and the minute I raised my voice at him, he beat the shit out of me. I was scared because I have never seen him like that. There was a weird look in his eyes and I thought he could maybe kill me. At one point he walked into the bathroom, I think he hurt his hand hitting me...so I quietly dragged myself to my cellphone and called the police. When they arrived, they took a look at my face and arrested him. I was taken to the hospital and it took me a few weeks to recover. My face was fucked up. I got a restraining order and he was in prison for nine months. I swore I wouldn't go back to him, but here we are. He still feels bad for what happened.

The six women in this study have/had partners that have been incarcerated at some point during their relationships. Both Tesha and Maliha's husbands have been incarcerated for gang-affiliated crimes, and are currently on probation. Maliha's husband has also been incarcerated for the violence he has inflicted upon her, as the story above reveals. Both Elda and Edrei's previous partners have been incarcerated numerous times, and both men are currently incarcerated for events that took place after their marriages dissolved. Delmira's ex-husband has also been incarcerated three times for drug and alcohol related incidents. My ex-husband was incarcerated prior to our relationship for assault with a deadly weapon and armed

robbery. He also served time shortly after our marriage ended for possession of a deadly weapon and drug charges. He has been out of prison for four years. He is clean and sober, is working, and spends time weekly with our sons.

Child protective services

All of the women in this study have shared about their deep fear of losing their children because of their violent relationship. This fear is sometimes tied to the fear of calling law enforcement when violence is occurring. State laws are in place to protect children from witnessing violence in the home. If police are called and a child is present, there is fear of the possibility that Child Protective services will become involved with the family. All of the women shared that there were several times in their past or present relationship that they did not call police for fear that their children would be taken away from them because they were witnesses to the abuse.

Four of the women in this research experienced fear of losing one's child at some point during her IPV relationship. Edrei had CPS involved with her family after her son shared with a school employee about a violent incident he witnessed. CPS worked with the family to provide counseling support to Edrei and her children. Her partner was required to attend anger-management courses, per the court. Maliha has had similar circumstances with her three children. She was hospitalized after the violent altercation shared above. CPS was called and initially met with her and her children. At that time, she filed for a restraining order against her husband and filed for a divorce. Her husband was incarcerated for nine months for that event. When he got out of prison, he attended mandatory anger management courses. Maliha and her husband got back together and are currently raising their children under one household. Maliha shared that "there isn't a day that goes by that I don't worry that another event will take place

like before and I will lose my babies. I won't be able to live if I don't have my babies with me. But he's changed, he's better now, and he feels bad for what happened".

Elda and Tesha have both had CPS called on their families due to things their children have shared in school with teachers. Both women have received counseling services and other supports based on the investigations from CPS. However, both women fear that things from their past or for Tesha, current events, will warrant CPS to visit them again. Tesha shared, "It is a fear that nags me so much, and all of my decisions and every move I make is based on keeping my boys safe and keeping them with me. This fear keeps me up at night."

While I didn't have CPS involved in my case, my husband threatened to take my children from me on a weekly basis. He threatened to "call CPS and let them know what a terrible mom you are". I lived with tremendous fear of losing my children to him or to the system. The fear was irrational, but at that point in my life, I believed that my husband would do that to me. He planted that fear as a way to control me, because I can say with confidence that I was a loving and attentive mother to my children and there wasn't any backing to his threat of CPS taking my boys from me. During our first separation, he threatened to "kill me and leave me in the dirt, and take the boys far away from your fucked up family."

Fear of law enforcement

The fear of law enforcement manifests itself in the women differently in this study. For Tesha, the deep fear of any social agency involvement comes because she is undocumented and she fears being deported without her sons. She has endured many circumstances of violence because she did not want her name to be on record in the local law enforcement system and/or with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. She shared a story of when her husband hit her and threatened to kill her. She wanted to call the police because she feared for her life, but she

feared deportation back to Mexico even more. If deported, she would have to start a new life without her children, and that fear was greater than the fear of her husband.

