VICTIMIZED AND CRIMINALIZED BLACK WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES WITH THE POLICE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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VICTIMIZED AND CRIMINALIZED
BLACK WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES WITH THE POLICE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

by

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This qualitative, multi-manuscript dissertation examines the experiences of Black women who live in the Greater Toronto Area and other southwestern Ontario regions who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), some of whom were also charged with an IPV-related offence. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 Black women to better understand the meanings they attach to their experiences. Critical race feminism (CRF) was employed to help conceptualize women’s narratives. In addition, the dissertation includes a review of the relevant literature, the methodology that was utilized for the study followed by three self-contained manuscripts. The purpose of the first manuscript is to discuss challenges or barriers encountered during the research process, propose strategies for engaging with Black women and highlight their reasons for participating in the study. Findings indicate that using various sampling strategies increase Black women’s participation. In addition, methodological approaches must consider Black women’s lived experiences of systemic oppression and racism. The purpose of the second manuscript is to better understand Black women’s experiences of IPV, how it has impacted their lives and the consequences of using force against an intimate partner. Findings reveal that Black women often have histories of abuse and those who used force did so in response to their partner’s violence against them. The purpose of the third manuscript is to examine Black women’s experiences with the police and highlight counter-narratives they create in response to stereotypes that construct them as aggressive or violent. Findings from this study show that women were more likely to disclose negative encounters with the police and that their experiences with the police were influenced by their intersecting identities of race, gender and class. Most women believed their race influenced the police’s perception of and interaction with them. Those who had negative encounters with the police are less likely to seek help from them.
in the future. These findings have implications for improving future police interactions and relations with racialized communities.

*Keywords:* Domestic violence, intimate partner violence, policing, arrest, African American, Black women
This dissertation is dedicated to my family, the countless Black women who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) and those who have also been charged with an IPV-related offence.
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List of Abbreviations

Children’s Aid Society (CAS)
Criminal Justice System (CJS)
Critical Legal Studies (CLS)
Critical Race Feminism (CRF)
Critical Race Theory (CRT)
General Social Survey (GSS)
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
Partner Assault Response (PAR)
Research Ethics Board (REB)
Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR)
Violence Against Women (VAW)
Preface

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research. Sometimes, these are deeply ingrained views about the types of problems that we need to study, what research questions to ask, or how we go about gathering data” (p. 15). In qualitative research, researchers often situate themselves by making their beliefs, assumptions and biases known at the onset of the research. Notwithstanding, they “remain sensitive to their own biographies/social identities and how these shape the study” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 2). Discussing these biases and/or assumptions at the start of the research process is relevant because “through recognition of our biases, we presume to gain insights into how we might approach a research setting, members of particular groups, and how we might seek to engage with participants” (Bourke, 2014, p. 1). For social workers, recognizing and naming these biases are at the forefront of everything we do, including how we engage with others and how we understand ourselves in relation to those around us.

Qualitative researchers also write about their social location (i.e. gender, race, age, social class) to express how these identities impact their research. The act of situating and locating oneself in research is known as positionality. Qualitative researchers believe that one’s experience has significant value in the research process because it helps us to make sense of the world we explore. They do not claim to be objective or detached from the research they are conducting. Instead, they are of the view that as they enter the lives of their participants, they may shape their lives and the research in significant ways. This perspective is considered highly valued and necessary and brings a greater understanding to the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Thus, with these considerations in mind, I situate myself in my research by discussing how I am
connected to the research and how my experiences as a heterosexual Black woman inform what I know and understand as well as how I approach my research.

Approximately 15 years ago, shortly after the birth of our daughter, my husband and I planned a trip to visit his family in Guelph for a Thanksgiving dinner. For the journey, I sat in the backseat of the car so that I could care for our infant daughter. En route, we made a quick stop at my sister’s apartment. At the time, my sister lived at Martin Grove and Eglinton, which is in a Toronto suburb. Those who are familiar with the area know that it is a predominantly racialized neighbourhood. Just before we left the building, my sister met us downstairs and handed us a bag. Shortly after pulling out of the parking lot onto the street, a police officer came racing after us. After being motioned to pull over, my husband stopped the car on a side street. When the officer approached the vehicle, he appeared uneasy and agitated. Immediately, he demanded my husband provide him with his driver’s license and registration. I did not believe being pulled over was warranted since we weren’t speeding and had just left private property. “What could we have possibly done wrong?” I thought to myself. Shortly afterward, I asked the officer, “Why are we being stopped?” He ignored me and immediately addressed my husband. He asked, “Did you pick her up from around here?” My husband told the officer that I was his wife. I decided against responding to what the officer had said because I did not want my interference to have a negative impact on the outcome of the interaction.

As I sat in silence and reflected on the situation, I had many questions. Were we pulled over because the officer thought that we were in a stolen vehicle? We were driving a black Acura Integra, which at the time was amongst the top ten stolen vehicles in North America. Were we pulled over because the officer assumed my husband was Black and had done something wrong? The opposite would have been revealed when he approached us. My husband is white. Were we
pulled over because the officer assumed that my husband had just picked up a sex worker? (He had, after all, asked where my husband had picked me up). Did the officer believe the bag handed to us contained drugs? Were we simply under surveillance for being in a “Black neighbourhood”? Was I seen as a sexual object or thought of as promiscuous or viewed as a criminal? At that moment, I felt “othered,” silenced and powerless. Although I later reported the incident to a police sergeant, nothing came of it. There was no follow-up phone call from the police sergeant, and I do not imagine that the officer was reprimanded for his actions.

Unfortunately, situations like the one I experienced are not unique. Black women and men continue to have negative encounters with the police. Sometimes, these encounters generate significant attention from members of society, the media and scholars; other times, they go unnoticed or undocumented.

My own experiences with the police, combined with the experiences of acquaintances, friends and loved ones, sparked an interest in wanting to better understand the nuances around police interactions with racialized people. This interest grew a few years later while completing my Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree. Around the same time, I had started working in a shelter for women and children exposed to violence. At the time, women accessing the shelter system were predominantly white; however, as a racialized woman, I was particularly interested in understanding racialized women’s experiences, specifically, Black women’s experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV). These previous experiences became a catalyst for my interest in conducting research in this area.

In 2010, I conducted a research study as part of my Master of Social Work (MSW) degree examining Black women’s experiences of IPV (Duhaney-Morris, 2010). The study sample consisted of four Black women charged with an IPV-related offence and three front-line
workers who counselled Black women charged with an offence. The study results revealed Black women who were arrested were not themselves batterers but were primary victims who reported histories of prior childhood abuse and IPV, including physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. It also revealed Black women's experiences and use of force in their relationships were compounded by the multiplicities of race, class and gender.

Another recurring theme prevalent in this research was the role of the police in IPV incidents. When asked about their experiences with the police, there was a consensus amongst both the women charged with an offence and the front-line workers that the police did not care about Black women. They also mentioned that police officers cared little about the context within which they experienced IPV (Duhaney-Morris, 2010).

The findings from this study gave me insights into Black women’s experiences of IPV and showcased the need for further studies in this area. Subsequently, my extensive review of the literature as part of my doctoral studies led me to conclude that research documenting how Black women experience both the investigative and charging processes of the criminal justice system for IPV-related offences remains limited. Thus, findings from the present study will address the gap in Canadian IPV research to increase our understanding of Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police. I take the stance that these experiences are complicated by issues related to the hyper-invisibility of violence experienced by Black women within and outside their communities, anti-Black racism, systemic oppression and over-policing tactics.
Terminology

In this dissertation, I use several terms to conceptualize Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police. These terms are complex and fluid, have multiple meanings and are often contested. However, they are addressed below to help frame and contextualize my discussion.

Black

I use the term “Black” to refer to people from African ancestral origins (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2015) who identify as Black Canadian, African Canadian or Caribbean Canadian. When reporting on U.S. studies, the term Black may be used interchangeably with African American. Classifying women as “Black” is not solely an indicator of skin colour or physical characteristics. In fact, this designation may also include persons who are of mixed-race and who identify themselves as Black. I politicize this term with the recognition that there is not one essential female voice and that diversity exists amongst women categorized as Black. Moreover, Black people hold multiple identities and are diverse in various aspects, including but not limited to ethnicity, culture, religion, education, social class, sexual identity and immigrant status.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

There has been much debate about what term best describes the complexities of abuse that occurs in intimate relationships. Scholars have used terms such as wife abuse, domestic violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), intimate partner abuse, spousal assault, conjugal violence and violence against women (VAW) to describe violence that takes place within the context of intimate relationships. For my dissertation, I use the term IPV to capture the psychological, physical and sexual forms of abuse to women in their relationships (World Health
Organization, 2012). Nonetheless, when reporting on the work of others, I will use their concepts (e.g. domestic violence). Furthermore, it is important to note that while violence occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships, my dissertation will focus solely on violence that occurs in heterosexual relationships.

**Criminalized Women**

The term “offender” is commonly used in the criminal justice system and social sciences, particularly in the field of criminology, to refer to a person who is accused of, commits or is considered responsible for a crime against a person or property. The *Canadian Criminal Code* uses the term offender to refer to a “person who has been determined by a court to be guilty of an offence, whether on acceptance of a plea of guilty or on a finding of guilt” (Justice Laws Website, 2017). Constructing women as offenders, however, does not accurately reflect the complexities of their lives nor the process by which they come to be criminalized. Rather than use the legal term “offender” to refer to women who have been arrested by the police, I will refer to these women as “criminalized.” Like Pollack (2007), I use this term to “signal processes and practices rather than a reified identity... and to challenge discourses that construct criminalized women as ‘other’ and separate them from those who research and write about their experiences” (p. 172). Using the term criminalized to characterize women’s use of force allows me to “place women's violence within the social context in which it occurs ... it does not excuse the behaviour but it does assist in making it more understandable, especially in terms of the choices available to these women” (Comack & Brickey, 2007, p. 27). It also allows me to describe how Black women’s actions and responses to violence are severely penalized by the police.
Victim/Survivor

The terms “victim” and “survivor” have different connotations. In Canada, the Department of Justice (2016) defines a victim as “a person who has suffered physical or emotional harm, property damage, or economic loss as a result of a crime.” This definition removes accountability from the person who has suffered harm and places the responsibility on the person who has caused harm. However, the Department of Justice’s definition is limited and does not fully capture the complexities of victimhood. In the IPV literature, the victim identity typology has been criticized for failing to consider women’s self-agency (Dunn, 2005). For Dunn, the victim construct presumes that the person is passive, vulnerable, weak and helpless. In an effort to promote women’s strength, empowerment and resilience, some scholars use the term “survivor” (Gillum, 2019; Taft et al., 2009; West, 2004). Some women may assume the identities of victim and survivor simultaneously or at different times in their lives. However, I use the term victim as it is most often used by the women in my study to characterize their experiences.
Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been recognized globally as a pervasive social problem. According to the World Health Organization (2012), IPV is any behaviour that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in an intimate relationship. The devastating effects of IPV include physical (broken bones, cuts, bruises) and non-physical (anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) consequences as well as death (Wathen, 2012). Over the last 20 years, research has consistently shown that women are more likely to be victims of IPV than their male counterparts (Bunge & Levett, 1998; Burczycka et al., 2018; Conroy et al., 2019). For example, in 1996, of the nearly 22,000 incidents of spousal assault recorded by the police in Canada, women accounted for 89% of victims (Bunge & Levett, 1998). A more recent Statistics Canada report that showed that in 2018 there were over 99,000 victims of IPV; the majority (79%) were women who were victims of violence by a spouse or dating partner (Conroy et al., 2019). While women are more likely than men to be victims of IPV, Indigenous women (Department of Justice Canada, 2017b) and racialized women (Lee et al., 2002) face systemic barriers that increase their vulnerability.

Through increased awareness of IPV, there have been changes in legislation and an increase in government initiatives to address the issue. There has also been an increase in various Violence Against Women (VAW) organizations and supportive services for victims of abuse across Canada (Moreau, 2019). Despite the significant strides to fight and eliminate violence against women, the victimization rate amongst women has remained relatively high (Burczycka et al., 2018). The number of victims who have been criminalized following police intervention has also increased, which has given rise to significant debate among scholars about the extent to
which women engage in reciprocal violence in their relationships (Hamberger & Larsen, 2015). Feminist researchers argue that women are predominantly victims of IPV (Dobash & Dobash, 2004), whereas family violence researchers argue that women perpetrate violence at equal rates as men (Fiebert, 2014; Straus, 2010). In fact, some family violence proponents assert that women use more violence than their male counterparts (Taft et al., 2010) and engage in more severe forms of violence (Busch & Rosenberg, 2004; Melton & Sillito, 2012).

While there has been extensive scholarship exploring the frequency and extent to which violence occurs in intimate relationships, victimology research and, in general, IPV research has focused primarily on the experiences of white women and men (Taft et al., 2009). The scarcity of IPV research examining the differential experiences of racialized women (Bent-Goodley et al., 2014) and, in particular, Black women limits our understanding of their unique needs and how to best support them. However, there has been an emergent body of research focusing on the experiences of Black women. It has been documented that a disproportionate number of Black women and men are victims and offenders of IPV (Field & Caetano, 2005; McCloskey et al., 2006; Truman & Morgan, 2014). While some racialized and white women have similar experiences of physical violence, sexual violence and coercive control from their male partners (Swan & Snow, 2002), racialized women’s experiences are further compounded by their intersecting identities of race, class and gender (Bograd, 1999; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). In addition, Black women encounter barriers in receiving services, and have limited access to culturally appropriate services, further complicating their lives since they are not only victims of IPV but may also be criminalized (Bent-Goodley et al., 2014).

Research that examines Black women’s experiences with the police in which they are charged for an offence related to IPV is another area of investigation that remains sparse.
Specifically, little is known about the circumstances in which they are charged and the consequences of those charges. In fact, Black women remain subsumed under the generic term “women” in many research studies. This present study is intended to address this gap in our understanding.

**Rationale for the Dissertation**

My research examines Black women’s experiences of IPV and their interactions with the police by drawing on in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with 25 Black women living in the Greater Toronto Area and other Southwestern Ontario regions; 15 of these women had also been criminalized by police in relation to IPV. This study is both relevant and timely in light of the perpetration of violence by women in their intimate relationships, the overcriminalization of Black women and men by the criminal justice system, the prevalence of anti-Black racism and increased tensions between the police and members of the Black community. The study contributes to and builds upon limited Canadian IPV research by focusing on a diverse group of Black women, contextualizing how violence unfolds in their lives and the consequences of engaging in defensive violence in their relationships.

I use Critical Race Feminism (CRF) as a theoretical framework to inform my research and articulate Black women’s experiences of IPV and of being arrested. Rather than focus on a single factor such as race, class or gender, this approach allows me to consider how these characteristics intersect along with other causal factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Black women’s experiences with the police in situations related to IPV. Moreover, it allows me to consider how these factors interact with the many manifestations of racism and other systems of oppression. My research also has significant implications for social
work knowledge, practice and policy initiatives and has the potential to expand the base of social work by enhancing discussions on Black women’s experiences with the police.

**Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Feminism**

Critical race feminism (CRF) is the overarching theoretical framework that informs this research. This theoretical lens informs my understanding of the intersectionality of race, class and gender in Black women’s lives as well as the ways in which race, racialization and racism are implicated in Black women’s experiences of IPV and the police responses to Black women. Finally, I situate the issue of Black women’s experiences of IPV and the police response within the broader context of anti-Black racism and racialized policing.

Critical Race Feminism is an offshoot of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Wing, 1996-1997) and is informed by Critical Legal Studies (CLS), feminism and Black feminism/womanist feminism. However, it has enhanced these movements through its analytical contributions of anti-essentialism and intersectionality (Wing, 2003). Although the term CRF is more widely used in the United States, the term anti-racist feminism has been used more extensively in Canada. CRF has centred the experiences of racialized women within the United States and the experiences of Indigenous people within Canada (Razack et al., 2010). However, racialized women from multiple disciplines have utilized CRF in their work (see, for example, Razack, 2010; Smith, 2010; Jiwani, 2010; Thobani, 2010; Nelson, 2010; & Dua, 1999).

CRF can be defined as a body of scholarship that attempts to theorize the ways in which race, gender and class “function together in structuring social inequality” (Dua, 1999, p. 9). Some writers have also described CRF as a movement of activists of colour who are “interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, pp. 2-3). According to Onwuachi-Willig (2006), “CRF serves as a bridge toward
understanding the legal status of women of color and the ways in which women of color face multiple discrimination on the basis of factors, including but not limited to race, gender, class, able-bodiedness, and sexuality” (p. 736). However, CRF addresses both legal and non-legal issues across multiple disciplines, which include but are not limited to law, education, social work and women’s studies.

CRF emerged during the second wave of feminism at the end of the twentieth century through the efforts of American Black feminists and other feminists of colour (Aylward, 1999; Wing, 2003). During this time racialized scholars expressed that their experiences were being ignored (Wing, 1997). Specifically, they stated that neither CRT nor feminism addressed the multiple sites of oppression that Black women and other racialized women encountered in both private and public spheres (Wing, 1997). They were of the view that CRT focused predominantly on the experiences of Black men or other racialized men (Wing, 1997). Furthermore, much of the activism and scholarship practiced by white feminists focused primarily on the needs of white, middle-class and Western women (Collins, 2000; Simien, 2006), ignoring the unique experiences of racialized women (Wing, 1997) and the diversity amongst women (Rosser, 2008). They maintained that although Black women experienced gender oppression, they also experienced other forms of oppression that made their experiences distinct from that of racialized men and white women. As hooks (2015) noted, Black women were not only subjected to sexist victimization but also “oppressions no white woman was forced to endure ... white racial imperialism granted all white women ... the right to assume the role of oppressor in relationship to Black women and Black men” (pp. 122-123). While Black women embraced the idea of women’s equality, for some Black women their experience of racism superseded alliances based on gender alone.
There are several tenets that inform CRF. One tenet is that racism is an everyday occurrence in society in its systemic and subtle forms (Wing, 1997) and permeates all facets of society, including educational, religious, political and civic realms. Everyday racism is complex and involves “the structural exclusion, marginalization and repression of Black people” (Essed, 1991, p. 50). Through this process, there is a continuum of everyday practices (cognitive and behavioural) that are rationalized and become “part of the expected, of the unquestionable, and of what is seen as normal by the dominant group” (Essed, 1991, p. 50). The manifestation of racism in its various forms (individual, institutional/structural) is central to understanding its implications for Black people who experience anti-Black racism.