Edrei also expressed that she should have called law enforcement at many different times in her relationship, but she feared that if she did, her husband would be taken away and the family would not be able to financially survive without his income contribution. She shared that this fear eventually went away as she began to grow confident with working outside the home and earning an income on her own to provide for her family. Delmira's fear stemmed from knowing that if law enforcement were called, her husband would punish her even more afterwards. Maliha's fears included financial instability, the fear of losing her children, and the fear of retaliation from the gang community she affiliates. She shared that after her hospitalization incident that led to her husband's incarceration, several gang members threatened her, and even her close friends told her "she better keep her mouth shut next time", "this is just the way it is", and "stop making him mad Miha or he will just keep doing that to you". Elda feared that she could lose her children if law enforcement got involved in their person business, and therefore didn't call.

One significant difference between me and the other women was the fact that I did not fear law enforcement, but I feared the stigma and gossip that could occur from my neighbors if the police arrived at my house. My motivation to keep law enforcement out of my situation had nothing to do with fear of how law enforcement would treat me, but rather how my community would possibly judge me. My lack of fear of police demonstrates my privilege in our society, since as a white woman, I do not have the notion that the police wont protect my children and me.

Yet, once I had left my husband and was fighting for custody of my children, the lack of police reports filed hindered my progress. When I tried to prove that my husband was violent and abusive, no legal documents could prove my case. Eventually, I got full custody of my children when my abuser was incarcerated, but it took a many attempts to convince the courts of my situation.

Class Stratification

Poverty is not a new concept to both ancient and modern societies. The United States has provided some solutions to help address the issues of poverty, however systems, structures, and norms are still in place that keep women from thriving both financially and academically. Since these things are still in place then, many women are bound to their partners due to a lack of financial resources that could otherwise allow them the freedom to escape their abusive relationships.

Employment, Poverty income, and Education

The five of the six women in this study have struggled with excessive financial and employment barriers that have kept them in their relationships with their abusers. All of the women in this study all fell within the poverty income at some point in their lives. Five women graduated from high school, but the same women did not have a college degree while in the relationship with their abuser.

Maliha finished high school, but got pregnant with her oldest boy shortly afterwards. She has worked minimum-wage jobs, but does not make enough money to support herself and her three kids in the Sacramento area. She recalled the time when her husband was incarcerated and she had to provide for her family. They had to move in with a friend so they could have a roof over their heads and food to eat. She describes these moments in their lives as a very difficult

time for her and her children, and she doesn't want to experience that again. She concludes that the fear of poverty is one of the reasons why she is still with her abuser. She hopes to go back to school in the near future so she can "stand on my own two feet someday".

The theme of income and education sheds more light on my own privilege as a white woman in our society. I grew up in a middle class home in a nice neighborhood in Sonoma County. I attended a private high school and attended a private college. After college, I got married and began my career as a teacher. My husband owned a successful business and we owned several homes in the Sacramento area. The financial barrier that I did face is that my partner had full control over our money. He would give me an "allowance" of one hundred dollars a month to buy clothes for my boys or myself. I didn't have access to our bank accounts, including the money that I earned from my job. There were many times that I wanted to leave my abuser, but I knew that I didn't have access to our money. My name wasn't on the homes we owned or the car I drove. Once I left my husband, he did not pay child or spousal support. I moved to Sacramento and I found a job as a teacher in a small private school, but my income of \$1500 per month qualified me for government assistance. I will never forget the moments I stood in line at the Social Services Department and looked around to find I was the only white person in the waiting area. At first I felt tremendous shame and embarrassment that I was in that position. It wasn't until years later did I realize how my whiteness mindset of superiority was showing it's ugly head in those moments because I believed that *I* didn't deserve to be in that situation.

Many factors impacted the participants and their experiences with financial insecurities. For example, both Edrei and Elda got pregnant at the ages of sixteen, and both women dropped out of school to care for their child. The eventually went back to school and received their

GEDs, and from there, they both enrolled in cosmetology school and became licensed hair stylists. This is where the two of them became close friends and they have walked through life together since that time.

Although they had their cosmetology licenses, they didn't have access to child-care, which prevented them from working enough hours to provide for themselves and their children on their own. Their partners had jobs that helped support the family, which allowed the women to be the primary caregiver for their new babies. When both Edrei and Elda left their partners, they were both left with the sole financial burden of their families. Both women received government assistance in the form of food stamps, welfare, and health insurance to help their families survive. The women shared that at one point, they moved in together in order to pull their money together, help care for the children, and support each other emotionally.

Tesha has been bound to the working minimum-wage jobs because she does not have U.S. citizenship and the appropriate documentation she needs to go back to school and further her education. She shared that she wants to go back to school and become a social worker, but she fears that this dream will not come true because of her immigration status. Her husband works as a construction worker in the area and he controls the money they both receive from their jobs. While her boys were young, she wasn't able to work at all because of the lack of access to childcare. During that time, she felt isolated and even more trapped in her relationship because she did not contribute to the family financially.

Teenage pregnancy

Four of the six women became mothers while they were still teenagers. The women express deep love and gratitude for their children, and all shared they wouldn't change that experience in their lives if given the opportunity to go back in time. However, all four women

communicated that they wish they had waited to get pregnant until they could finish high school and could have followed their career dreams and aspirations.

As Elda reflected on this time in her life, she shared that having a baby at such a young age is what bound her to her partner, and kept her in the abusive relationship longer than she would have stayed otherwise. Elda has since finished college and is currently finishing her teaching credential to become a teacher. She stated, “it’s taken me long enough, but I am so happy that I finally did what I always hoped I would do for myself and my children!”

Edrei’s shared how she enrolled in cosmetology school while she was pregnant at the age of fifteen. She shared how cool her teachers were that they would let her bring her newborn daughter to school sometimes, as long as she was on her body in a baby carrier, and as long as she could still practice hair cutting. “I would not have been able to graduate if my professors didn’t help me like they did.”

Drugs and Alcohol

Out of the six women of focus in this study, all six women shared that their partner abused alcohol and/or narcotic drugs during their relationship. My husband was addicted to both alcohol and narcotic pain pills. His violent and aggressive episodes increased with intensity when he was either drunk or coming down from the pills. It was a vicious cycle throughout our relationship. Maliha’s husband currently uses drugs on and off throughout his life, and she expressed that she sometimes worries that his addiction is getting worse. She is concerned that his addiction is taking hold of his life and his violence is increasing as a result. Elda shared that her partner was an alcoholic and she blames this on the abuse that he inflicted on her. “When he was sober, he was a really nice person,” she said. Delmira’s partner was both an alcoholic and drug user. She revealed that they both used drugs together at one point, but when she got

pregnant, she quit all substances. Her partner on the other hand increased his use, and eventually became entrenched in his addiction to the point that he cannot hold down a job and is currently homeless. The last time she saw him, he was still struggling with his addictions. Edrei's husband was a perpetual marijuana smoker, and he has served time in prison for possession and selling of marijuana. She shared that she would sometimes beg him to smoke so that he would calm down. When he was high, he was easier to live with, but when he was not, he was angry, controlling, and mean.

Summary

This chapter has been devoted to providing the key themes from the stories of the six women who have lived experiences of Intimate Partner Violence, and to reveal the many other significant factors that perpetuate oppression and subordination in their lives. In the following chapter, I will analyze the data and reveal conclusions based on the findings. My analysis is informed by the literature and theoretical framework that I have used to scaffold this research.

CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

My research began as a celebration and love offering to my survival of Intimate Partner Violence. Yet, my research has morphed into a love story to the other five women who have bravely shared their deep and personal survival stories of Intimate Partner Violence, as well as for the millions of women around the world that have experienced IPV in their lifetime. I am immensely honored to have the sacred opportunity to hear their stories and capture their words onto paper. Their words serve as a form of defiance and resistance to the oppression that exists for them, and for millions of women around the world.

The purpose of this study was to gather the testimonies of six women who have experienced Intimate Partner Violence and to map the complex intersections of their identities to further the research in this multifaceted problem of oppression of women. Patterns emerged as the women began to share their personal experiences. The patterns that materialized from the narratives of women in this study serve as immensely rich data. Furthermore, this project confirms for me the notion that every woman comes to this research with complexities and intersecting identities. The participant's stories have common elements and themes, and yet they still vary from one another.

What I did not realize was the deep personal growth that would occur for me from the hours of research and reflection that was put into this project. As stated in the beginning of this research paper, this study does not claim generalizability. Rather, by using a critical race theory framework as the anchor, I can offer further insight, by using qualitative methods to maintain the rich complexities of women's lives. Every IPV experience differs from one woman to the next, and when I analyze the data, I am continually striving to be conscientious of my own

positionality and not generalize women based on race, class, or status. I recognize, however, that my own identity as a white woman informs my research. Nevertheless, through engaging in this research and using a critical race theory framework, I can continue to interrogate my own racial conceptualizations and how they continue to frame my research. “The scholar’s position indicates the influences of the scholar’s social identities on the research process and aids the audience in understanding how the scholar’s position and identities influence the research process” (ASHE Higher Ed Report, 2015, p. 38). Therefore, as I take time to discuss the findings from my research in this chapter, my own personal position is at the forefront of my heart and mind so I can present the information with integrity and thoughtfulness.