Scholars and activists have attempted to conceptualize Black people’s experiences of racism in various contexts. In particular, the concept of anti-Blackness or anti-Black racism has been used to articulate and respond to manifestations of systemic racism inherent in policing and the criminal justice system’s policies and practices (Benjamin, 2003). It is “both internal and external, conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, personal and social-political, global and local” (Kumsa et al., 2014, p. 30). It festers in a deeply embedded system that is rooted in “misinformation, fables, perversions, projections, and lies” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 235). Yet, within the Canadian context, anti-Blackness “often goes unspoken. When acknowledged, it is assumed to exist, perhaps, but in another time (centuries ago), or in another place (the United States)” (Maynard, 2017, p. 29). Issues around anti-Black racism are exacerbated by a lack of or limited race-based data, lack of awareness, lack of education and unwillingness to acknowledge that there is a problem (Maynard, 2017). Nonetheless, in recent years, Black people’s experiences of anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism have garnered increased attention on various levels, including child welfare (Clarke, 2012; Pon et al., 2011), criminal justice
(Maynard, 2017; Chan & Chunn, 2014; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011), education (Henry et al., 2017; James, 2012; Tatum, 2017), employment (Block & Galabuzi, 2019; Galabuzi, 2006) and healthcare (Calliste, 1996). The pernicious effects of anti-Black racism persist and continue to negatively affect Black people. Various governmental bodies, such as the City of Toronto, have now started to implement policies to confront anti-Black racism and ensure services and programs are both inclusive and accessible to Black people.

For this dissertation, an understanding of anti-Black racism as it pertains to Black women is necessary to not only theorize about their experiences but to emphasize their counter-narratives as a form of resistance against white hegemony. It allows me to examine pervasive racial stereotypes that “consciously or unconsciously shape behaviours, actions and attitudes towards people of African descent” (Mullings et al., 2016, p. 24). Naming racism as it relates to Black women allows me to focus attention “on the distinctiveness of this form of racial oppression, as perpetrated by dominant and hegemonic powers and institutions” (Benjamin, 2003, p. 87).

CRF adherents also express skepticism toward claims of a neutral, objective and just society. CRF rejects a colour-blind approach to law and argues that people of colour are not similarly situated in practices, principles, legal doctrines and rules as those from the dominant group (Aylward, 1999). For example, CRF maintains that the law is not neutral and thus is not applied to people equally. People of colour do not have the same access or enjoy the same protection under the law. Valdes et al. (2002) problematize this neutrality claim by arguing that, “neutrality and objectivity are not just unattainable ideals; they are harmful fictions that obscure the normative supremacy of whiteness … in society” (p. 1).
CRF proponents assert that race is socially constructed. Specifically, race is understood amongst critical race scholars as a social, political and cultural construct based on real or imagined physical characteristics (Murdocca, 2014). The meanings attached to race have changed considerably over time. For example, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, race was used to distinguish and classify groups of people (Henry & Tator, 2006). There was presumed to exist a distinguishable “racial type” based on physiological differences. People were arranged hierarchically whereby the white race was considered superior to other “races.” Within this construction of race, white people were positioned at the top of the hierarchy and benefited from the power and privilege awarded to them, whereas people who were non-white were relegated to the bottom and deemed powerless and inferior in relation to their white counterparts (Henry & Tator, 2006). While a person’s physical traits, such as facial features, eye colour, skin colour and hair texture have no biological significance, this typology of race has been used historically and in recent times as social signifiers to legitimize the unequal treatment of racialized groups (Henry & Tator, 2006). These ideas have infiltrated the core of society on multiple levels, including the government, educational system, criminal justice system, civil society organizations and the media (Henry & Tator, 2006). Notions of race continue to permeate all facets of society and are continuously used to identify and categorize groups of people to stigmatize, exclude and treat them unfairly in society.

CRF calls attention to the process of racialization and the notion of “othering.” The term “racialization” has been conceptualized by Fanon (1967), Miles (1993) and Banton (1998) (Barot & Bird, 2001). It is manifested in various ways, including class (Martinot, 2000), space (Razack, 2000), neighbourhood (Gotham, 2000; Neely & Samura, 2011) and crime (Chan & Chunn, 2014; Henry et al., 1996; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2012). Of interest in my dissertation is the notion
of the racialization of crime. Through the process of racialization, people are classified based on biological characteristics that define and differentiate them in relation to the dominant group. Racial traits and, in particular, Blackness are believed to be a contributing factor to understanding criminal behaviour and crime (Chan & Chunn, 2014, p. xviii; Miles & Torres, 1999). Individuals and groups “are designated as different and on that basis are subjected to differential and unequal treatment” (Block & Galabuzi, 2011, p. 19). I will refer to racialization to signify a process whereby racialized groups, particularly Black people, are constructed as being more disposed to criminal behaviour than white people and other racialized groups (Henry & Tator, 2006). The notion of “othering” refers to the process whereby difference is constructed into binary categories (“Black/white” or “us/them”) by the dominant group. The dominant group has the power to ascribe meaning in order to construct the “other” as inferior and legitimize their degradation. Othering specific groups often trivializes, erases or denies the legitimacy of their experiences (Jiwani, 2002).

CRF builds on CRT by introducing intersectionality and anti-essentialism (Wing, 1997). Intersectionality emerged in the late 1980s to early 1990s from critical race theory (Nash, 2008) and was a response to limitations of gender-based and race-based research (McCall, 2005). Intersectionality is premised on the notion that women of colour do not have a single, unitary identity but intersecting and overlapping identities that impact how they experience their world (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality has been used as an analytical tool to explore and highlight the various ways in which race, gender and class differently position individuals (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Additionally, it has been used to examine how structural, institutional, cultural and political elements influence violence in Black women’s lives, the ways in which they address violence in their lives and legal responses to violence against women (Crenshaw, 1991; Potter,
Accounting for women’s intersecting identities is necessary because “the blurring of victimization and criminalization is implicated differently” for people with different social realities. For Black women, the impact of social structure and white supremacy must be considered (Potter, 2015, p. 130).

Related to intersectionality is the concept of anti-essentialism. Essentialism is the view that women share properties, characteristics and experiences that are common to all women (Stone, 2004; Witt, 1995). Moreover, the experiences of individuals and groups can be described independently from other aspects of their identities (i.e. gender, race and class) (Grillo, 1995). This sameness that essentialism assumes privileges white women. In contrast, proponents of anti-essentialism do not believe women have fixed characteristics which define them or that there is a generic woman (Wong, 1999). Instead, CRF scholars adapt an anti-essentialist approach by considering racialized women’s experiences and the multiple discriminations they encounter based on race, class and gender (Wing, 1996-1997).

**Relevance of CRF for Research**

Critical race feminists recognize that Black women’s narratives have merit and forefront their voices and experiences in IPV scholarship. Centring the experiences of women of colour is significant because “existing legal paradigms have permitted women of color to fall between the cracks, so that they become, literally and figuratively, voiceless and invisible under so-called neutral law or solely race-based or gender-based analyses” (Wing, 1997, p. 2). Thus, CRF challenges racial oppression and denounces the unfair treatment of Black women that overtly or covertly suppresses and excludes their voices and experiences in public spaces, academia and political spheres.
Using CRF will direct attention to Black women’s experiences of multiple forms of oppression with the police and in the criminal justice system. In addition, examining the counter-narratives of Black women who experience IPV and are also charged with an offence can advance understanding of the myths and negative constructs that misconstrue their realities. This framework will also help bring new insights to discussions on Black women’s experiences with the police while positioning their experiences of IPV at the forefront of the discussion to understand the context within which charges ensue. By analyzing the dissertation research data through the lens of CRF, I hope to better understand the processes by which Black women’s contact with the police results in their criminalization, which complicates their victimization status.

Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation employed a qualitative research design to gain insights into Black women’s experiences of IPV and their experiences with the police. The overarching question that the dissertation sought to explore was: how do race, gender, class and other forms of social stratification inform Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police? The dissertation is prepared as a Multiple Manuscript Dissertation (MMD). The MMD is comprised of a literature review, a methodology chapter, three self-contained manuscripts, discussion of all manuscripts and a concluding chapter. The literature review provides a synthesis of previous scholarship to help situate my research and highlight the contributions it will make to existing IPV scholarship. The methodology chapter explains the data collection and analysis methods used in the study. The self-contained manuscripts form separate chapters and are integrated into the dissertation in a logical fashion. The first manuscript examines how to conduct research with hard-to-reach populations, in particular, Black women who have experienced IPV, some of whom have been
charged with a domestic violence offence. It discusses the challenges encountered during the research process and strategies used to address them. It also explores Black women’s motivations for participating in the study. The second manuscript explores the overlap between Black women’s victimization and criminalization. The third manuscript explores Black women’s experience with the police in which they were charged and/or arrested for domestic violence related offences.

The following provides a brief overview of the three manuscripts contained in this dissertation as well as highlights the research questions that each manuscript aims to address.

**Manuscript 1**

The first manuscript explores methodological concerns that surface when conducting research with Black women who have experienced IPV, some of whom have been criminalized for an IPV-related offence. These concerns include but are not limited to barriers or challenges related to sampling, recruitment and participation. The findings from this research provide strategies on how to engage with Black women so that they will be motivated to participate in subsequent research.

The extant research that examines how to recruit, retain and engage Black women who have been charged with an IPV offence is sparse. More research is needed in this area so that scholars can achieve more success in recruiting these women. The questions explored in this manuscript are:

1) What challenges are encountered when conducting research with Black women?

2) What strategies can researchers utilize during the research process with Black women who experienced IPV, some of whom are charged with an IPV-related offence?
3) Why do Black women choose to participate in a research study exploring their experiences of IPV and with the police? What factors influence their participation in this research study?

**Manuscript 2**

The second manuscript explores the overlap between Black women’s victimization and criminalization. This area of focus is of relevance to my dissertation because several U.S. studies have documented the high rates of Black women experiencing IPV (e.g. Field & Caetano, 2005; McCloskey et al., 2006). However, according to Hampton et al. (2003), “the situational context in which intimate partner violence occurs among African Americans is, in many ways, a product of the various structural forces (e.g., institutional racism, cycles of chronic underemployment and unemployment, poverty, etc.) that constrict the lives of African Americans” (p. 542). To shed further light on this discussion, some scholars have argued that Black women’s experiences of IPV are further complicated by various forms of oppression (West, 2005). The research questions for my second manuscript are:

1) What are Black women’s experiences of IPV?

2) How do Black women’s intersecting identities of race, class and gender influence how they perceive, experience and respond to IPV?

3) What are the consequences of IPV in the lives of Black women who are both victimized and/or criminalized?

**Manuscript 3**

The third manuscript explores criminalized Black women’s experiences with the police. I am particularly interested in not only Black women’s encounters with the police but uncovering their counter-narratives of their situations. For example, research has shown that stereotypical representations of Black women may impact their experience of IPV. According to Fenton
(1998-1999), “domestic violence is infused with stereotypes associated with race, gender and victimization. Racial stereotypes (often gender dependent) and gender stereotypes (usually race dependent) are used to qualify the meaning of the stereotypes associated with victimization” (p. 27). These stereotypes also affect the identities racialized women assign to themselves (Potter, 2006). Because higher rates of IPV are often perceived to be linked to cultural traits, communities of colour are at risk of being subjected to further stereotypes (Bubriski-McKenzie & Jasinski, 2014). Black women who do not conform to the “good victim” stereotype run the risk of having their victimization undermined and being classified as an accomplice (Harrison & Esqueda, 1999). This manuscript intends to add to the limited research that examines Black criminalized women’s experiences with the police from their perspectives. The research questions explored are:

1) What is known about Black women’s experiences with the police in the context of IPV?
2) Given their experiences with the police, what is their perception of the police?
3) To what extent do women construct counter-narratives of their experiences with the police and what does that involve?

**Objectives for the Dissertation as a Whole**

The overall objectives of this dissertation are: 1) to explore Black women’s experiences of IPV and highlight the overlap between their victimization and criminalization; 2) to examine Black women’s experiences with the police; 3) to inform social work knowledge and practice; 4) to inform future policy initiatives and 5) to propose recommendations for future research.
Review of Literature

The issue of IPV has evolved from not being recognized as a social problem to becoming a major issue for researchers. Prior to the 1980s, IPV, in particular, wife abuse was considered a private matter between intimate partners, mainly wives and husbands (Nored & McMullan, 2007). Due to efforts made by community activists and feminists, IPV was identified as a social problem in Canada and other societies across the globe (Fong, 2010). Specifically, the Violence Against Women Movement mobilized to insist on equal rights for women and demanded the eradication of sexual and physical violence against women. Over time, there has been an increase in the number of services (i.e. battered women’s shelters, feminist-based rape crisis centres) available to women (Backhouse, 1992). The criminal justice system also responded in the early 1980s by implementing mandatory charging and prosecution policies that required the police and Crown prosecutors to charge and prosecute in all incidents of spousal assault (Department of Justice, 2017a). The purpose of these policy directives was to remove the responsibility from victims to lay charges, increase reporting of assaults that occurred within intimate relationships and reduce reoffending (Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group, 2003, p. 160). These initiatives were designed to legitimize IPV as a crime and hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour (Barrett et al., 2011). These early efforts also impacted the academic community where scholars were simultaneously publishing research on the nature and prevalence of IPV (e.g. MacLeod & Cadieux, 1980; MacLeod, 1987; Smith, 1987).

In this chapter, I synthesize and critique relevant IPV literature to shed light on the state of knowledge, situate my research within a broader context and identify gaps in the scholarship. Through my review of the scholarship, I intend to show the relevance of my own investigation of Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police. I begin by reviewing the gender
symmetry/asymmetry debate by highlighting arguments from two perspectives, family violence and feminist. These two perspectives have attempted to elucidate violence that takes place in intimate relationships. Johnson’s (1995) typology of violence is also discussed as he has contributed to this debate by further contextualizing women’s use of force. I will then turn my attention to discussing Black communities’ involvement with the police followed by Black women’s experiences with the police. Finally, this section concludes by discussing Black women’s experiences with the police in the context of IPV.

**Family Violence versus Feminist Perspectives**

As research on IPV developed during the 1980s and 1990s, there emerged a divide between two main groups of researchers: those who adopted a feminist approach and located IPV in the context of the patriarchal nature of society and those who argued that violence was “de-gendered.” For the latter group, violence that occurred within the family setting could be perpetrated by women as well as men, and men could be victims of their partner’s violence. Differences between these two groups centred around three main issues: whether gender symmetry actually existed in relation to IPV; whether women’s motivations for violence were different from or the same as men’s; and whether the consequences of IPV were more severe for women than they were for men.

**Gender Symmetry**

Gender symmetry is the claim that women are as violent as or more violent than men. To support this standpoint, family violence researchers have typically drawn on findings based on the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS and CTS2). The CTS is a quantitative tool used to assess IPV perpetration and victimization. The original scale (CTS) consisted of three categories: violence, verbal aggression and reasoning. The CTS was later modified to CTS2, which consists of
physical assault, psychological aggression, negotiation, injury and sexual coercion (Straus, et al., 1996). Revisions were made to a) enhance content validity and reliability; b) increase clarity and specificity; c) better differentiate between minor and severe levels of each scale; d) account for sexual coercion and physical injury; and e) incorporate a new format that simplifies administration and reduces response sets (Straus et al., 1996).

For family violence scholars, women perpetrate violence at comparable rates to their male counterparts and, in some cases, women perpetrate more violence (Archer, 2000; Buttell & Starr, 2013; Fiebert, 2014; Straus, 2010). Family violence researchers assert that, “violence, aggression, and exploitation in its variant forms is dangerous, destructive, and consequential, regardless of the method of violence or the gender of its wielder” (Buttell & Starr, 2013, p. 119). From this perspective, those who use violence, either male or female, should be held accountable.

Several prominent studies have been used to support the claim that women’s use of IPV was slightly higher than that of men. In Archer’s (2000) meta-analysis of sex differences in physical aggression amongst heterosexual partners, he found that women were slightly more likely to use one or more acts of physical aggression and used such acts more frequently than men. The claim of symmetry was also evident in Fiebert’s (2014) article. He described over 343 empirical studies and reviews that showed that women used comparable physical aggression or more aggression than men.

The use of the CTS to measure violence in intimate relationships has been subject to several methodological criticisms, including: 1) only conflict-related violence is being measured; 2) no differentiation is made between less severe acts of violence and more severe acts of
violence; and 3) the context and consequences of violent acts are not taken into account (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

While feminist scholars acknowledge that women use violence in their relationships, they emphasize the importance of considering the context in which women engage in violence. Specifically, they maintain that given the patriarchal context in which violence occurs, violence is gendered: women are primarily victims of IPV (Johnson, 2008) and use violence in response to their partner’s violence (Potter, 2008).

In their Canadian study consisting of 18 women who have been criminalized, Comack and Brickey (2007) reported that women’s use of violence was a response to their victim status within their intimate relationships. Similarly, in their study comparing 33 female offenders and 32 non-offending females, Goldenson et al. (2007) found an association between exposure to violence and/or being a victim of domestic violence during one’s childhood and subsequent perpetuation of domestic violence in adulthood. Additionally, it was revealed that a greater frequency of victimization from either a partner or childhood abuse increased the likelihood that women would perpetrate violence against their partners (Swan et al., 2005). Dobash and Dobash (2004) interviewed 95 couples to better understand their use of violence in their intimate relationships. From their findings, they concluded that women’s use of violence in terms of “severity, consequences and victim’s sense of safety and well-being” differs significantly from their male counterparts (p. 324). In her theoretical paper, Ferraro (2013) postulates that “gender matters in our lives and in our experiences of IPV. Arguments about which sex engages in more violent acts distract us from the important work of generating the research, services, and policies that will end violence between intimate partners” (p. 147).
**Women’s Motives for Using Force**

Another area where family violence and feminist scholars disagree relates to women’s motives for using violence in their relationships (Buttell & Starr, 2013). Family violence researchers argue that women and men have similar motivations for engaging in violence in their relationships. In contrast, feminist researchers have argued that women’s motivations for engaging in violence in their intimate relationships differ from those of men.