Intersections of Identity and IPV

By using the critical race methodology and Intersectionality as the center of this research, I was centered on the notion that race and racism intersect with other forms of oppression and subordination such as classism, sexism, and religious oppression that affect People of Color’s lived experiences, specifically women of color who are or have experienced IPV (ASHE Higher Ed Report, 2015, p. 35).

While looking at different communities in the US throughout this research, the statistics are alarming. At first sight, it seems like communities of color have far staggering rates of IPV. Yet it is crucial that one looks at these statistics with a critically conscious mindset. I assert that non-white men are no more aggressive and violent than a white man. It is imperative to note that the extreme violence, oppression, and colonialism white men have inflicted on African American, Asian, Latino and Native American communities, is continuing to negatively impact the family structures. While it is easy to blame violence on a particular race and accuses them of being abusive to their women, let’s dare not forget the part that our white, dominant culture has

played a leading role in exemplifying violence and abuse to people of color for hundreds of years.

Since storytelling is at the center of CRT, I was able to hear firsthand the stories of oppression that my participants have experienced. While they have all experienced gender oppression, many women have experienced various forms of other oppressions. The mapping through storytelling can be formidable for both the storyteller and the listener. Freire (2000) credits “the word” as a powerful tool for transformation and to speak a true word is to transform the world:

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only in true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem that requires them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (Freire, 2000, p.87-88)

Forms of oppression such as racism, colonialism, economic exploitation, and heterosexism impact a women’s experience as she navigates her world within an abusive relationship. We all exist in social contexts that are created by the intersections of systems of power, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, and of oppression, such as prejudice, class stratification, gender inequality, and heterosexist bias. Most important, gender inequality itself is modified by its intersection with other systems of power and oppression (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2004, p. 43). The structural underpinnings of abuse are imperative to explore while not denying the existence of concrete differences among women from diverse backgrounds.

Women who have endured Intimate Partner Violence have unique experiences to share with their communities. As stated above, storytelling can help bring societal change, and yet most women don’t have the opportunity to share their stories. My research is deeply important to me because by providing the time and space for women to tell their stories of IPV, which can

be one of the catalysts for change in our society. It is also imperative that I created a safe space for the women participants to share their lived experiences of IPV so that themes of systemic oppression are identified and called out. Only through illumination of a woman's personal experience can we begin to see change in the way women are treated in our country.

In addition, women can experience their own personal healing as they share their story. All of the women expressed that this storytelling process was therapeutic and had healing elements in the process. I have also experienced the power of telling my own story of Intimate Partner Violence to trusted people around me. I have shared my story several times, and yet each time I tell it, I come away from the experience feeling deeper healing than before. I have also experienced deep solidarity and connections between woman with whom I have shared my story. Through my storytelling, other women have felt open to shared their deeply painful stories of IPV with me. Through the exchange of our stories, deep bonds and fierce solidarity grew between us. These experiences of mine ties back to Critical Race Theory, which centers on the notion that storytelling is at the center of breaking down racial, gender, and societal barriers that continue to haunt us all.

The narratives of these women in this research paper are intended for all community members who wish to stand in solidarity with women who have endured Intimate Partner Violence, as well as a tool to build empathy and understanding about extensive barriers that women can face based on their identity. Additionally, these narratives of the six participants is to also build solidarity between women through telling oral histories, and ultimately inspire hope and courage for others who have endured, or are currently enduring Intimate Partner Violence.

While it may be true that women from all backgrounds can suffer oppressive systems of violence, it is essential to draw our attention and research to the women who are not situated in

the dominant culture, specifically women of color, who historically have been left out of the discussion of IPV.