Feminist researchers assert that women engage in aggression/violence in their relationships in self-defence (Hamberger & Larsen, 2015; Swan & Snow, 2003, 2006). This claim is supported by Caldwell et al. (2009). Their study examined women’s motives for engaging in IPV. Among their findings, they found that 83% of the women had used violence in self-defence. They also found that women who experienced greater victimization were more likely to engage in high levels of aggression and high levels of self-defensive acts. Although there were many Black women included in the sample, it was unknown to what extent Black women’s use of self-defence differed from the other women in the sample since the authors did not provide an analysis based on race.

In Potter’s (2008) study that examined Black women’s use of defensive actions, she found that most of the women (33 of 37) in her study engaged in some form of retaliatory action against their partners to protect and defend themselves. One of the women in Potter’s study stated, “I fought back, but I just got beat down. That’s the way I was. That was it. I was just getting beat. No big deal. Still, today, I don’t see it as domestic violence” (p. 128). Another participant explained her experience by stating: “I called him out of his name. He hit me. We started fighting…. I just kind of let him go ahead and beat me down. He’s a big guy, and I wasn’t gonna win this” (p. 90). As Potter indicated,
Because Black women usually are not afforded the same recognition for their ‘victimization’ as white women are, it is highly likely that Black women are viewed even more as responsible for the abuse committed against them, more than their white counterparts. White women are often seen as being in need of protection, and Black women are typically perceived as being able to protect themselves. (p. 52)

Some studies that examine women’s motivation for using violence in their relationships have presented contradictory findings. For example, while some researchers reported that women use IPV to exert power or control over their partners (Kernsmith, 2005; O’Leary & Slep, 2006; Ward & Muldoon, 2007) and at comparable or equal rates to men (Caldwell et al. 2009), others report that women are less likely to use violence to exert power/control over their male partners (Hamberger, 2005; Tanha et al., 2010). In Caldwell et al.’s (2009) study, more than 89% of their participants indicated that they used IPV to control their partners. Within this category, 68% of women said they used control because their partners tried to control them, while 67% of women identified that they used control to get their partners to do what they wanted them to do. However, for these authors, the consequences are greater for women who engage in violence in their relationships. In a sample of 762 couples, Tanha et al. (2010) reported that women in their study were more likely than their male partners to experience the use of coercion from their male partners in order to exercise control over them. Despite these mixed findings, feminist researchers would argue that the degree of power/control tactics utilized by women compared to men differs.

While there is still ongoing debate about women’s motivation for using violence, Swan and Snow (2006) emphasize the importance of examining women’s use of violence within social, historical and cultural contexts, a perspective that is in line with feminist scholars.
Consequences of Violence

Contrary to family violence researchers, feminist scholars have argued that the outcome and/or consequences of violence are different for women than for their male counterparts. Specifically, some are of the view that women who engage in violence in their relationships are more likely to suffer or sustain more severe injuries and experience more emotional and psychological issues than men.

In their report on findings from the British Crime Survey, Walby and Allen (2004) indicated that women were more likely than men to sustain some form of physical or mental injury. Approximately three-quarters of women compared to half of the men reported sustaining injuries. Similarly, Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. (1995) conducted a study of 199 couples mandated to a domestic violence treatment program. They found that females were more likely to be injured and report being afraid of further violence. Higher rates of injuries were also reported in Feder and Henning’s (2005) study. For example, overall, females were more likely to report higher rates of being assaulted and sustaining injuries than their male counterparts. In contrast, Weston et al. (2005) did not report any significant differences. Their study examined gender symmetry and asymmetry in the perpetration of mutual IPV, male primary perpetrators (MPP) and female primary perpetrators (FPP) with African American, Euro-American and Mexican American women. Among their findings, they did not find any significant differences in injury across the ethnicities. However, they noted that for MPP, African American women were more likely to sustain injury than African American men.

The consequences are more severe for women who use force in their relationships when it results in their arrest. Feminist scholars assert that criminalizing women makes them more vulnerable to manipulations and control by their partners (Henning et al., 2006) and allows
abusive men to use the criminal justice system against them (Bohmer et al., 2002). Women are also less likely to defend themselves for fear that they will be further penalized (Miller, 2001; Pollack et al., 2005). Additionally, Chesney-Lind (2002) and Dasgupta (2001) found that there were other consequences for females charged with an offence, including: loss of employment, child-custody issues and deportation. Victims charged may be unlikely to contact the police in the future for fear that a criminal record would have a negative impact on how they are dealt with by police officers (Henning et al., 2006; Henning & Feder, 2004; Rajah et al., 2006).

Women who experience IPV are more susceptible to mental health issues. Some research has shown an association between IPV and mental health conditions, which included depression, anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and suicide. Research has indicated that Black women frequently experienced psychological distress in the form of depression, anxiety and somatic complaints. For example, in their study that examined the relationship between IPV and mental health among 569 Black female patients, Houry et al. (2006) found that IPV was related to various types of mental health symptoms. Thirty-six percent of Black women experienced IPV within the past year of the study. Among this group of women, 24% reported moderate to severe depression symptoms, 15% reported moderate to severe PTSD, while 6% disclosed suicidal ideation. This research did not examine women’s experience of IPV in relation to their own perpetration of violence; however, Bubriski-McKenzie and Jasinski (2014) examined this relationship in their study. Using a majority Black (67%) and Latina sample, their study examined the mental health outcomes of women’s experiences of intimate terrorism (IT) and situational couple violence (SCV). The results showed differences across subgroups between Black and Hispanic abused women. For abused Black women, as the levels of control by an intimate partner increased, they were more likely to experience PTSD symptoms. However, this
was not the case for Hispanic women who had been abused. The authors noted that there was not much difference between control for both Black and Hispanic women and that control was fairly high for both groups. According to the researchers, “while the women in this sample are of similar socioeconomic status and gender, other elements of intersectionality such as race and ethnicity may be playing a significant role in why the results are different between the groups” (p. 1445).

Johnson’s Typology of Violence

Johnson (1995, 2006, 2008) has attempted to respond to the family violence and feminist perspectives by stating that much of the ongoing debate occurs because they are analyzing different phenomena. Specifically, Johnson argues that: a) partner violence is not a unitary phenomenon; b) family violence and feminist researchers use different sampling strategies—the first focusing on national samples and the second focusing on data from shelter populations, criminal justice and divorce court; c) the sampling strategies used by family violence and feminist researchers examine different types of partner violence—family violence researchers focus on common couple violence while feminist researchers focus on patriarchal terrorism; d) common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism are experienced differently by women and men.

To better capture the complexity of violence that occurs in intimate relationships, Johnson (2006, 2008) proposed a typology involving four major types of intimate partner violence: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, situational couple violence and mutual violent control. The first type of partner violence, intimate terrorism, occurs when one partner uses violence in the relationship to exert control over the other person; the other partner does not reciprocate violence. For Johnson, when people refer to domestic violence, they are referring to
intimate terrorism. The second type of partner violence, violent resistance, occurs when one partner uses violence and control tactics; the other partner uses violence in response to their partner’s violence but is not controlling. According to Johnson, this type of violence has received much attention in the media. Within the courts, some have classified violent resistance as the Battered Woman Defence. The third type of partner violence and perhaps the most common type of violence is situational couple violence. For Johnson, as conflicts occur in relationships, tensions or emotions rise; partners may react to ongoing tensions in the relationship and resort to violence. However, this type of violence does not involve the use of power control tactics by one or both partners but is provoked by different situations. The fourth type of partner violence, mutual violent control, occurs when both partners use violence in the relationship to gain control over the other person. This type is not as common as the others but truly reflects mutual combat between both partners (Johnson, 2008). According to Johnson, these types of violence have different causes, patterns of development and consequences, and require different forms of intervention (p. 1003).

Thus, Johnson maintained that researchers must distinguish among different types of intimate partner violence to “intervene effectively in individual cases or make useful policy recommendations” (p. 1013). However, his typology of violence has received criticisms from others. Capaldi and Kim (2007), for instance, argued that the “conceptual and clinical utility of typological approaches seem quite limited” (p. 12), particularly in clinical settings. Researchers are encouraged to adopt alternative approaches (such as the dyadic model of couple’s aggression) that consider both intrapersonal and interpersonal explanations of violence.

Despite the criticisms Johnson’s typology of violence has received, his contribution is relevant to the gender symmetry discussion because it highlights the heterogeneity of violence.
between intimate partners and further complicates women’s experiences of violence in their intimate relationships.

**Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence amongst Black Couples**

Although IPV scholarship has largely been consumed with documenting gender differences in IPV perpetration among white women and men, Black women’s experiences of IPV remain submerged in these discussions. This body of scholarship has not adequately interrogated the significance of race and how it intersects with gender and class. However, attention must be paid to understanding Black women’s unique experiences of IPV because research has consistently shown higher prevalence rates of IPV among Black women and men. The discussion that follows looks at the prevalence of IPV among Black couples as documented in several large population studies. These are highlighted because they are often cited when discussing the nature and prevalence of IPV among Black women and men. Nonetheless, early representations of Black women and men provided little explanation for racial disparities, which may lead to the assumption that they are more prone to IPV. Some of these studies showed that Black couples engaged in IPV more frequently than white couples and couples from other racial groups (e.g. Field & Caetano, 2005; McCloskey et al., 2006). As will be shown from subsequent studies, once other factors were accounted for, the significance of race in explaining the differences among couples diminished.

Though limited in some areas, there are over thirty years of research documenting the prevalence of violence among Black couples in large population studies (Straus et al., 1980; Rennison & Welchans, 2000; Black et al., 2010; Truman & Morgan, 2014). One of the first accounts of IPV among Black couples captured in Straus et al.’s (1980) survey indicated that Black couples were disproportionately overrepresented among those who used violence in their
relationships; violence was 400% more common among Black than white couples. However, caution must be taken when analyzing their findings, in part because Black women and men represented only a small number (147 of 1,996) of families interviewed. Their findings also did not take into account the context of violence or couples’ motivations for using violence in their relationships. Moreover, the authors maintained that in their opinion, stress, discrimination, frustration and being disenfranchised from various opportunities enjoyed by majority group members may explain the higher rates of violence reported by Black couples.

Ten years later, Rennison and Welchans (2000) documented similar findings. Black females and Black males were victimized at higher rates than persons from other racial groups. Findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) showed that the rate of nonlethal IPV for Black females between 1993 and 1998 was 11.1 per 1,000, which was the highest rate when compared to females who were Non-Hispanic (8.4 per 1,000), white (8.2 per 1,000), Hispanic (7.7 per 1,000) and Other race (4.1 per 1000). In sum, the rate of IPV victimization for Black females was 35% higher than white females and 2.5 times the rate of other racialized women. While their analysis was minimal, Rennison and Welchans’ (2000) explanation for the differences in IPV rates amongst these groups revealed that victimization rates alone did not provide a clear explanation as to why the rates varied across various racial groups. As they indicated, “Among women, being Black, young, divorced or separated, earning lower incomes, living in rental housing, and living in an urban area were all associated with higher rates of intimate partner victimization” (p. 3). Certainly, from their findings, we begin to get a clearer understanding that race alone does not explain IPV prevalence rates; however, several unanswered questions remain. For example, to what extent do race, gender, age, lower income and situational factors impact Black women’s experiences of IPV?
Higher prevalence of IPV among Black couples remained evident in more recent U.S. national surveys as well (Black et al., 2010; Truman & Morgan, 2014). Among other findings reported in The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 4 in 10 (43.7%) Black women compared to 1 in 2 (53.8%) multi-racial women, 4 in 10 (46%) American Indian or Alaska Native, one-third (37.1%) Hispanic women, one-third (34.6% or 28,053,000) of white women and one-fifth (19.6%) of Asian women reported that they had experienced intimate partner rape, physical violence and/or stalking. Unlike the previous surveys, Black et al.’s (2010) survey accounted for a more diverse group of women. However, they stated that racial minority women and men continued to experience higher rates of sexual violence, stalking and intimate partner violence, which may be a result of continued stressors experienced by these groups that may include low income, limited access to education, community resources and the social determinants of mental and physical health (p. 83). However, they did not discuss the ways in which these stressors impacted women differently, thus it is not clear how Black women’s experiences differ from women from other racial groups.

Comparative findings were noted in Truman and Morgan’s (2014) analysis of the NCVS data. According to the authors, between 2003 and 2012, non-Hispanic Black persons and non-Hispanic persons of two or more races had the highest rates of IPV and violence committed by acquaintances and strangers compared to non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic persons of two or more races. Specifically, during this period, non-Hispanic Black persons (4.7 per 1,000) and non-Hispanic persons of two or more races (16.5 per 1,000) had higher rates of IPV than other racialized groups. Truman and Morgan’s (2014) analysis of NCVS data provided no explanation for the differences among racialized groups, therefore little is known about what factors contributed to the differences in IPV rates amongst Black couples and couples from other
racialized groups. This is problematic because, with no explanation, these results imply that Black women and men are more predisposed to victimization and criminality than couples from other racialized groups.

Some of the studies discussed previously indicated that Black couples engaged in violence in their intimate relationships and, in many instances, were disproportionately represented as victims and offenders of IPV. However, from these results, it has been difficult to fully understand the extent to which Black women engaged in IPV or what factors accounted for their disproportionate numbers. It is also important to note that in some studies, there was only a small sample of Black participants. Such small sampling is problematic because generalizations cannot be made to the general population. Another notable issue is that some studies have produced inconsistent or contradictory findings (West, 2005; Hampton et al., 2005; Websdale, 2005). One possible explanation for the inconsistent findings might be the varied methodologies used across the studies (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Measurement instruments like the CTS may have produced contradictory findings because it did not account for severity, context and consequences of violence (Straus, 2007).

Indeed, IPV among Black couples is quite complex and cannot be explained by race alone. Some researchers have called for more research that examines the relationship between IPV, socio-cultural, situational and other known risk factors. For example, some researchers have found a strong association between IPV and socio-economic, neighbourhood and situational factors. However, in some instances, the effects of some of these factors were non-significant. Nonetheless, this body of research is relevant in better understanding the prevalence of IPV among Black couples.

Socio-Economic and Neighbourhood Factors
Previously, I discussed research that suggested that Black women and men experienced more IPV than white couples and couples from other racialized groups; however, in some instances, other racialized groups were more likely to experience higher rates of IPV than Black couples. Nevertheless, there was little discussion about what contributed to the differences among couples. The discussion that follows provides an overview of research that expanded on previous scholarship to explore the relationship between IPV and structural and social factors.

Rennison and Planty (2003) analyzed data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) between 1993 and 1999 to determine the relationship between race, gender, household income and IPV. Among their findings, they found that after controlling for victim’s gender and race, persons with annual household incomes of less than $7,500 experienced IPV victimization at a rate of 13.4 (per 1,000), whereas persons with annual household incomes of $50,000 or more experienced IPV victimization at a rate of 2.3 (per 1000). Once household income was factored in, the researchers found that rates of IPV were different along income instead of racial lines for both Black and white victims. IPV rates for Black and white persons with similar income were statistically equal. Once Rennison and Planty examined the role of gender, they noted that income, rather than race, accounted for differences among Black and white female victims. In sum, the findings showed that the relationship between race and IPV was not significant; rather, it was the relationship between IPV and the victim’s class and gender that showed statistical significance. While these findings help to better understand the role of race in IPV incidents in the United States, it certainly warrants more research to understand how gender, race and class are interrelated.

Cunradi et al.’s (2002) study provided further evidence of the relationship between IPV and social class. They examined the association between socio-economic status (SES) and
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on the probability of IPV among Black, Hispanic and white cohabiting or married couples in the United States. Along with other variables, the authors found that the annual household income for Black and Hispanic couples who reported male-to-female partner violence (MFPV) were significantly lower than those who did not report MFPV. Black couples who reported female-to-male partner violence (FMPV) had significantly lower annual incomes than couples reporting FMPV. There was no significant difference in mean years of education between white and Black couples reporting FMPV. The authors concluded that low socio-economic status was linked to increased risk of IPV and had a greater probability of IPV than education or employment status.

To better understand the prevalence of IPV among Black couples, researchers have also explored the relationship between IPV and neighbourhood factors. Research examining the extent to which neighbourhood predictors impact IPV is mixed; however, there is significant evidence that shows that some neighbourhood factors influence IPV. As Beyer et al. (2013) state, “this growing body of literature examining neighbourhood factors associated with IPV is an exciting contribution to IPV research. There is ample evidence to indicate that some aspects of neighbourhood may be risk markers or risk factors for IPV, independent of individual characteristics” (p. 26). This body of research has also challenged previous research that pathologized Black couples as more violent in their relationships than their white counterparts.

In their study, Caetano et al. (2010) examined the types of neighbourhood poverty and socio-economic factors (unemployment, working class composition and high school graduation) associated with female-to-male and male-to-female partner violence. Participants were part of a second wave of interviews from a national household sample in approximately 48 states in the United States of America. Their findings revealed that neighbourhood poverty was significantly
related to IPV. Additionally, when they examined Black couples, they found an association between female-to-male and male-to-female partner violence. However, once they considered socio-demographic and neighbourhood variables, the relationship between a person who is Black and female-to-male partner violence and male-to-female partner violence was insignificant. The researchers noted that their findings were different from previous research that analyzed the same data for several reasons; it used follow-up samples which included only intact couples and controlled for a different set of variables.