Conclusions

Lack of Research on IPV and Women of Color

As I dug deeper into the research of IPV, I was struck with the lack of research that has been conducted in regards to women of color who have endured abuse. For example, I was able to find tremendous amounts of research on the Feminist theory and stories of white women who have endured IPV (Haaken, 2010; DeKeseredy, W. S., & MacLeod, L., 1997; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 1995; Cowan, G., 2011). Nevertheless, when digging deeper into research on specific communities of women who have endured IPV, I discovered there is a limited amount of research that has been conducted (Rodriguez, M. A., Heilemann, M. V., Fielder, E., Ang, A., Nevarez, F., & Mangione, C. M., 2008; Sokoloff, N. J., & Dupont, I., 2005; White, J. W., Yuan, N. P., Cook, S. L., & Abbey, A., 2012). Furthermore, research is lacking on how the complexities and intersectionalities of a woman's identities impact her experience in an Intimate Partner Violent relationship.

The lack of research on the complexities of women, specifically women of color, is a deep concern for me, and yet it makes sense to me as I look at this issue through a Critical Race theory microscope. Women of color have been left out of the dominant conversations and research for hundreds of years, and this is another example of how they continue to be silenced in the conversations of IPV.

A significant finding from my research is the importance of honoring the unique and beautifully complex beings that we are, and take into consideration the historical, racial, and cultural differences and distinctions among women in order to further understand intricate

complexities of IPV. Additionally, while researching a woman's experience of IPV, it is imperative to recognize the dynamics of societal trauma, racial oppression and mistrust that further complicate racial and ethnic minority women experiences with IPV (Campbell, 2016, p. 69). The important intersections of a woman's life guided me as heard the personal stories of my participants in this study.

Systemic Patterns Of Racial Inequality

Many patterns emerged from the testimonies of the participants. One of the significant patterns that emerged is how systemic patterns of racial inequality perpetuate the participant's victimization with their partner. One way this materialized was in several of the participant's stories about their deep fear and lack of trust of law enforcement. Each woman shared at some point in her life she did not call the police because of the fear and mistrust they felt. The fear of law enforcements in communities of color connects to some of the literature that I included in earlier chapters. "The casual attitude of the police response to domestic violence complaints constitutes an obstacle to effective change, especially for women of color who disproportionality relies on the public sector for relief" (Rivera, 1994, p.244).

The stories of the participants in this study reiterated this notion that their experiences with police were not positive, and therefore they would not be inclined to involve law enforcement in the future. There was an inherent lack of trust that emerged from the stories, and this is a significant concern for our communities. If a woman cannot trust law enforcement, who have sworn to protect their citizens, then who *can* they trust to protect them in times of violence with their partner?

Law enforcement has long been dealing inappropriately within communities of color, and these negative and racist interactions have had negative consequences, such as mass

incarceration of Men of Color, increased use of force, the killing unarmed men, etc. This fear and lack of trust creates grave consequences and tensions for women of color between the need for protection from abuse in their homes, and the recognition that many of the women in need of protection are made more vulnerable by these very interventions (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Therefore, when considering a woman's mindset towards law enforcement and lack of trust of the current governmental systems in place, it is imperative to consider the complexities that a woman's situatedness in the community. Michelle Bograd (1999) added to this discussion when she writes of the imperativeness of considering Intersectionality when looking at the complexities of a woman's experiences with IPV:

Not only do different patterns of domestic violence have different consequences for different families, Intersectionality asks us to integrate into theory and practice the simple recognition that, for many families, domestic violence is not the only or primary violence shaping family life. Intersectionality also requires that we develop theories that go beyond single-factor descriptions of domestic violence, such as gender inequality. (p. 283)

The women in this study reiterate the lack of trust they have of law enforcement to actually protect them and the complications that this perpetuates. Instead, they share that they fear the greater harm will come to them and their loved ones if they call the police to report abuse. In Sacramento alone, the police have proven time and time again that they are not equitable in their responses to People of Color. This is evident in things such as the disproportionality of African American men being harmed by police, or with ICE raids that have occurred over the past several months (Benton, Randall, 2018).

I have also witnessed on several occasions how police interact with people of color in my school community. I have seen firsthand the negative/nonchalant attitude that some of them have towards the community members. After many of my own interactions, I would also be

reluctant to contact law enforcement to keep me safe and to take care of my children if I needed to call them during a violent situation with a partner.

Furthermore, on the topic of undocumented women, in the last several months, thousands of children have been taken from their families and put in detention facilities. Furthermore, many children are now separated from their parents and the government is lagging to reunite families together (Healy, 2018). These separation stories have been all over the media, and the fear of losing one's child/children is overshadowing the minds of the undocumented people that I am in contact with on a daily basis. The fears will continue to haunt women who are experiencing IPV because they don't want to expose themselves or their families to law enforcement or any government agency, for fear of losing their own children.