Benson et al. (2004) found a correlation between IPV and ecological contexts (i.e. social and economic disadvantage such as unemployment and poverty). In their empirical study, they sought to understand the extent to which African Americans and whites engaged in male-to-female domestic violence. They argued that the correlation between race and IPV for African Americans and whites was confounded by different ecological contexts. African American women were twice more likely than white women to experience violence at the hands of their partners even after controlling for age, level of educational attainment, economic distress and male drinking behaviours. But additional analyses showed that the relationship between race and violence was greatly reduced when African Americans were compared to whites residing in similar contexts. Initially, the rate for IPV among African Americans (9.6%) was significantly higher than that of their white counterparts (4.7%). However, once they accounted for varied ecological contexts, the authors found that the rate of violence for African Americans living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods was 11.4% compared to a 5.7% rate of violence for African Americans living in more advantaged neighbourhoods. The rates for white respondents had a similar relationship. For example, the rate of violence for whites living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods was 7.9% compared to a rate of 3.5% for whites living in the least
disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The findings revealed no significant differences among whites and African Americans residing in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and African Americans and white Americans residing in more advantaged neighbourhoods. There was a higher percentage (61%) of African Americans living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods compared to 14% of whites. In contrast, 33% of white respondents lived in the least disadvantaged neighbourhoods compared to 8% African Americans. In sum, the differences between African American women and white women were reduced when the authors took neighbourhood contexts into consideration. The authors also found that age was negatively associated with violence; however, substantive job strain, male instability and male problems with alcohol were positively associated with domestic violence.

In this discussion, I have highlighted the changes that occurred over time in the conceptualization of IPV among Black couples. While some studies indicated higher IPV rates among Black couples, findings from other research challenged these notions by stating that race alone did not explain the high prevalence rates among Black couples. In fact, some researchers have attempted to complicate the understanding of race and IPV by examining the relationship between IPV and social and situational factors. Despite these changes, a large body of research continues to show higher prevalence rates among Black couples with little or no explanation on how their experiences with the police further exacerbate their experiences of IPV. According to Hampton et al. (2003), “The situational context in which intimate partner violence occurs among African Americans is, in many ways, a product of the various structural forces (e.g., institutional racism, cycles of chronic underemployment and unemployment, poverty, etc.) that constrict the lives of African Americans” (p. 542). The contextual evidence provided in the subsequent section helps to further demonstrate the complexity of Black women's experiences of IPV.
Contextualizing Black Women’s Experience of IPV

I now present research that examines the intersections of race, ethnicity, class culture and IPV. As Bograd (1999) stated, “intersectionalities color the meaning and nature of domestic violence, how it is experienced by self and responded to by others, how personal and social consequences are represented, and how and whether escape and safety can be obtained” (p. 276). An intersectionality perspective is crucial to understanding how Black women’s victimization overlaps with their perpetration of violence and subsequent criminalization.

Racism

To further contextualize the issue, it has been argued that Black women’s experiences with IPV are related to their experience of racism. For example, according to Nash (2005) chronic racism may impact how Black women construct abuse in their intimate relationships. It may also impact how they respond to violent or abusive behaviours (Campbell et al., 2002).

The relation between perceived racial discrimination, IPV and health outcomes for Black women was evident in Waltermaurer et al.’s (2006) study. Of the 88 Black women represented in the study, the authors found that of the Black women who perceived that they had experienced racial discrimination, 71% reported that they had experienced abuse (i.e. physical, sexual) in the last year. In contrast, of the women who did not perceive racial discrimination, 44% experienced IPV in the last year. Based on their findings, Black women who reported experiencing perceived racism were more likely to be abused by an intimate partner than Black women who reported experiencing no perceived racism. They also found Black women who experienced both racism and IPV were more susceptible to increased mental and physical health symptoms. Similar findings were noted in Nash’s (2005) study that examined Black women’s experiences of IPV. Her findings indicated that most respondents who perceived “white racism” believed that it influenced their experience of marital tensions, which they associated with their partner’s
displaced anger from discrimination. Because of their experience of racism, Black women may remain in an abusive relationship and try to resolve issues of violence on their own. For example, although Black women may experience the family as an institution of violence and oppression, it provides a political retreat against racism and white supremacy (Chigwada-Bailey, 2004; McAdoo, 2002).

Research has also shown a relationship between women’s experiences of IPV and other forms of oppression. For example, Taylor’s (2005) study examined how intersections of gender, cultural violence and other social oppressions complicated Black women’s experiences of IPV. For one participant, her experience of IPV was directly linked to other forms of oppression in her life. According to this participant:

The relationship between the abuse and the [violence] are very closely tied to the experience of dual oppression of being Black and female. I believe I accepted a lot of what I accepted because I was never encouraged not to, as a woman or as a Black person. I [became] used to being treated badly. I had become immune to being treated badly. I had become immune to being second class. (pp. 1482-1483)

Although the extent to which racism impacts Black women’s experiences of IPV has received limited consideration (Waltermaurer et al., 2006), some research has shown that Black women’s experience of racism may lead them to remain silent about their victimization.

**Racial Loyalty and Protector Identity**

The experience of institutional racism may prevent Black women who experience IPV from seeking help. For example, some researchers explained that women may remain silent about their victimization for fear that members of their communities may view them as traitors (Razack, 1994; Sen, 1999). Thus, it is often easier for Black women to remain silent about their
victimization to maintain cohesion in their relationships and ward off external oppressions and stereotypical representations of Black families (Fenton, 2002). Some scholars have used the term “racial loyalty” to describe this phenomenon. Racial loyalty is defined as an African American woman’s decision to “withstand abuse and make a conscious self-sacrifice for what she perceives as the greater good of the community, but to her own physical, psychological, and spiritual detriment” (Bent-Goodley, 2001, p. 323). However, assuming this protective role puts Black women at an increased risk of physical harm (Bent-Goodley, 2004). Participants in Nash’s (2005) study assumed a protector identity in their intimate relationships to nurture and protect an abusive partner from the psychological repercussions of Black men’s marginalized status in society. According to one of her respondents,

There are so many [Black men] there [in prison] already. So, if we speak out and say, “He beat me,” then you are putting them in the penal system. . . [So,] you don’t “tell”! If you “tell,” you are putting a Black man in the system. If I told on Lee that means that the criminal justice system would be brought into play. That means another Black man would be put into the criminal justice system. And it’s your fault. (p. 1428)

Nash (2005) found that women also assumed a protector identity to protect their children. For example, she stated that, “several participants with children struggled with the uncertainty of not having a father in the home and how it could affect the social development and life chances of their Black sons. Generally, this influenced their decisions to remain in their abusive relationships” (p. 1429). Assuming a protector identity makes Black women more vulnerable to further abuse as they are forced to decide between protecting themselves or remaining loyal to their communities. As Coleman (1995) identified, Black women may find themselves having to make a choice “between claiming individual protection as a member of her gender and race or
contributing to the collective stigma upon her race if she decides to report the . . . misdeeds of a Black man to white authority figures” (p. 102, as cited in Ammons, 1995).

However, Bent-Goodley (2001) argued that not being able to speak about their victimization creates internal barriers for Black women, which entraps them and puts them at greater risk for further victimization and criminality. Richie (1996) advanced the concept of “gender entrapment” and described it as “the socially constructed process whereby African American women who are vulnerable to male violence in their intimate relationships are penalized for behaviors they engage in even when behaviors are logical extensions of their racialized identities, their culturally expected gender roles, and the violence in their intimate relationships” (p. 4). Davis (2014) expanded on Richie’s (1996) notion of gender entrapment by suggesting that, “African American women have been seduced or co-opted to adopt sets of gender and racial identities, principles, and concepts that have made them vulnerable to male emotional and physical violence” (p. 9). Assuming a protective role creates additional burdens for Black women who continue to remain in relationships characterized by abuse.

**Portrayals of Black Women**

Research has shown that stereotypical representations of Black women may impact their experience of IPV. According to Fenton (1998-1999), “domestic violence is infused with stereotypes associated with race, gender and victimization. Racial stereotypes (often gender dependent) and gender stereotypes (usually race dependent) are used to qualify the meaning of the stereotypes associated with victimization” (p. 27). These stereotypes also affect the identities racialized women assign to themselves and the way they are acknowledged and treated (Potter, 2008). For Hill Collins (2009), “stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning. Because the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power, elite
groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas about Black womanhood. They do so by exploiting already existing symbols or creating new ones” (p. 69). These representations are harmful to Black women. For example, Bell and Mattis (2000) maintain that, “representations of African American women in mainstream American culture contribute to the promotion, sustenance, and legitimization of violence against African American women” (p. 6). There are two re-occurring stereotypes that are frequently discussed in the literature; one representation is the image of a “Matriarch” and the second representation is the image of a “Jezebel.” The matriarch is defined as a Black woman who is angry, masculine, domineering and strong, whereas the Jezebel is defined as a Black woman who is sexually permissive (Moore, 1994-1995).

Gillum (2002) explored the stereotypes of “Matriarch” and “Jezebel” in her research. Specifically, she was interested in knowing whether there was a link between these stereotypical images and Black women’s experiences of IPV. Surveys were administered to 221 African American heterosexual men who were between the ages of 18 and 73 years. Participants were asked questions about their perceptions of African American women. The findings revealed that 94% of African American men endorsed positive images of African American women. However, African American men also endorsed one or both stereotypes about African American women; 48% of the sample endorsed the Jezebel stereotype, 71% of the sample endorsed the matriarch stereotype. There was 33% of the sample that endorsed both stereotypes. The results showed a link between stereotypical images of Black women and their experience of IPV. However, the Jezebel stereotype was more strongly associated with justifying IPV than the matriarch stereotype. The author hypothesized that belief in the matriarch stereotype may produce an element of fear in African American men, which makes them less reluctant to use violence,
whereas the belief in the Jezebel stereotype may prompt African American men to use violence to control Black women’s promiscuity. The author concluded that stereotypical images of African American women could be one of many factors related to IPV among African women and men.

Prevailing stereotypes of Black women place them in precarious positions in their intimate relationships and society. For example, Black women have been positioned in societies where they have had to physically defend themselves through histories of oppression to ensure their survival (Moss et al., 1997). Therefore, fighting back physically against their intimate partners has been seen as necessary by Black women to protect themselves in society (West, 2007). The defensive tactics used by Black women are evident in Potter’s (2008) study. For example, women who perceived themselves as “strong” and not “victims” were more likely to engage in efforts to protect and defend themselves from an abusive partner. According to one woman’s narrative:

I started to in the end, but of course, he’s bigger than me. He’s a man. He hits harder. I would try. I would slap him or push him away from me, but I can only do so much. Especially being pregnant, I’m not gonna endanger my kid. I would just try to protect myself from his rage as much as I could. (p. 126)

According to Bubriski-McKenzie and Jasinski (2014), because higher rates of IPV are often perceived to be linked to cultural traits, communities of colour are at risk of being subjected to further stereotypes. However, in Moore’s (1994-1995) opinion, stereotypes of Black women are problematic because they may be considered more blameworthy for their victimization. Black women who do not conform to the “good victim” stereotype run the risk of having their victimization undermined and being classified as an accomplice (Harrison & Esqueda, 1999).
The body of research discussed here expanded on earlier research that examined social and structural factors by highlighting how women’s intersecting identities of gender, race and class further complicate their experiences of IPV. In the section that follows, I expand on this discussion by introducing research that examines Black people’s experience with the police. A subsequent section then considers the disproportionately high numbers of Black women and men who are charged with an IPV-related offence.

**Black Communities’ Involvement with the Police**

There is a well-established body of research that documents Black people’s experiences with the police (e.g. Barrett et al., 2013; Gabbidon et al., 2011; Kiedrowski et al., 2015; Maynard, 2017). It has been argued that racial disparities exist on various levels of the criminal justice system and that Black people are more likely to be arrested and imprisoned than their white counterparts.

The term “racial profiling” has been used by scholars to refer to the differential or disparate treatment of racialized people in the criminal justice system, especially in situations related to police stops and searches. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2003), racial profiling is

any action undertaken for reasons of safety, security or public protection, that relies on stereotypes about race, colour, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, or place of origin, or a combination of these, rather than on a reasonable suspicion, to single out an individual for greater scrutiny or different treatment. (p. 6)

However, it has been argued that the term racial profiling does not fully capture the complexity of racialized people’s contact with the police (Comack, 2012). “Racialized policing” has been considered a more suitable term because it moves beyond individual or interpersonal
experiences of race and racism (Comack, 2012). As Comack notes, “racialized policing offers the potential to move us away from arguments that rest on simplistic claims that police are ‘racist bigots’ or the problem is one of ‘a few bad apples’ and enables a better appreciation of the complexity of the matter of encounters between racialized groups and the police” (pp. 63-65).

For Comack (2012), racialized policing allows us to broaden our focus to consider the role of the police as reproducers of order. Despite the terminology used by scholars, racial profiling or racialized policing is believed to have a significant psychological and social impact not only on individuals but also racialized communities. These include fear, lack of respect, mistrust, alienation and community division (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003).

One of the ways in which the effects of racialization and anti-Black racism were most evident was during the War on Drugs era that occurred in the United States. The term “War on Drugs” has been used since the 1970s to refer to the U.S. government’s initiative to address and take actions against the illegal drug trade. It was believed that crack (a cheaper alternative to cocaine) was used primarily by young Black and Hispanic males, which resulted in their higher incarceration rates. As Reinarman and Levine (1997) acknowledged, “crack was sold in smaller, cheaper, precooked units, on ghetto streets, to poorer, younger buyers who were already seen as a threat” (p. 2). During this time, white people also engaged in drug use but the probability of arrest for white people was much lower than it was for Black people. In fact, Black people were disproportionately arrested and received harsher sentences than white people. The War on Drugs “was a powerful contributor to the typification of criminals as Blacks” (Welch, 2007, p. 280).

Due to the large number of Black males that were incarcerated, many associated Black people with drug use, which further reinforced the association between Black people and crime (Welch, 2007, p. 280). However, these typifications are problematic because “they seem to justify law
enforcement tactics that exploit race in criminal investigations” (p. 286). Specifically, when certain crimes are linked to certain racialized groups, the police are more likely to profile those groups. Through the over-criminalization of Black people, these policies were intended to further erode and disenfranchise racialized individuals and communities by disrupting or preventing their participation in the labour market, and political and economic spheres (Roberts, 2004).

Another area in which racialized policing and anti-Black racism are evident is in scholarship on police arrests, stops and searches and sentencing practices. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s (2018) interim report, preliminary findings revealed that Black civilians are over-represented in all types of Special Investigative Unit (SIU) investigation. This overrepresentation appears to increase with the seriousness of cases, i.e. police shootings and death investigations. The police are more likely to use physical force against Black people than white people. Despite these troubling data, police officers are cleared of wrongdoing in over 95% of all SIU investigations involving the Toronto Police Service. In relation to their Black male counterparts, Black women are less likely to have contact with the police that results in an SIU investigation. Between 2013 and 2017, Black males represented 4.1% of the Toronto population, but accounted for 23.7% of all SIU investigations. Black females were under-represented in SIU investigations. Specifically, they represent 4.8% of the general population but accounted for 1.6% of SIU investigations. From these data, it is clear that Black men are more likely to be involved in encounters with police personnel that lead to an SIU investigation.

Another example where racialized policing is evident is in Wortley and Owusu-Bempah’s (2011) study. Using data from a 2007 survey of 1522 Black, Chinese and white Toronto residents, the authors sought to understand citizens’ experiences of police stop-and-search practices. Among other findings in their study, they found that Black (34%) respondents
were more likely to be stopped in the previous two years more frequently than white (28%) and Chinese (22%) respondents. It was also revealed that Black people were more likely to be stopped on three or more occasions by the police. Specifically, 14% of Black people were stopped by the police on more than three occasions compared to 5% of white and 3% of Chinese people. Black females (9%) were also more likely to be stopped by the police than white (8%) or Chinese (6%) females. Results also indicated that Black people were more likely to be searched by the police than white or Chinese respondents. In sum, Wortley and Owusu-Bempah (2011) maintained that, “if Black people are systematically stopped and searched more frequently than others, they are also more likely to be detected and arrested for illegal activity than people from other racial backgrounds who engage in exactly the same behavior” (p. 403).

Similar findings were evident in Gabbidon et al.’s (2011) U.S. study that examined Black people’s experiences with the police. They found minimal differences in the experiences of Black women and men; however, Black females in the South were less likely than Black men to believe that they were unfairly treated by the police. Overall, 20% of Black women and 30% of Black men believed that they were treated unfairly by the police within the last 30 days prior to the study. The authors concluded that while the experiences of Black women and men were similar in some instances, they were different in other instances. For example, Black men who were older and had higher incomes were less likely to perceive that they were unfairly treated. The researchers suggested that more research is required that examines differences in police encounters with the Black community across various incomes and neighbourhoods.

According to a Government of Canada Public Safety Report, less than 2% of police-citizen encounters result in police use of force (Kiedrowski et al., 2015). Arguably, these numbers may not be a true representation of the number of incidents resulting in police use of
force. Nevertheless, the number of racialized people injured or killed by the police has received increased attention in the media as well as in criminological and sociological scholarship. It is believed that police are more likely to use deadly or lethal force against racialized individuals. While much of this research has focused on police brutality against Black males, there is an increased number of Black women who have also been killed by the police. According to existing U.S. data tabulated from several sources, an estimated 55,400 people were killed or injured by the police in 2012 (Miller et al., 2016). According to the authors, these numbers are far from accurate, mainly because they are underreported or unidentified in U.S. Vital Statistics, FBI reports and Bureau of Justice Statistics (Miller et al., 2016).

Wortley (2006) noted that police use of force may increase tensions between racialized minority communities and the police. Given the proliferation of Black men who are killed daily in the United States at the hands of police, Chaney and Robertson’s (2013) study is not surprising. In their analysis of statistical findings presented in the National Police Misconduct Statistics and Reporting Project (NPMSRP) and comments from the NPMSRP website, they found individuals generally had negative perceptions of law enforcement. Specifically, among the themes generated from their study, the authors reported that respondents expressed a strong contempt for the law and members of law enforcement; they were suspicious of law enforcement and believed they were agents of brutality. In contrast, some respondents shared that members of law enforcement should be respected.

**Arrest Outcomes**

Research on arrest outcomes for Black people has also garnered increased attention. However, much of these data draws from U.S. data, which shows that Black people are over-represented among those who are arrested. They are also more likely to receive longer sentences
than members of other racialized groups (Russell-Brown, 2009). Further evidence of higher arrest rates for Black people living in the U.S. is revealed in the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR, 2016). In 2016, of the estimated 10,662,252 arrests that year in the U.S. Black people accounted for 26.9% compared to 18.4% of Hispanic or Latinos and 3.6% of individuals from other racialized groups (UCR, 2016). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2018), which is the primary source for criminal justice statistics in the U.S., reported that in 2016, Black males 18 to 19 years and males 65 years and older were more likely to be arrested than white people (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018).

Kochel et al.’s (2011) meta-analysis of 40 research reports that addressed legal and extra-legal variables found that minorities and Black people had higher odds of being arrested than white people in police-citizen encounters. While some studies reported more racial disparities than others, they found that on average minority suspects were 30% more likely to be arrested than white suspects. Although their study did not look at causes of racial disparity, the authors concluded that there was a need for solid empirical research that moves beyond race effects.

The number of arrests each year have also contributed to the growing number of people serving sentences. For example, in Canada, relative to their representation (3.5%) in the general population (Statistics Canada, 2017), Black people remain overrepresented in Canadian correctional facilities. Between 2016 and 2017, of adults incarcerated in a Correctional Service Canada (CSC) facility, 57.9% were white compared to 23.1% who were Indigenous and 7.5% who were Black (Public Safety Canada, 2018).

In this section, I discussed ongoing tensions between the police and Black communities. I highlighted several areas that have been the subject of intense debate: arrests for drug-related offences, racial profiling, police brutality and sentencing practices. This body of research
consistently showed that Black men are more likely to have contact with the police resulting in an arrest. While this body of research is important in informing discussions about police relations with Black communities, much of the focus in this area has been on the experiences of Black or racialized men. Nonetheless, the experiences of Black women can be informed by understanding the tension and conflicts that have characterized police-Black communities’ relations. Furthermore, this scholarship provides further context for how these relations may transfer into IPV incidents in which the police intervene.

**Black Women’s Experiences with the Police**

There is an abundance of research documenting Black men’s experiences with the police, including police use of force and brutality against Black and other racialized men. However, Black women’s experiences with the police have not received the same attention. The dearth of empirical evidence in this area has made it difficult to address the extent to which Black women come into contact with the police and the consequences of their encounters. Like their male counterparts, relative to their representation in the general population, Black women are disproportionately arrested, charged and incarcerated for criminal offences. However, the offending rates for Black women are much lower than their Black male counterparts.

The Canadian criminal justice system does not officially collect race-based data, except for data pertaining to Indigenous people, so it is difficult to get a clear picture from official crime statistics of the extent and frequency to which Black women are arrested. Inferences can be drawn, however, from the general population in Canada. In 2017, there were 942,777 persons, 12 years and older, accused of committing a crime reported to the police in Canada (Savage, 2019). Females (youth and adults) accounted for only one in four (25%) of all persons accused of a police-reported criminal offence. Offending rates of females were highest for those aged 18 to 24
(2,803 accused per 100,000 population) (Savage, 2019). Women accounted for 23% of all persons accused of a violent offence (i.e. use of or threatened use of violence, homicide, attempted murder, assault, sexual assault, robbery). Females (36%) were most often accused of assaulting an intimate partner (Savage, 2019). Compared to their male counterparts, women accounted for a lower percentage of those accused of a criminal offence in Canada. Considering these findings, it may be presumed that compared to Black men, there would be a smaller percentage of Black women accused of committing criminal offences in Canada.

There is a lack of attention to the issue of police brutality against Black women, which further contributes to their invisibility. However, with the increased scholarly focus and the proliferation of media coverage in recent years, more attention has been paid to documenting the disproportionate number of Black women who have been beaten, sexually assaulted and killed by the police (Crenshaw, 2015, Richie, 2012; Ritchie, 2006, 2017; Maynard, 2017). What remains evident from current scholarship is that Black women’s experiences with the police are rooted in larger social issues and systemic racism. Movements such as #SayHerName is one of the many ways in which racialized activists are bringing attention to the collateral consequences of the over-criminalization of Black women. Scholars have raised concerns around racially biased policing, documenting the number of unarmed girls and women who have died at the hands of the police (Jacobs, 2017; Maynard, 2017; Richie, 2012; Ritchie, 2017). However, little is done to help remedy the situation with many police officers not being held accountable or criminally liable for their use of lethal force against Black women (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018).
Black Women’s Experiences with the Police in the Context of IPV

There is extensive research on women’s experiences with the police or criminal justice system in relation to the type and frequency of contact they have had as victims and their perceptions and experiences with the police or criminal justice system (i.e. Bell et al., 2011; Bonomi et al., 2006; Davies et al., 2007; Dichter & Gelles, 2012). However, research documenting how Black women experience both the investigative and charging processes of the criminal justice system for IPV-related offences is limited. Moreover, only a few studies have explored the context and experiences of women’s arrest from the women’s perspectives (Li et al., 2014; Leisenring, 2011; Rajah et al., 2006; West, 2007). Even fewer examine the experiences of Black women (i.e. Dichter, 2013; Larance et al., 2019; West, 2007).

Some women may contact the police for support following a domestic violence altercation with their partners. Research addressing the likelihood of police contact is conflicted, with some indicating that Black women are more likely to call the police for help than other women (Lipsky et al., 2009; Lucea et al., 2013), while others reveal some reluctance on the part of Black women (Gover et al., 2013; Lanthier, 2008). Yet, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) are of the view that some racialized women’s over-reliance on the criminal justice system to intervene in intimate partner violence altercations make them more vulnerable to entrapment and subsequent criminalization.

Black women’s decision to report IPV victimization to the police is compounded by various factors, including the severity and frequency of violence, harassing behaviours committed by the abuser, the length of the relationship and women’s social support network (Davies et al., 2007). Women’s decision of whether to call the police is also based on whether they believed they were victims or primary aggressors. In their study, Lipsky et al. (2009)
reported that Black women who were victims of IPV were more likely to report violence to the police at higher rates than white women who also believed they were victims. In contrast, others have argued that women who had previous encounters with the police in which the outcome was negative or resulted in a charge were less likely to call the police in the future (Gover et al., 2013; Lanthier, 2008).

Scholars documenting women’s reluctance in reporting an IPV incident to the police have identified various barriers, including fear (Barrett et al., 2011; Lichtenstein, & Johnson, 2009). Some have noted that Black women’s reluctance to contact the police for help stems from their inequitable and unfair treatment in society and the criminal justice system (Loy et al., 2005) and mistrust (Petersen et al. 2004). For example, Wolf et al. (2003) reported that personal and situational factors were barriers for women calling the police for help. Specifically, women in their study believed that police biases about race, neighbourhood or sexual orientation affected police response time and quality of service.

For criminalized Black women, their experience with the police is not often pleasant, as was evident in Dichter’s (2013) study. The purpose of her study was to understand the experience of getting arrested from the perspectives of women who were also victims of IPV. Participants for the study were taken from a larger study of 173 adult women. Twenty-four women made up the final sample. African American women (66.7 %) accounted for most of the women in the study. Women shared that their experience of getting arrested was “traumatizing, degrading, and shocking” (p. 87). Women also did not expect that they would have been arrested. For some women, getting arrested was a turning point for escaping their partner’s violence. For other women, the consequences of getting arrested were severe (involvement of child protection, loss of financial support/employment, incurred legal fees, etc.). Women also
reported that the arrest led them to depression, suicidal attempts and the consumption of alcohol. One of the direct outcomes following a negative encounter with the police was that women who were arrested reported that they did not feel supported or safe in the criminal justice system (Dichter, 2013).

Issues surrounding an arrest are further compounded by Black women’s intersecting identities of race, class and gender. Several studies reveal that Black women believed that their race had an impact on their experience with the police. For example, West (2007) examined Black women’s experiences as victim-defendants of IPV. One participant believed that her race played a role in the police’s decision to arrest her. The respondent tried to explain the incident to the police by stating, “Y’all got it all wrong, he attacked me!” She concluded, “I’m being arrested because I’m a Black woman!” The police denied racial discrimination and told her that “color had nothing to do with it” (p. 107).

Women’s experiences may vary depending on whether the police intervened in situations in which they were perceived to be primarily victims or perpetrators. A few studies report that some women believed that they were wrongfully arrested. For example, in Pollack et al.’s (2005) qualitative study, the authors were interested in better understanding the context in which women’s use of force occurred within domestic violence situations as well as to provide policy recommendations to enhance the criminal justice response to women charged with a domestic violence offence. They found that some of the women in their study called the police for protection but were charged instead. The acts for which they were charged were women’s attempts at protecting themselves. The authors noted that women’s actions were more defensive than offensive. Ten of the women reported that their partners used their knowledge of the
criminal justice system to portray women as primary aggressors for them to be charged or arrested.

Dichter (2013) reported similar findings in her study. Results from the study revealed that women who had been victimized had called the police for help but were charged instead with an offence. One of the participants in Dichter’s study provides an account of “being set up” by her partner, which resulted in her arrest:

I do remember, after being slammed into the wall, him taking my laptop…. And, at this point, he was luring me out of my apartment to lock me out, and that’s when he scratched himself up… So, I was outside in the hallway with the cop and when the door opened, I noticed [my abuser] had scratches all over his chest. I didn’t do that. So, the next thing I know, the cop grabs me brutally by the arm and slams me, my face, against the door. I looked over at [my abuser] and he’s sitting calmly on the couch, smiling at me. I think he had done this before because he did this very calmly and smoothly. (p. 90)

Rajah et al.’s (2006) study provides another example in which a woman felt that she was wrongfully arrested. The participant shared that she was arrested after defending herself against an abusive partner.

I was like, how could this happen? I’m the one who did everything right, went to the cops. But he called the cops and everything, filed the report and everything. I’m the one who’s getting abused and I’m trying to stop it. And I’m going to jail? I was so upset. It was, it felt like . . . I was betrayed by the justice system, by the cops! Why, why should I be treated like a criminal when I didn’t do anything wrong, but protect myself? And, that was so unfair. (p. 903)
Concluding Remarks

In summary, there has been substantial debate between two opposing camps, the family violence and feminist perspectives, about whether gender symmetry exists in the perpetration of IPV. These perspectives have assisted broadly in framing discussions of IPV among Black couples. However, there is a dearth of Canadian research that examines Black women's experiences of IPV. Early IPV scholarship focused mostly on a gender and race analysis to discuss differences in incidence and prevalence rates among couples. Over time, there has been some shift in these discussions with an inclusion of the various factors that influence Black women experiences of IPV. Another area where there has been limited data is research that captures Black women’s experiences with the police. Research on the policing of racialized populations has focused on racialized or Black men. Despite recent developments in the field, existing accounts of Black women’s experience with the police are mostly informed by research conducted in the U.S. More Canadian research is needed that takes into account how Black women's intersecting identities of gender, race, class complicate their experiences of IPV and the police. My study intends to address some of these research gaps.
Methodology

This chapter identifies and discusses the methodological framework that was utilized for my research. It provides a rationale for employing a qualitative methodology, and describes the research design, procedures for data collection, research sample and data analysis. It concludes with a chapter summary. The three self-contained manuscripts are then presented.

Overview

The current study used a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is a means by which research is conducted to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem and the complexities of their experiences (Creswell, 2008; Padgett, 2017). It considers the social construction of reality while accounting for the relationship between the researcher and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In qualitative research, “the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 5). Qualitative methods are especially appropriate when vulnerable populations are involved because these methods are flexible and fluid (Liamputtong, 2007). Qualitative methodology is the most suitable approach for my study because it allows me to place Black women’s experiences at the centre of the discussion and better understand the meanings they attach to their experiences.

Research Design

The research design was chosen to correspond with my research problem, questions and theoretical framework. Developing a comprehensive approach to sampling was crucial during the research process because it allowed me to evaluate whether the methods selected were required, appropriate or adequate (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This approach also assisted me in determining how to recruit participants, how participants would be identified, the type of participants that would be involved and how the sites would be determined. I utilized a combination of sampling strategies to reach and increase the number of participants in the study.
Participants were recruited by using two selection techniques: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. I began the initial recruitment of participants for my study using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, also known as purposeful sampling or intentional sampling, is a widely-used technique in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015). It involves choosing a group of people from which the researcher gains substantial knowledge about their experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). Purposefully selecting participants for my study had many benefits because this method allowed me to identify a specific group of Black women with similar experiences, in this case, with IPV and the criminal justice system.

The second sampling strategy I used for my study was snowball sampling. Researchers use snowball sampling to access informants or participants when other avenues have been exhausted (Noy, 2008). Specifically, it refers to a process whereby the researcher speaks with one or more individuals and asks that person to nominate someone else that they believe would make a positive contribution to the research. The researcher then contacts the nominated individual and asks them to nominate additional participants. Subsequently, the sample snowballs as new people are recruited and refer other participants (Denscombe, 2010). One of the disadvantages of using snowball sampling is that it may limit the diversity of participants for the study. However, to address this issue I used different methods of locating participants, including speaking with colleagues and other personal contacts, connecting with various organizations and agencies, advertising through various media outlets and making use of other social network platforms (Taylor et al., 2016).

Another important aspect of the research process is determining the number of participants to interview to uncover adequate data or reach data saturation (no new data). However, there is little consensus among qualitative researchers on what sample size leads to
saturation (Dworkin, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018). In his study that examined 560 qualitative Ph.D. studies, Mason (2010) found that the most common sample sizes used by researchers were 20, 30, followed by 40, 10 and 25. However, Mason maintained that being able to elicit rich data may have more relevance to researchers than sample size. Sandelowski (1995) suggests that “an adequate sample size in qualitative research is one that permits … the deep, case-oriented analysis that is a hallmark of all qualitative inquiry, and that results in a new and richly textured understanding of experience” (p. 183). The number (18 to 25) of participants to interview was pre-established prior to conducting my study. It was believed that this range of participants would offer diverse perspectives and inform my research questions. Considering the recurrent themes and theoretical insights extrapolated from the data, the final sample size of 25 participants seemed appropriate to elicit rich analysis of Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police.

**Research Site**

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) was chosen as the research site for my study as it has a diverse number of Black women and provided me with easier access to this population of women. However, due to the limited initial responses from women in this area, recruitment was extended to areas outside of the GTA, including Durham Region, London, Kitchener and Windsor. While recruiting outside of the GTA was beneficial in generating a more diverse group of women, in the end there was a larger representation of Black women who reside in Toronto.

When deciding on sites, I considered “the role of a particular site in the community, who will be there, participants’ roles and researcher’s role, and how identities and positions would be constructed in a particular place” (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p. 656). I established relationships with community partners who were willing to provide a meeting room to conduct interviews.
Specifically, I was successful in getting the commitment of two churches and one agency to use their facility to conduct the interviews. However, I ended up not using these locations (located in Durham Region) because they were the least accessible for participants when compared to a local library or participants’ homes.

Public libraries and participants’ homes were the most appropriate field sites because they provided appropriate privacy for me and the participants; in the case of libraries, participants could also find and travel to these sites easily. I interviewed most participants in a study room at a public library near their homes while some participants requested to be interviewed in their homes. The time and location of interviews were pre-arranged and negotiated with participants. Based on the locations selected, there did not appear to be any known immediate safety risks to the women or myself (Sullivan & Cain, 2004).

**Data Collection Methods**

Data collection occurred over a 7-month period. Specifically, it began in June 2018 following ethics approval (See Appendix A) and was completed in January 2019. Although my initial desire was to solely recruit women who were charged with an IPV-related offence, I anticipated that I would encounter difficulties based on previous challenges recruiting this population. Thus, I broadened my criteria to also include women who reported experiencing IPV but were not charged. It took approximately one month to recruit the first set of participants. Contact was made with a total of 26 women. Most of the participants (18) were recruited between September 2018 and January 2019. By November 29, 2018, consent was received from 24 women who were subsequently interviewed. Two other participants contacted me between December 2018 and January 2019. Of these two participants, I was able to successfully gain
consent and set up an interview with one of them resulting in a final sample of 25 Black women. None of the women for which consent was given, withdrew from the study.

My intention was to initially recruit the sample of women from shelters, probation offices, legal aid clinics, community health centres and other social service agencies within the GTA that provide counselling, advocacy and support to women who have experienced abuse in their intimate relationships and/or have been charged with an offence. I contacted approximately 213 agencies and professionals by email and phone. However, it proved difficult to recruit women from shelters, probation offices and legal aid clinics. Women recruited for the study were primarily from agencies providing services to women who have been criminalized and using social media. This approach attracted other women, including those who had a relationship with a social services agency not specifically providing services to victimized or criminalized women.

The recruitment process started by researching all social service agencies in the GTA and surrounding areas that provided services to Black women who have been abused or have been charged with an offence. Once I had generated a list of relevant agencies and service providers, I visited the organization’s website to locate the name of the executive director. In some cases, this information was not listed on the website. In these cases, I contacted the agencies directly to request the contact information for the executive director. In other instances, only a phone number was available, thus I contacted the executive director initially by phone. An email was sent to the executive director or program manager at each agency to determine their interest in supporting my research (See Appendix D). A recruitment script, a flyer (See Appendix C), and an approval letter from the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board were provided to the agencies through both email and mail. In some instances, program managers requested to speak with me by phone to learn more about my research or requested an in-person meeting. I
attended staff meetings or a house meeting to provide additional information about my research. While many agencies were contacted by phone and email multiple times, some agencies did not respond at all.

Qualitative researchers generally collect data through observations, interviews or document analysis and, in some cases, may use a combination of more than one method (Patton, 2002). Data were collected from three sources: a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix G), semi-structured interviews and personal logs of the researcher (See Appendices K and L) that captured contact with participants and other relevant information.

For the demographic questionnaire, women were asked to share information related to their education, household income, place of birth, religious affiliation and so forth. Participants were provided with an electronic copy of the questionnaire to complete prior to our meeting. All the women, with the exception of four women, completed the questionnaire prior to their interview. Time was set aside during our meeting to assist the four women to complete the questionnaire. Participants had the option of receiving an electronic copy of their responses.