Gender Oppression and IPV

Sexual abuse and rape were other factors that contributed to the women in this study. The women who did experience sexual abuse shared how those experiences created a sense of worthlessness and shame, which contributed to the decisions to be with a man that mistreats them. Patterns of victimization that were created at a young age continued to permeate the woman's life as she grew into adulthood. The participants described their thought process during and after the sexual abuse and/or rape as a young woman, and the same feelings they had felt as a child emerged after abuse from their intimate partner later in their lives. Complex feelings of victimization and self-loathing continued to whittle away at their self-worth.

The impact of sexual abuse on the woman is profound and long lasting. While there isn't a direct correlation between sexual abuse and IPV, the woman in this study shared how they believe that their sexual abuse experiences had a direct impact on how they view themselves and their choice in intimate partners who continued to victimize them.

The complexities of sexual abuse and rape are important issues that warrants continued research and action. While this paper does not focus on these issues, it is an interesting trend finding that four of the six women interviewed had/have experienced Intimate Partner Violence have also been victims of some type of sexual abuse.

Poverty and Economic Instability and IPV

There was a connection between economic instability and IPV in the lives of the participants in this study. All of the participants had experiences with economic instability at some point during their relationships with their abusive partners. All of the women fear/feared leaving their abuser at one point or another because they would not be able to support themselves, their children, and maintain their home on their own. The women also shared that they feared their abuser would control the finances of the family if they attempted to leave him. Moreover, a few of the women shared the abuser was/is the sole financial provider, which they felt perpetuated the power and control the abuser has over her.

If a woman feels that she cannot leave her abuser because she doesn't have resources, she will remain in a dangerous situation, even if she wants to leave. Unless there is family or other means to financial resources, a woman can be enslaved to her abuser solely for financial reasons. According to Montalbano-Phelps (20020), "without the ability to provide for themselves and their dependents, victims may not be able to leave their abusive partners" (p.163). Many women, including the six in this study, remained in their abusive relationship because of high levels of financial insecurities, which created a reliance on their partner to survive and to provide food and shelter for their family (Sokoloff & Dupont 2005). Economic structures often times disempower women, which in essence continues to victimize women (Vidales, 2010). A woman not only has to think about herself, but many times she has to think about her children. Survival becomes the

center of her decisions, and if survival for her means eating and sleeping with a roof over her head, then she may endure violence and abuse in order to keep the resources that will ensure her and her children's basic survival needs.

Immigration and IPV

While only one woman in this study has experienced immigration barriers, which impacted her experiences with IPV, it is essential to highlight that the undocumented status of thousands of IPV victims in the United States deserves our immediate attention. The complexities of a woman's immigration status and the impact that has on her safety in her relationship are deeply intertwined. The impacts include a woman's fear of losing her children if the government finds out about her family's status, particularly if law enforcement is called and discovers that she is undocumented. I have met numerous women over the years who are trapped in a violent and abusive relationship because they believe they do not have any way to escape and gain citizenship in the US. Tesha's story revealed that she is undocumented and has had limited English, which has created tremendous barriers for her in her life. She shared that she wanted to escape her abusive husband multiple times, but is always drawn back by fear that she will be deported back to Mexico. Her fears connect to Montalbano-Phelps (2003) research, which states that women who immigrate and/or migrate can be disempowered on many levels as they enter the US, due to many factors, including immigration policies and regulations. Many women experience feelings of intense fear at the threat of being deported, which plays a significant role in making the decision to remain in her violent relationship (Campbell, 2016).

Just this month, our current US presidential administration signed and passed a bill that dismantles IPV victims from seeking asylum in our country (Benner, K. & Dickerson, C., 2018). The administration's decision will have profound impacts on the thousands of women who are

currently seeking citizenship via asylum due to the violence they have endured with their partner. The government decision regarding IPV victims is despicable on so many levels, and most importantly, it will continue to oppress women who are in this country and who are undocumented.