Interviews are valuable because they help to contextualize people’s behaviour and allow researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour (Seidman, 2006, p. 10). Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (2012) note that, “through such research interviews, researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own” (p. 3). Semi-structured interviews were considered the best method to gather information from participants about their lived experiences and the meanings they attach to these experiences. This format allowed me to have a list of questions to explore, provide flexibility around the order of issues raised and the freedom to expand on points of interest (Denscombe, 2010). I used an interview guide (See Appendix H) which outlined specific questions that I
intended to ask participants during the interview. Participants were asked a combination of specific and open-ended questions, which allowed me to probe for additional information. According to Patton (2002), there are six types of questions that may be useful in stimulating rich responses from participants: questions that focus on their experiences/behaviours, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory perceptions and demographic characteristics. Patton’s recommendation was used to inform the types of questions I asked participants during the interview. For example, participants were asked questions about their experience of IPV in their intimate relationships. For my research, IPV was broadly defined as emotional, verbal, psychological and/or spiritual, physical, and sexual abuse. Women were asked to share their own definition of the types of interactions that may arise in their intimate relationships. For women who were charged, questions were also asked about the events leading up to their contact with the police in which there was an investigation resulting in a charge against them. They were asked to give their account of what happened when they called the police and what transpired during their encounter with the police to assess the nature of their interaction with the police as well as the consequences of the arrest.

Every effort was made to conduct in-person interviews. Women who may have been uncomfortable sharing sensitive information in a face-to-face format were given the option of completing their interview via telephone, Skype or Zoom. Providing participants with alternative options was also meant to remove other potential barriers such as issues around transportation or childcare. However, all participants agreed to an in-person interview.

Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted for approximately two hours. The initial thirty minutes of the interview was set aside to establish trust and build rapport. This approach was necessary with the women I interviewed because of their marginalized status. It was essential to
me that women were at ease prior to disclosing intimate details of their lives. I began the session by asking women if they were comfortable; in some instances, I brought snacks or refreshments that I offered to participants. I showed genuine interest in the information they shared with me. The initial conversation with the women focused on aspects of their lives that were most relevant to them, including personal or professional aspirations. I engaged in some self-disclosure when necessary; however, care was taken to ensure the attention was on the women. Building rapport and establishing trust with participants proved beneficial because once I began to ask participants questions, they appeared to be a lot more comfortable and relaxed when responding. Participants received an honorarium of $35 for their involvement in the study. Women were informed that it may be necessary to conduct follow-up interviews to capture additional information. While no follow-up interviews were conducted, I emailed or phoned a few participants to get clarification on a few demographic details. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their personal information.

A personal log was developed to capture relevant information about participants, which included their names, date of interview and referral source (i.e. agency, professional contact, community board, social media, referral by another participant). A second log was created consisting of the following categories: 1) women’s names; 2) victimized or victimized/criminalized; 3) engaged in defensive or retaliatory acts; 4) person who called the police; 5) likelihood of future call to the police; 6) previous record; 7) charge; 8) positive or negative police encounter; 9) consequence of charge; 10) Children’s Aid Society (CAS) involvement; and 11) perception of the police. These logs provided a quick reference and summary of key components of my data. They were also beneficial when providing statistical information about women’s experiences and analyzing my data.
**Research Sample**

At the early stages of my research conceptualization, I had proposed to interview Black women who were charged with an offence as well as police officers who had contact with Black women in which they charged and arrested them. My intention in interviewing these two groups was to understand their unique perspectives and strengthen my analysis of police encounters with Black women. However, my committee expressed concerns with access to both groups and the possibility of an oppositional binary. To address their initial concerns, I did not interview the police for this project, but may consider interviewing them at a later date. Black women who experienced IPV but were not charged with an offence were also included in the sample. Interviewing both groups of women allowed me to broaden the pool of participants and achieve a desired sample size of 18 to 24 women.

The final sample consisted of 25 women: 10 of the women had a recent experience of IPV and 15 women were both victims of IPV and arrested for an IPV-related offence. It is important to note that while IPV occurs in all types of relationships, including same-sex relationships, my research focuses solely on violence that occurs in heterosexual relationships. Inclusion criteria were based on the following: a) self-identify as Black; b) over the age of 18; c) in a heterosexual relationship, marriage or living in a common-law or cohabiting relationship at the time the police got involved; d) live in the GTA or surrounding areas. An age restriction was put in place to ensure that women were able to legally provide consent on their own. Although education and social class were not criteria for inclusion, women were asked to share their level of education, household income and other demographic information (See Appendix G). The income categories used to capture participants’ household income are consistent with those identified by Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). This information
was used to better understand how and to what extent social class might influence Black women’s experiences of IPV and their experiences with the police.

**Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Critical race feminism was used to analyze and synthesize my data. It also helped me to conceptualize Black women’s experiences of IPV and their experiences with the police. CRF is relevant in the research process especially when questions regarding methodology, epistemology, positionality, voice and who speaks for whom arise (Parker & Lynn, 2002). According to Hylton (2012), critical race theory implies “a critical epistemological root, though knowledge development has suffered from mainstream agendas that have neglected new emergent forms of research” (p. 26). However, consistent with its liberatory, emancipatory and transformative focus, CRF proponents believe in centring the voices of those who are marginalized. Using CRF allows me to bring forward narratives and counter-stories as a way of developing a “voice of colour” to “name Black women’s own realities” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, p. 139). From this framework, people of colour are well positioned to speak of their lived experiences in ways that are most comfortable to them. This is a critical component of CRF because it provides the space for Black women to dispute hegemonic discourses and representations that construct them as aggressive and violent. Subsequently, Black women can create counter-narratives that better reflect and consider their lived experiences.

I transcribed most interviews; the remainder were transcribed by two online transcription services. I began the coding process once all interviews were completed. Coding played a significant role in the analysis as it allowed me to interpret and analyze the data. Data used for coding may consist of but not be limited to interview transcripts, field notes and journals (Saldana, 2016). Open-coding in qualitative research “is done to develop the initial descriptive
codes around which all subsequent data will be organized or grouped. These codes are abbreviations that establish descriptive categories or groupings in the data” (McNabb, 2009, pp. 294-295). Specifically, a code refers to a word, phrase or sentence from a whole document. Data coding usually consists of “identifying ‘chunks’ or ‘segments’ in your textual data and giving each of these a label (code)” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 349).

The first part of the coding process involved uploading transcripts to NVivo 12 for Mac (version 12.3.0). NVivo is a computer software that supports qualitative and mixed-methods research (QSR International, n.d.). Utilizing a software such as NVivo allowed me to be more organized, store and retrieve my data quickly and work efficiently; it also reduced the amount of time it took to analyze my data. In addition, I utilized the framework outlined by Miles et al. (2014) to better understand emerging themes from my data alongside NVivo. The process of uncovering data using this framework includes three interconnected and continuous streams: data condensation, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions. While this framework served as a useful guide, coding my data was certainly not a linear process as it was often necessary to move back and forth between these various stages to uncover meaning from the women’s narratives.

*Data Condensation*

The first stream for qualitative data analysis identified by Miles et al. (2014) is data condensation. Data condensation “refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interviews, transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials” (p. 31). I immersed myself in the data to select, focus and simplify relevant areas. Immersing myself in the data was done by listening to each interview recording and reading and rereading the interview transcripts.
This initial immersion allowed me to make notes of relevant information and gain more familiarity with the interviews. After reading each interview transcript, I had a preliminary understanding of some of the recurring themes, which assisted me in determining areas of focus. I also utilized the text search and word search features in NVivo, which allowed me to quickly cross-reference my initial review of the data.

Some themes were predetermined based on my review of the literature, my theoretical framework and my research questions. In NVivo, these themes are classified as nodes. According to Bazeley and Jackson (2013), “nodes provide the storage areas in NVivo for references to coded text. Each node serves as a container for everything that is known about one concept or category. Nodes can be used also as a tool to organize qualitative data in particular ways” (p. 17). I created parent nodes (See Appendix J) that represented my three research questions; these nodes were organized under the headings, Manuscript 1 (Black women’s experiences of the research process). Manuscript 2 (Criminalized Black women’s experiences of IPV) and Manuscript 3 (Criminalized Black women’s experiences with the police). Then, child nodes or sub-categories were created under these core headings and organized as question 1, question 2 and question 3; these subheadings represented the three set of questions for each manuscript. Additional themes were created under the research questions of each manuscript. As I read each interview transcript, I dragged and dropped text that was related to my preliminary nodes. I also used the quick coding bar to move my text to the appropriate node. I went through the first five interviews to create preliminary themes; however, as new themes emerged, new nodes were created. Some of the nodes created for each manuscript and respective questions included: childhood witness and experience of abuse; partner’s violence; response to violence;
overlap between victimization and criminalization; drugs or substance use; women’s perception of the police; and women’s understanding of how they are perceived by the police.

Data condensation was beneficial at the onset of my research as well as throughout the research process as it provided guidance for subsequent interviews. For example, based on the data generated from the first set of interviews, I was able to adjust the types of interview questions I asked participants. Specifically, Manuscript 1, question 1 asked, why do Black women choose to participate in a research study exploring their experiences of IPV and with the police? What factors influence their participation in this research study? The initial interview questions that were developed centred on women’s interest in the research and included the following: Could you please tell me how you heard about this research study? Why were you interested in this study? What was your reason for agreeing to participate? What do you hope to gain from participating in this study? However, the initial interview questions developed for Manuscript 1 were too few and general. In addition, after reviewing the first set of interviews, I did not get a clear enough understanding of the women’s motivations for participating in my study. These initial questions were therefore revised to include the following questions: Is this the first time you are participating in a research study? How likely do you believe Black women are to participate in research studies? Why? Do any of the reasons you discussed apply to you? Were there obstacles to you participating in this study? Is there anything you would like to share about your experience of the research process? What do you believe researchers can do to increase participation of Black women in research? The revised questions further contextualized Black women’s experiences at various stages of the research process and contributed to a richer analysis of my data.
For Manuscript 2, Black women were initially asked the following questions: Have you experienced abuse from a previous partner? Could you please tell me more about this experience? For example, how often did the abuse occur and how long did it last? What was the outcome of your experience? While these questions were relevant, before I delved into their experiences of abuse I considered it necessary to also understand how Black women defined abuse in their lives and whether they believed race or their upbringing influenced their understanding and experiences of IPV. Revised questions included the following: How would you define an altercation between a man and a woman? Do you believe your race influences your perception of domestic violence? How has this affected you? Do you believe your culture or your upbringing influences your understanding of domestic violence? How? Asking women these additional questions prior to asking them about their experiences of abuse was beneficial because they were less invasive and allowed me to gradually build up to subsequent questions. They also provided flexibility for women to elaborate on their experiences.

Data Display

The second stream of qualitative analysis identified by Miles et al. (2014) is data display, which is “an organized, compressed assembly of information that allows conclusion drawing and action” (p. 31). At this stage, I was able to examine my data to discern how the data were unfolding and then decide whether further analysis was required or the data that were uncovered were sufficient to begin initial interpretation. I utilized some of the features in NVivo, including a codebook (See Appendix J) and a hierarchy chart. Once I generated a codebook, I could see the descriptions of each node. The hierarchy chart allowed me to “visualize a hierarchy of files or nodes as a tree map or sunburst to see coding patterns” (QSR International, n.d.).
Data display was ongoing and occurred throughout the coding process. For this stage, I reviewed all my themes and made revisions as necessary. For example, once I reviewed my data, nodes were renamed or reorganized or merged with other related nodes. Core nodes were based on nodes with most files attached (i.e. interviews). Following this process and using Manuscript 1 as an example, I was able to uncover the following prominent themes to draw conclusions: privacy and confidentiality; sharing to help other women; having a voice; sharing to help researcher; and closure.

**Drawing and Verifying Conclusions**

The third stream of qualitative analysis identified by Miles et al. (2014) is referred to as conclusion drawing and verification. At this stage, I developed a preliminary interpretation of what things meant by “noting patterns, explanations, causal flows, and propositions” (p. 32). Once core nodes were generated, I reviewed all the coded text from all interviews to interpret and discuss findings for each manuscript. Some of the initial conclusions that were drawn included: Black women experience various forms of violence and at different stages in their lives; women are primarily victims of IPV; the overlap between victimization and criminalization is significant; and women’s experiences with the police are influenced by their perception of the police and how they believe they may be perceived by the police.

The process of drawing interpretations and conclusions was continuous and became more explicit as I immersed myself in the data. For example, general conclusions were drawn after reviewing my data. As new data were uncovered, these conclusions became more explicit.

**Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research**

There is no consensus among scholars on the broad range of criteria used by qualitative researchers when evaluating the quality of their work or whether these strategies contribute to
valid and trustworthy research (Barusch et al., 2011). However, as Porter (2007) argues, “some approaches to validity, trustworthiness and rigour are better suited than others” (p. 5). Some scholars have advocated for the use of several strategies, including but not limited to the use of a sampling rationale, triangulation and identifying problems/limitations of the study (Barusch et al., 2011). Others have ensured trustworthiness in their qualitative study by using reflexivity, an audit trail, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking and prolonged engagement (Lietz et al., 2006). Still, Lincoln and Guba’s (1986) evaluative criteria for trustworthiness involve credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Irrespective of the strategies used to evaluate rigour or trustworthiness in one’s research, Davies and Dodd (2002) suggest the criteria used to evaluate the quality of the research must be appropriate and in line with the research methods. While attention to trustworthiness is crucial, to enhance the quality of their research researchers must also determine the extent to which their research advances a social justice approach (Lyons et al., 2013). I am of the belief that it is necessary to establish and assess the procedures or approaches I utilized to ensure trustworthiness of my research. Accordingly, I incorporated a combination of strategies proposed by various scholars. These included: credibility, dependability, reflexivity and impact on social justice (Lietz et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Lyons et al., 2013). These strategies were fluid and at times overlapped with each other. It was important for me to adapt a set of criteria that were both contextually relevant, flexible and complemented the type of research I was conducting. Adapting these principles allowed me to capture my engagement with participants and highlight my approaches in the research.

Credibility
Credibility in qualitative research involves thick descriptions, triangulation and multivocality. These involve providing concrete details of research findings, making use of multiple data sources and attending to various viewpoints of participants (Tracy, 2010). Credibility is achieved throughout the research process through prolonged engagement with participants, persistent observation, triangulation of data, peer debriefing, negative case analysis and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Patton (1999) highlights three areas in which qualitative researchers can enhance credibility: a) rigorous techniques and methods for collecting and analyzing data; b) the credibility of the researcher; and c) philosophical belief. To illustrate credibility, I used different sources to gather data (e.g. interviews and questionnaires). Attempts were made to engage with participants outside of the interviews. For example, I conducted screening interviews with participants to determine whether they met the criteria for inclusion. When necessary, I followed up with them to respond to their queries or to collect missing data. For instance, as I reviewed and coded my transcripts, I realized there were missing responses from participants. I contacted them to collect this additional information when it was deemed necessary. In addition, I presented accurate data and made appropriate interpretations that reflected women’s narratives (Miles et al., 2014).

**Dependability**

Qualitative research is also assessed by its dependability, which relates to the quality and integrity of the research. Qualitative researchers ensure their findings are dependable and consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). I must demonstrate my dependability as a researcher as well as that of the research. To enhance my dependability as a researcher, I provided explicit detail about my role and how my positionality influenced the research. I also clearly identified my research questions, and collected data from a variety of women, across
different sites and at different times. Moreover, I provided sufficient information to reveal how I arrived at certain conclusions (Miles et al., 2014).

**Reflexivity**

Engaging in reflexivity is also considered a critical component of qualitative research (Lietz et al., 2006). It entails an appraisal of oneself, how I am situated in relation to participants and how these affect the research setting and how data is collected and interpreted (Berger, 2015). For Ravitch and Carl (2016), reflexivity “necessitates that you assess and continuously reassess your positionality, subjectivities, and guiding assumptions as they directly relate with and shape your research” (p. 1169). Engaging in a reflexive process was evident at the onset of my dissertation. For example, I provided a critical self-evaluation of my positionality and discussed how it informed my research. I was also aware of the operations of power and control throughout the research process and their impact on the participants, professional colleagues and communities. In addition, recognizing the power differential inherent between myself and the participants, I embraced the fact that they were experts in their lives. Engaging in reflexivity allowed me to use CRF to critically examine the underlying assumptions made about whose knowledge gets validated and legitimized. Thus, I was intentional in positioning Black women’s voices at the forefront of my study. I also engaged in reflexive practice when discussing how my insider/outsider identity influenced my engagement with participants.

**Impact on Social Justice**

While there are controversies about the meaning of social justice and how one theorizes about its application in social work (Hutchison, 2010), some scholars argue that these discussions must question assumptions about race and culture (Reisch, 2008). Thus, a priority for social workers is to advocate for racialized people and challenge social inequality, particularly
for those who live at the margins of society. Lyons et al. (2013) refer to four aspirations of socially just qualitative research: equity, access, participation and harmony. These aspirations provide a useful model to discuss how this was achieved in my research. One of the ways in which I aspired to be equitable was to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the experiences of women. I took steps to provide access to my research by removing barriers. For example, I utilized various recruitment strategies to inform women about the study. To increase their participation, I conducted interviews in women’s homes or in close proximity to their homes. I provided them with a reasonable incentive to offset some of the costs associated with their participation. Attempts were made to accomplish a harmonious process by conducting respectful and ethical interviews, considering potential benefits and negative consequences of my research and taking steps to manage these issues (Lyons et al., 2013). Interviews were only conducted with women after they expressed an interest in the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are an essential component of the research process as they urge researchers to not only consider procedural and documentation matters but to have an awareness of the ethical issues they may face during the research process as well as negotiate ways to address them (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Ethical approval was sought and acquired from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Wilfrid Laurier University prior to conducting my research (See Appendix A). Every effort was made to reduce harm or risk to participants. They were informed at various stages of the research process of the nature of the research, types of questions that would be asked, how I would use the information they shared and the steps I would take to ensure their confidentiality.
I took great measures to maintain confidentiality and protect the identities of participants during the research process. I followed guidelines identified by Morse and Coulehan (2015) around maintaining confidentiality. The authors recommend that researchers should: 1) report demographic characteristics as a group data in ranges and or means; 2) present only data that is pertinent to your topic; and 3) remove descriptors or identifiers that may compromise a participant’s identity. For example, identifiers such as age, ethnicity, income, etc. were only presented as a group. Although information related to the number of children, type of employment and religious affiliation was collected, to protect the identities of participants these were either not discussed in-depth or excluded.

Confidentiality was also assured by asking participants to select a pseudonym or an alias to protect their identities. I also ensured that participants were aware of their rights during the research process. Once they communicated their interest in participating in the research study, participants were provided with a copy of the consent form by email. I also provided them with a copy of the consent form at the start of the interview to acknowledge their understanding of the research study and to express an interest in participating. I reviewed the consent form with all participants; they were informed of the benefits of participating and risks or discomforts that they may experience due to their participation in the research study. Participants were told that they could choose whether to answer a question and withdraw from the research at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they would be entitled. They were provided with opportunities to ask questions and I asked probing questions to ensure that they were clear on what they were signing to before proceeding further with the interview. None of the participants withdrew from the study and they responded to all the questions that were asked during the interview.
Due to the nature of the study, participants were asked questions during the interviews that may have brought about some discomfort or triggered some traumatic experiences. In situations where participants expressed an unanticipated emotional response during the interview process, they were reassured that they could stop the interview at any time whether temporarily or permanently. I was prepared to provide a referral to a social service agency (See Appendix I), if needed, to assist the participants in addressing their discomfort. A referral was made for one of the participants who experienced distress while sharing her experience with the police.

Confidentiality was also maintained when managing data. For example, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts.

**Concluding Remarks**

A qualitative research design was adopted to illuminate and bring to the forefront Black women’s experiences of IPV and their experiences with the police. The study used semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to capture women’s narratives. To address issues of trustworthiness, I identified several strategies that I utilized: credibility, dependability, reflexivity and the impact on social justice. The study intends to fill a gap in current scholarship and offers some important insights on conducting research with Black women participants, their unique experiences of IPV and interactions with the police.
Manuscript 1

Insights Gained Conducting Intimate Partner Violence Research with Black Women

Abstract

Black women are underrepresented as research participants in intimate partner violence (IPV) scholarship largely because their experiences have not received adequate attention. Recruiting and retaining Black women as participants, however, have also proven challenging for researchers. The aim of this article is to illustrate recruitment challenges encountered during the research process and explore Black women’s reasons for participating in an IPV study. This qualitative study was informed by critical race feminism (CRF) and involved semi-structured individual interviews with 25 self-identified Black women over the age of 18. Findings from this study highlighted challenges related to access and agency restrictions. To address these challenges, several strategies were employed, which included establishing trusting relationships with staff at agencies, utilizing leads from professional contacts and promoting research through multiple sites. There were several themes that captured participants’ understanding of Black women’s involvement in research studies and their motivation for participating in the study: the invisibility of Black women’s narratives; Black women’s experiences of racism; safeguarding Black women and men from racial oppression; fostering political change; and the impact of racialized and gendered insider positionality. It was revealed that Black women’s experiences of anti-Black racism and various forms of systemic barriers may deter them from disclosing their experiences of IPV. Therefore, positioning their narratives at the centre of IPV discussions is necessary to gain a better understanding of their unique experiences and ensure supports and services are relevant.
Keywords: Black, African American, Black women, intimate partner violence, recruitment, research methods
Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been recognized as a social issue affecting women from diverse backgrounds (Truman & Morgan, 2014). Due to the lack of race-based data in Canada, national data representing prevalence rates of IPV among Black women is nonexistent (Conroy et al., 2019). However, some U.S. scholars have argued that Black women are more susceptible to abuse by an intimate partner than white women (Black et al., 2010; Truman & Morgan, 2014). In fact, Black women are twice more likely to be murdered by their partners when compared to white women (Violence Policy Center, 2018). They are also more susceptible to poor health outcomes (Veenstra, 2019) due to economic and social disadvantages and at high risk of experiencing mental health issues, including depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and suicidal ideation (Bubriski-McKenzie & Jasinski, 2014; Houry et al., 2006).

While some attention has been devoted in IPV research to exploring Black women’s experiences of victimization (Bent-Goodley, 2004; Brown, 2012; Potter, 2008; Richie, 2012), they continue to be underrepresented in IPV studies and their experiences remain homogenized with the experiences of white women (Chigwada-Bailey, 2004), rendering them invisible (i.e. Dichter, 2013; Gerstenberger & Williams, 2013; Hamilton & Worthen, 2011; Houry et al., 2006). With minimal recognition of Black women’s unique experiences in IPV scholarship, researchers risk misrepresenting, misconstruing and reinforcing deep-seated negative stereotypes about them (Bell & Mattis, 2000).

Literature Review

Researchers who focus on the experiences of Black women are faced with myriad challenges. Black women participate less frequently in research studies than their white counterparts (Shavers et al., 2001). A number of barriers have been cited as inhibiting their participation, which include issues around privacy and confidentiality (Coker et al., 2009) and
trust (Corbie-Smith et al., 2002; Hughes et al., 2017; Kibler et al., 2014; Shavers et al., 2001). Black people’s distrust of researchers may be related to their history of being mistreated, misrepresented and deceived by researchers. An often-cited research study is the Tuskegee Syphilis Study that lasted for 40 years. During this time, researchers withheld treatment from Black men diagnosed with syphilis, resulting in serious health problems and the death of 128 participants (Brandt, 1978; Cobb, 1973; Reverby, 2011; Thomas & Quinn, 1991). Other factors found to impact Black people’s participation in research studies include fear (Hughes et al., 2017), religious beliefs (Kibler et al., 2014), perceived social stigma (Hatchett et al., 2000; Valandra et al., 2019) and economic constraints (Corbie-Smith, 2004). Black people’s reluctance to participate in research studies may also be related to their lack of knowledge and understanding of the research process (Hughes et al., 2017), administrative issues (e.g. poor communication between researchers and sites, problems establishing partnerships and staffing issues) (Paskett et al., 2008) and insufficient efforts by researchers in recruiting Black participants (Mason, 2005).

Some scholars have addressed the challenges associated with recruiting and retaining Black women as research participants by utilizing various strategies during the research process (Clay et al., 2003). These include utilizing flexible data collection methods, involving community groups and using social media and social marketing tools. Strategies to retain participants have included: offering incentives and gifts; implementing multiple tracking, reminders and contact procedures; and building relationship and trust (Tillman, 2006). Others have sought to effectively engage with Black women by addressing cultural and racial/ethnic barriers (Germino et al., 2011), contextualizing research and subjectivity, triangulating multiple sources, monitoring symbolic power and showing care during the research process (Few et al.,
Identifying and understanding the factors that create barriers for disadvantaged groups is necessary to develop strategies to increase their involvement in research (Bonevski et al., 2014). However, the majority of these strategies are focused on health or clinical studies. Research focusing on recruitment and retention strategies in IPV studies is limited (i.e. Dutton et al., 2003; Dichter et al., 2019). Even fewer studies focus on the experiences of Black women, particularly those who have been victimized and criminalized.

While recruitment and retention of Black women in research studies have proven difficult for researchers, conducting research that centres the voices of Black women creates opportunities for them to share their experiences and advances discussions on how to effectively respond to their unique experiences of IPV. The inclusion of these women’s voices may also help to increase their social, health and economic outcomes and contribute to the development of programs and services that consider the barriers they face due to their marginalized identities.

This article explores methodological concerns that arose when conducting a qualitative research study with Black women participants that inquired about their experiences of IPV and their experiences with the police. It highlights barriers related to recruitment and discusses Black women’s motivation for participating in the study. The overarching theoretical framework that informed this study was critical race feminism (CRF).

**Theoretical Framework**

CRF is informed by critical race theory (CRT) (Treviño et al., 2008). CRT emerged as an intellectual movement that critiqued the ways in which race and racial power were manifested, understood and articulated by critical scholars (Crenshaw, 2011). There are several key tenets of CRT. The first tenet is racism is ingrained in society and impacts the everyday experiences of racialized people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; 2017). However, colour-blind discourses in legal
processes make it difficult to address (Gotanda, 2013). The second tenet is racism advances the interests of white elites (Bell, 1995; Harris, 2012) who have little regard to eradicate racial injustices. The third tenet examines the process of racialization (Bonilla-Silva, 2015) in which racialized groups are subjected to differential unjust treatment based on race (Chan & Chunn, 2014). The fourth tenet concerns the unique voices, perspectives and experiences of racialized people and asserts that their unique identities position them well to advance issues around race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; 2017).

Building on the key tenets of CRT, CRF proponents encourage a gendered analysis that centres the voices of racialized women (Wing & Willis, 1999-2000). CRF scholars also critique essentialism, an element of feminism that is largely based on the experiences of white women. Specifically, feminist essentialism is based on “the notion that there is a monolithic ‘women’s experience’ that can be described independent of other facets of experience like race, class, and sexual orientation” (Harris, 2013, p. 349). CRF adherents, adapt a non-essentialist perspective that recognizes that there is not one essential woman and that women have different and complex experiences (Grillo, 1995). Nonetheless, others have problematized a non-essentialist feminist stance which “still excluded some women … poor and working-class women, women of colour, and lesbians” (Goldenberg, 2007, p. 142). An intersectional approach is a key component of CRF and attempts to account for the diversity among women. Specifically, it draws attention to other interlocking forms of oppression (i.e. gender, class, sexuality) (Wing & Willis, 1999-2000). It examines the various ways in which Black women’s multiple identities overlap while simultaneously compounding their marginalization (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw describes three types of intersectionality: structural, political and representational. Structural intersectionality looks at how Black women’s gendered and racialized positionality characterizes their differential
experiences of IPV. Political intersectionality highlights “the fact that women are situated within two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting agendas” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252), which disempowers Black women and reinforces their subordination. Representational intersectionality examines the ways in which socially constructed cultural images of Black women reproduces racial and gender hierarchy that marginalize and ignore their intersecting realities (Crenshaw, 1991). A CRF analysis forefronts Black women’s narratives while providing a comprehensive overview of their experiences.

The Study

This qualitative study sought to understand Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police. The women were also asked about their reasons for participating in the study. Recruitment occurred across the Greater Toronto Area and other Southwestern Ontario regions. Flyers were posted across various social service agencies, social media platforms and in various communities. Contact was made with a total of 26 women between June 2018 and January 2019. Of these women, 25 consented to participate in the study; none of the participants withdrew from the study. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 25 participants. All of the participants were women who self-identified as Black, were over the age of 18, had experienced IPV in a heterosexual relationship and had contact with the police; 15 of the women had also been charged with an IPV-related offence. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Three research questions were developed in an effort to better understand Black women’s reasons for participating in a research study that also asked about their experiences of IPV and with the police: 1) What challenges are encountered when conducting research with Black women? 2) What strategies can researchers utilize during the research process with Black
women who experience IPV? 3) Why do Black women choose to participate in a research study exploring their experiences of IPV and with the police, and what factors influence their participation?

Transcribed interviews were analyzed using CRF to help inform my understanding of the ways in which race, anti-Black racism, gender and class are implicated in how Black women experience the research process and engage with me as a Black female researcher. I also situate Black women’s experiences within the broader context whereby various systems of oppression reinforce stereotypical images of Black women.

**Findings**

The following discussion is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I discuss the challenges I encountered while recruiting Black women and the strategies I used to address and overcome these challenges. In the second section, I discuss Black women’s reasons for participating in the study and some of the factors that influenced their decision.

**Challenges Encountered While Recruiting Black Women**

According to Dutton et al. (2003), women who experience IPV are “are typically dealing with safety issues, coping with traumatic reactions to violence and abuse, and making decisions and difficult transitions in their lives” (p. 15). However, these factors are greatly intensified for Black women who also face multiple forms of abuse and are “disadvantaged by structural racism, economic exploitation and political disenfranchisement” (Richie, 2012, p. 18). These myriad factors showcase some of the complexities encountered in recruiting this marginalized population. Added to the complexities that the women themselves are dealing with are the challenges that researchers encounter in gaining access to those women via criminal justice and social service agencies.
Prior to undertaking this research, I had conducted a study for my Master of Social Work degree that focused on the experiences of Black women who were charged with an IPV-related offence (Duhaney-Morris, 2010). That study taught me firsthand about the challenges encountered in recruiting Black women as research participants. Unable to recruit a reasonable number of participants, I had to broaden my criteria to also include social service practitioners who had experience working with Black women and were willing to speak about their interactions. Despite making this adjustment, the sample size was still rather small, yielding only four women and three front-line workers. Nevertheless, the study results revealed that Black women who were arrested were not themselves batterers but were primary victims who reported histories of prior childhood abuse and IPV, including physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. It also revealed that Black women's experiences and use of force in their relationships were compounded by the multiplicities of race, class and gender. Another recurring theme prevalent in that study was the role of the police in IPV incidents. When asked about their experiences with the police, there was a consensus amongst both the women charged with an offence and the front-line workers that the police did not care about Black women. They also mentioned that police officers cared little about the context within which Black women experienced IPV. While the findings from this study gave me insights into Black women’s experiences of IPV, it also showcased the need for further studies in this area.

Intent on pursuing this area further, I set about to conduct a study for my Ph.D. dissertation on Black women’s experience with IPV in terms of both their victimization and criminalization. The initial intention was to recruit 18 to 25 Black women living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) who had experienced IPV and had been criminalized for an IPV-related offence. Given my previous experience, I anticipated that I would have difficulties recruiting
participants for the study. However, I was hopeful that a sufficient number of women who fit my study criteria could be accessed via criminal justice and social service agencies that work with women who have encountered IPV.

**Criminal Justice Gatekeepers**

Recruiting Black women through criminal justice agencies that oversee and monitor criminalized women proved to be a significant challenge. Other scholars (i.e. Bonevski et al., 2014; Clay et al., 2003; Dutton et al., 2003) have identified that gaining access when conducting studies involving hard to reach participants can be a daunting task. This was also the case in my research. In order to access Black women who had been criminalized for an IPV-related offence, I contacted several local probation offices but was redirected to their centralized department. According to one office, “All research requests have to be directed through a centralized department and are not considered at a local office level.” I was required to submit an ethics application to their ethics committee; this review process could have taken months to complete with no guarantee of approval. Also, there were other restrictions around what counted as an incentive. For example, I was offering to provide participants with monetary incentives; however, I was told the only incentive that participants connected to the agency were allowed to receive was gift certificates or bus tickets. I was required to confirm in writing that I would adhere to this clause.

I did not proceed with completing the REB application for a number of reasons: the length of their review process, there was no guarantee that I would attract participants and the stipulation around only issuing gift certificates or bus tickets was unreasonable. This last requirement has greater repercussions for Black women who experience economic barriers. The stark reality of employment inequities was captured in a Canadian report by Block and Galabuzi
Based on their findings, Black women earn 83 cents for every dollar that a white woman earns and 56 cents for every dollar that a white man earns; these differences are significant and reflect the gendered and racialized nature of unequal economic outcomes for Black women. Thus, opting out of these bureaucratic practices provided me with greater flexibility around compensation.

Given the lack of access to potential study participants via the criminal justice system, I turned my attention to social service agencies that could put me in contact with Black women who had experienced IPV and were subsequently criminalized.

**Navigating the Terrain of Unresponsive Social Service Agencies**

Considerable time and effort went into locating and contacting social service agencies that could assist in recruiting participants for the study. However, a significant number of agencies were unresponsive. Between June and November 2018, emails were sent to approximately 213 social service agencies and social/professional contacts, the majority of which were across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This recruitment strategy was a starting point to share my research, determine interest and identify potential participants. Within two weeks of my initial communication, a follow-up email was sent and/or phone call made to agencies. During this five-month period, I made several attempts to contact social service agencies; many agencies did not respond to either email or phone correspondence and other agencies took months to respond to my request. Nonetheless, after much persistence, I was successful in making contact with several agencies who granted me permission to post a flyer on site or on their website.

Agencies play a key role in allowing researchers to access vulnerable populations (Dutton et al., 2003). However, service demands such as managing high risk populations, heavy
workload, being understaffed and underfunded and having a lack of resources may impede their (i.e. executive director and managers) engagement with researchers. Staying on top of email correspondence and phone calls add to the day-to-day responsibilities at an agency. In their study, Burnett et al. (2016) explored how structural factors shape the delivery of services to abused women and their children in Canada. According to the authors, agencies are faced with competing demands, including high staff turnover, lack of resources and insufficient services for women that influence their capacity to meet the needs of their clients. With these aggravating factors, it is not surprising that attending to research requests from a researcher who is unknown to an agency would receive little attention.

**Social Services as Gatekeepers**

Social service agencies “can provide an insider perspective, identify pathways to potential participants, and endorse the value of the research to potential participants” (Horowitz et al., 2002, p. 319). However, they can also create barriers that make it difficult to gain access to prospective participants. For example, during an email correspondence with an agency, I offered to meet with clients and staff to provide additional information about my research. The agency responded by saying: “In order to protect our clients’ confidentiality, we do not allow volunteers, researchers, etc. into the groups.” In contrast, although I was unknown to another agency who provided similar services, I was granted permission to post my flyer and meet with clients and staff.

Agencies may be hyper aware of the vulnerabilities for Black women who are victimized and criminalized. As such, they could be more vigilant in protecting them for fear that they are at increased risk of manipulation. However, as Burgess-Proctor (2015) asserts, “unwarranted, excessive institutional cautiousness restricts the ability of abused women and other trauma
survivors to have their experiences represented in ‘what we know’ about violent victimization” (p. 28). While extra precautions must be taken to protect Black women due to their increased vulnerability, excluding them entirely or limiting their access disempowers them further. Thus, it is important for organizations to recognize Black women’s self-agency and capacity to make informed decisions.