IPV and the fear of losing one's child

A woman's fear of losing her child/children runs deep in every mother. It is in our nature to love and protect our children, and it is innate in us to ensure that we protect our children. If a mother has an indication that she will lose her child, she will do everything she can to ensure that will not happen. The innate need to protect one's child is also in women who are experiences IPV. A woman will remain in her abusive relationship if it means that she can protect her child. Additionally, she will remain with her abuser if that means that she will not lose her child.

The complexities of motherhood emerged in the testimonies of the women in this study. All six participants made decisions to remain with her abuser so that she would not lose her child/children. Whether there were valid immigration factors, CPS factors, or just an innate fear of losing her child/children, all of the women described how she would endure abuse just to keep her children with her.

Women should not have to fear the loss of her children in order to free herself from her abusive relationship. There is a demand for laws to be amended that will protect a woman from losing her children if she tries to escape her violent relationship. Additionally, continued research is imperative in order to record the testimonies of the thousands of women who have experienced this fear (whether perceived or real) of losing her children, which keeps her in danger with her partner.

Recommendations

My research focused on collecting the stories of women who have experienced Intimate Partner Violence, while focusing on the intersections of the participant's identities. I wanted to focus on the complexities of the women's identities and intersections in efforts to contribute to the research that has already been done on the complex issue of IPV. Albeit there is numerous researches on IPV, the focus has been on the dominant culture and narratives on white women, while millions of women of color are kept in the margins of the discussion.

Further research is imperative on this issue, since millions of women still remain in abusive and violent relationships, and there are entire communities of women who are left out of the research that explores the intersections of identity within IPV. Oppression, hegemonic structures, and poverty cannot be ignored while analyzing violence in communities and in the lives of women experiencing IPV. Taking time to collect the stories of women from diverse backgrounds and identities can continue to shed light on IPV and reveal complex gender and racial disparities that demand resistance.

Furthermore, the police in the United States do not have a great track record of caring for people of color with dignity, fairness, and care, which contributes to women of color remaining silent in their abuse. If we are to holistically address IPV, then there is a tremendous need for racial/cultural healing to occur between police and communities of color so that police will be seen as a resource and not a threat. I propose that our law enforcement agents must be required to take implicit bias training, which will which can begin to bring personal examination to each person that is sworn to protect all US citizens. The overhaul of our US law enforcement requires an entire separate research, yet I feel it is important to note as we look comprehensively at IPV.

My hope is that after reading this research, when you hear something on the news, read an article, or meet a woman who experiences abuse, you will take pause and examine your mindset about her and her experiences. Similarly, I strongly encourage you to courageously take time to create space for your friends and family to discuss the delicate topic of IPV and other forms of oppression. When you hear someone comment on women or communities of color, you can respectfully interrupt and create space to have a discussion. Only through illumination and acknowledgement of oppression can there be true healing in our families, communities, and country as a whole. If we all do our part to create the space for women to authentically share their experiences and together we interrupt oppression we see or hear, together we can change history for our daughters, granddaughters, and generations to come.

Closing

Much work needs to be done on behalf of all women who have lived or are living in a violent, oppressive, abusive relationship. Intimate Partner Violence is usually a topic that is not discussed openly for people to examine, and stigmas exist in our society and IPV is viewed as either “the woman’s fault”, or a problem that only exists among communities of color. If our society is to address the epidemic of Intimate Partner violence, then women must be looked at as dynamic, complex, and unique, taking into consideration of their personal identities and diverse experiences. Additionally, our mindsets must be changed, and that comes from comprehensive and diverse research and IPV prevention education of our young people using Critical Race Theory as the solid foundation. Only when we come together as a society and acknowledge and address our history of oppression of women and of People of Color, will we truly receive healing and equity.

In closing, I offer a quote made from Nelson Mandela while giving a speech on Women's Day in 1996:

That is a daunting task. The legacy of oppression weighs heavily on women. As long as women are bound by poverty and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance. As long as outmoded ways of thinking prevent women from making a meaningful contribution to society, progress will be slow. As long as the nation refuses to acknowledge the equal role of more than half of itself, it is doomed to failure. (1996, para. #4)

Until our country confronts the deep hegemonic practices that continue to oppress millions of women, we will continue to endanger millions of women who find themselves in violent relationships with their intimate partner. There is a great need to call to action all men, women, and children to confront these issues head on, and together eradicate Intimate Partner Violence.

Together, we will continue to move forward with research, advocacy, and with clarity as we fight for the rights of all women in the United States.

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