In another scenario, I had contacted a local Health Integration Network. After numerous correspondences, I was informed that I would need to submit an application to their Research Ethics Board. I was asked to complete a research request form and was informed that the information provided on the form would be reviewed by their Research Committee. I was then asked to provide the research proposal I submitted to my university for their Research Ethics Board’s (REB) approval and complete an Ethics Screening Tool. A month later, after fulfilling their initial requests, I received the following response: “Our Research Committee reviewed your request and due to the recruitment of patients within . . . and the sensitive nature of your research, we ask that your research protocol be reviewed by our local REB.” I did not believe that going through another review process would have yielded a significant outcome and decided to not proceed with contacting their local REB.

A community-based organization’s REB is responsible for protecting clients from harm, potential associated risk and ensuring researchers adhere to ethical standards; however, their review process creates additional delays. This sentiment was echoed by Ellard-Gray et al. (2015), who maintained that “conducting research on communities that are protected by an institution can require lengthy bureaucratic delays, and, particularly in the case of graduate research, these timelines can be unfeasible” (p. 6). Since, this research was conducted as part of my doctoral studies, recruiting participants in a reasonable amount of time was necessary for the completion
of my degree. Due to ongoing challenges in recruiting participants for the study, I incorporated a number of strategies to manage these barriers, including expanding my criteria for inclusion and broadening my geographical area.

**Managing Barriers to Recruiting Black Women**

Conducting research is more often a fluid rather than a linear process. As my research process proceeded, several methodological strategies needed to be adapted to address the issues I encountered in the early stages of my study. One significant strategy involved expanding the study criteria to include Black women who had experienced IPV as well as contact with the police but had not themselves been criminalized for an IPV-related offence. The rationale for this change was that it would still enable consideration of what Black women’s encounters with the police involved but at the same time garner a large enough sample to draw meaningful conclusions. Another change made early on in the research process involved expanding the geographical reach of the study to include cities surrounding the GTA. Again, the rationale was to enhance the number of potential participants for the study.

Nevertheless, altering the sample criteria and expanding the geographical scope of the study were not sufficient, on their own, to ensure the recruitment of an appropriate number of study participants. As the research process unfolded, a number of other recruitment strategies were adopted: 1) Establishing relationships with agencies; 2) Utilizing leads from professional contacts; and 3) Using multiple sites to advertise and recruit.

**Establishing Relationships with Agencies**

While accessing participants through many agencies proved challenging, there were several agencies that were supportive of my research. One of the ways I managed this initial barrier was to establish relationships with agencies that acted as intermediaries in locating
participants. Establishing a relationship with agencies is necessary to recruit potential participants with whom the researcher may not have otherwise had contact (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). This collaborative approach with agencies or organizations can be beneficial, especially when working with socially disadvantaged groups (Bonevski et al., 2014). Using this strategy, I recruited 15 participants who were either current or previous clients or staff at eight agencies. Perhaps one of the advantages of using this method is that many study participants had established trusting relationships with staff at the agency. As an outsider, I was unfamiliar to these women and they were not aware of my intentions. Offering to meet with staff and attending programs such as Partner Assault Response (PAR) groups was advantageous because this allowed staff and potential participants to learn more about the research and ask questions. However, only one participant who was a current client at the organization contacted me after my presentation. A possible explanation for low recruitment from current clients could be attributed to some of the negative consequences associated with their criminalization (i.e. loss of children, unemployment, social isolation). Thus, these challenges may have complicated their lives and created additional barriers; participating in the study at that time might have been too overwhelming for these women.

Another reason for success in recruiting women connected to an agency was that through establishing a relationship with one agency, staff saw the value of my research and went a step further by contacting past clients. The agency had identified potential participants, contacted them to provide general information about the study and gave them my contact details should they require additional information or wish to participate in the study. To protect their privacy and confidentiality, no client information was provided to me by the organization. Eight of the women who contacted me and expressed an interest in participating in the study were past clients
at the agency. Overall, this strategy yielded the most participants. The significance of establishing relationships with agencies was supported in Yancey et al.’s (2006) article. In their review of 95 research studies in which 82% of the targeted group was Black, they found that establishing trust with personal contact and building community ties were advantageous in recruiting high risk participants.

**Utilizing Leads from Professional Contacts**

Researchers may have some success attracting participants by relying on leads from social or professional contacts; this was another strategy used in my study. Three participants were recruited through a professional contact. One of these professional contacts was racialized and the other was an ally that worked predominantly with racialized immigrant clients.

In these cases, the clients were no longer receiving direct services but remained in contact with my colleagues, who had worked directly with the women and were aware of their situation. I may not have otherwise had contact with these participants as they were in a different geographical location and the services they had accessed were not specifically geared to women who had been victimized and criminalized. A significant benefit in using this approach was trust. The women had established a trusting relationship with my professional contacts and were more inclined to participate in the study.

**Using Multiple Sites to Advertise and Recruit**

Using other strategies such as posting flyers in grocery stores, restaurants, churches, a nursing home, beauty supply stores, community boards, libraries, listservs, professional websites, social media (Twitter, Facebook, Eventbrite) and newspapers to advertise and recruit participants also helped to increase the number of women I recruited for my study. Seven participants were recruited through these other platforms. Many Black women may not access services from a
social agency and those who may have accessed services in the past may choose not to remain in contact with an agency. There may also be a stigma associated with receiving support. Thus, solely relying on agencies to share information with women about a study may not be advantageous. Also, with this method alone, it is difficult to ascertain whether agencies distribute flyers provided to them.

While increased visibility of the study in public spaces may attract a larger number of participants, it is important to note that this approach may also prevent some women from accessing the information. For example, because flyers are placed in public spaces, some women may not feel comfortable in tearing off contact details. To manage this issue, where possible, a business card was attached to each flyer. At the back of each business card was additional information about the study. This method served two purposes: it provided a frame of reference to assist participants in identifying me and it removed barriers associated with capturing information. Participants could simply take a business card. This proved beneficial as several participants commented on seeing the business card.

Another consideration to keep in mind is that it is not enough to post flyers at these various sites. Some means should be developed to determine whether the posters or flyers remained visible. For example, posted flyers may have a “shelf life” and may be removed by cleaning staff or administrative personnel after this time frame ends (Clay et al., 2003). However, it may not be possible to track all sites to which flyers were provided. Also, due to the volume of flyers that were distributed, it would also be helpful to include the duration of the study to deter potential participants from contacting the researcher once recruitment is complete. I did not post an end date on my flyers and no potential participants contacted me after the data collection period ended. However, the inclusion of this information would be beneficial for future research.
Black Women’s Reasons for Participating in the Study

While challenges were encountered in recruiting women to the study, 25 women eventually ended up agreeing to participate, 15 of whom had been charged with an IPV-related offence. The interviews with these women afforded an opportunity to explore some of the factors associated with Black women’s decision of whether to participate in research of this nature. In that regard, five main themes emerged from the interviews: 1) A community’s code of silence; 2) Safeguarding Black women and men from racial oppression; 3) The invisibility of Black women’s narratives; 4) Racialized and gendered insider positionality; and 5) Fostering political change. These themes help to unearth some of the complexities related to Black women’s involvement in research studies.

A Community’s Code of Silence

Women expressed their initial reluctance to participating in the study, which was related to a code of silence within the Black community. Women may have been reluctant to participate in the study because they were embarrassed, fearful of further violence from their partners and concerned about being ostracized by their communities. Black women may also not want to reify stereotypical and oppressive images of Black people.

The women shared that growing up they were told to keep personal problems and challenges to themselves. As Ruth commented, “A Black person don’t generally jump up and put their life story out there… I guess it’s because of embarrassment or you don’t want people to look at you a certain way when you get out of the house.” Black women develop a culture of silence based on the various cultural scripts they confront on a daily basis. Like Ruth, many Black women fear being perceived negatively by others; this fear is grounded in the belief that Black people are often villainized in society.
Some women expressed concerns about how disclosing their experiences of abuse could result in further harm to them. As Anna stated, “We’re taught not to say anything, which is, don’t tell nobody your business. That means any good, anything bad. You just don’t tell anybody your business, except to your family. That ... can be harmful.”

Many Black women are vulnerable to multiple forms of violence, including partner violence, community violence, and structural and institutionalized violence. For some women, racism reinforces the need to remain silent about abuse in their relationships. Similarly, Evelyn reflected on the risk of sharing her experiences with others:

We’re told to keep your mouth shut and keep your nose down. So, don’t speak unless you’re spoken to. So, there’s always control, overbearing. The Black community, I see that quite often. So, I would assume, that even I would say that women of colour, especially Black women, they wouldn’t want to go put themselves in that position because there’s risk.

Like Anna, Evelyn’s narrative illustrates Black women’s fear of violence both within and outside of their homes. According to Richie (2012), Black women are “subjected to misdirected anger, their mobility is threatened, and they are kept under constant surveillance, and must engage with unsympathetic community members or institutional authorities who make them feel ashamed or punish them for their social circumstances” (p. 134).

Participants were also hyper-aware of the impact of pejorative stereotypes for Black women and Black people in general. Ava was concerned that stigma around sharing may reify people’s stereotypical views of Black women. As she stated:

I think there’s a stigma around being public, and not suffering in silence. In almost every interaction Black women have with the world, our identities are called into question. And
the validity of who we are as human beings is always an issue for other people. Either it makes someone feel unsafe, or uncomfortable, or challenged if they’re also Black and not comfortable with our womanhood. And I feel like that deters us from speaking on our own experiences as history participants.

Ava’s narrative captures the ongoing challenges Black women face in their everyday encounters. The very essence of who they are is called into question, which creates challenges for women who wish to seek support and leave an abusive relationship.

Black women are in a precarious position where they are thwarted from speaking about the various forms of violence that shape their lives. They are constrained by having an additional burden of constantly negotiating not only their own safety but that of their partners and communities. These findings are consistent with previous research by Taylor (2013), who examined Black women’s process for disengaging from an abusive relationship with their intimate male partners. She found that Black women were influenced by a deeply entrenched code of silence that made them reluctant to seek help. This code of silence also contributes to Black women’s reluctance about participating in a research study.

**Safeguarding Black Women and Men from Racial Oppression**

Another consideration for the study participants was determining how their disclosures to me would impact them, their families and their communities. Some feared further scrutiny, while others feared subsequent victimization or criminalization. They also worried about how they and their partners may be perceived by others.

The women took steps to safeguard against the negative stigma that Black women often face and were careful to negotiate the information they shared with me. Some women were concerned about how others may perceive them. In many instances I had to assure the women
that I would not disclose information to any agencies they were involved with or to the police. Like other women in the study, Sarah chose to participate once she recognize that her information would be kept private. As she stated, “This research is so private… it’s not too bad because my name is not going to be mentioned and they can’t judge me.” Similarly, Jocelyn shared that she had less problems when others were not involved. As she conveyed, “I don't really talk much. If I have problems with my husband, or somebody, I just keep it to myself. I really don't want to involve too much people in it because more problems come.” Gabby expressed fear that her disclosure may result in the involvement of the Children’s Aid Society (CAS). She requested several times that her name remain confidential. As she stated: “You said it’s going to be private and confidential, this is not going to the program or anything like that? As long as there's nothing, any problem in the information or, anybody calling family workers, stuff like that.”

At the time of her interview, Evelyn was still in a relationship with her abusive partner. The police had intervened previously due to IPV. Subsequently, they were restricted from future contact with each other. Due to Evelyn’s precarious position, I had to assure her that the police would not be notified. She also had to reassure her partner that information about him would not be shared with the police. As she declared: “Well, he knows very well I’m speaking to you right now. He’s not happy about it. And he was like, ‘If this is something you think and you feel that this is going to be beneficial for other women, you know, at least – in the shadow of secrecy – that’s something that might help fix this process. Just don’t incriminate me.’ Like, duh, you think I want to incriminate myself?” According to West (1999), it is common for Black women who have experienced IPV “to combine a sense of obligatory racial responsibility with self-
censorship” (p. 85). In an effort to ward off further racism, many Black women may repress their needs.

Women’s narratives alluded to the racial inequities that are prevalent in society and more specifically exist within the criminal justice system; these views are well supported by Canadian and U.S data. Black people are more likely to be stopped and searched than their white counterparts (Wortley and Owusu-Bempah, 2011), be arrested (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018), have encounters resulting in police use of force (Kiedrowski et al., 2015), be over-represented in correctional facilities (Public Safety Canada, 2018) and receive longer sentences (Russell-Brown, 2009). The over-surveillance and criminalization of Black women and men create a high level of fear and distrust (Maynard, 2017; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2009).

**The Invisibility of Black Women’s Narratives**

Despite their initial reluctance, the Black women who participated in the study recognized the relevance of their narratives. For some of these women, it was evident that Black women’s experiences were not always visible. Their participation was intended to elevate and forefront Black women’s voices.

Crystal acknowledged that Black women’s experiences are not often considered relevant. However, she was propelled to share her experience of IPV and with the police to help increase Black women’s visibility. She said,

> For me personally, I think because we’re not used to ever being important, you know, we’re shunned from everything and resources.... I’m just boldly stepping up, to be honest with you. I was afraid before, but I’m not afraid. I’m not afraid to talk. I’m not afraid because I am now accepting it, you know. And I’m tired of running so I’m facing it.
Crystal’s statement speaks both to the invisibility of Black women’s experiences and the structural barriers they face that create obstacles for them to speak out. These findings were also evident in Bent-Goodley’s (2004) study that explored Black women’s perception of IPV. Women reported that services were either not available or inaccessible to them. A similar finding was captured in a study conducted by Lucea et al. (2013), who found that 60% of the women who did not access services were not aware that services were available to them. It is possible that even if resources were available, the participants in my study may not have believed supports would be sensitive or appropriate to their needs.

Similar to their experience of invisibility, some women believed their voices were either not heard or not considered relevant. Jada was of the belief that Black women’s voices are not heard and was motivated to share her experience. As she expressed,

I was interested in participating because I feel like my voice is never heard. I’ve participated in many women abuse groups and on average typically I may be the only one in the group or maybe there might be someone else of colour but not specifically Black females and sometimes I felt like, you know, while abuse is abuse, the experiences are different in the way that it's perceived by others as well.

Although women were aware to some extent of the representation of Black women in the U.S., some were of the belief that the context is different for Canadian women. For Zoe, there is a lack of relevant Canadian data that focus on Black women’s experiences. As she acknowledged:

You hear more about Black women’s issues in the U.S., but I don’t think there’s enough information given to people in general about Black women in different parts of the world.
At the end of the day, we’re two completely different people. Although we are all Black, our experiences are definitely going to be different than those in the U.S. There certainly is limited Canadian data about Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police, as was identified previously, which makes it possible to misconstrue the complexities of violence in their lives.

**Racialized and Gendered Insider Positionality**

Another theme that emerged in women’s discussions was the influence of my racialized and gendered insider positionality. Racialized researchers may have an advantage as insiders during the recruitment and interview stages when conducting research with marginalized populations. From this perspective, it is believed that “researchers are uniquely positioned to understand the experiences of groups of which they are members” (Kerstetter, 2012). There are several advantages of being an insider: 1) researchers may gain or increase access to participants; 2) insider researchers may be more sensitive or responsive to the needs of Black women if they have shared social, linguistic and cultural commonality with participants; and 3) researchers may also have success eliciting deeper explanations.

In my study, Ava was forthright in commenting on how significant my positioning as a Black woman was to her. As she stated:

> If you weren’t Black, I wouldn’t have done this. If you weren’t a woman, I wouldn’t have done this. Representation matters. For me, it’s like a marker of safety. I feel that internalized guilt around what it could mean if I talk about my pain somehow is eased because you’re Black. And it may be fucked up, but I feel like it makes me feel less guilty. Although everybody’s experience is really different, I feel like community trauma matters.
My gendered and racialized identities, therefore, were beneficial in establishing and maintaining trust during the research process.

Sarah described her reasons for participating in the study by stating, “Well I wanted to support you because you’re a student and I think it’s nice for us to support, especially Black people that are students, assist them in their career.” Similarly, Dixie stated:

If it will help you complete your studies and get you what you need then I’m good. It’s [the abuse] been a long time and I moved on. Without the research it will definitely not make a difference. The only way it stands a chance of making a difference is if we do share and give you the opportunity to find, assimilate it and make heads or tails out of it.

Sarah’s and Dixie’s narratives address the ongoing racial inequities that Black people, in particular, Black women, continue to face in educational institutions. Their willingness to participate in the study highlights their attempts to counter these barriers by helping me to complete my studies. For example, according to a Statistics Canada report, in 2011, the proportion of Black women who obtained a degree in Canada (24.4%) was much lower than other racialized women (Hudon, 2016). In their study based on qualitative interviews at 13 universities, Henry et al. (2017) describe universities as a racialized site that has significant consequences for racialized people. In fact, racialized people are often marginalized and experience systemic exclusion and discrimination.

Fostering Political Change

While women were cognizant of inherent risks in participating in the study, they were also motivated by the possibility that telling their story could result in change and help other Black women know that they were not alone. Pamela remarked,
Well, you know what? I always think that if people know the statistics, about things like this, of what goes on behind closed doors, it could make a change. It could change the system.

A few of the women believed they were wrongfully arrested following police intervention and shared their story to bring attention to this injustice. As Jocelyn asserted:

After what happened to me, I felt stronger. Like, there’s something that needs to be done about it because a lot of people are going through this, and it’s not nice. It’s injustice. It’s breaching the human rights of women, especially. I felt like if there were any means that I could actually help and resolve in this, I think this opportunity came, and I make use of it.

As was evident in Jocelyn’s narrative, there are many Black women who continue to suffer in silence and are not aware of their rights. By sharing, she hoped to bring to light some of the struggles that Black women experience in order to bring about systemic changes.

For Melanie, sharing meant that her story may have a positive impact on other women. As she stated,

Because some of them have been victimized by their husbands and other people who they’re with and some of them don’t say anything, which is kind of sad. And I hope that, you know, this will open up a broader range of people speaking out and I’m happy that you're doing this type of service so that a woman would know that they don’t have to put up with this type of abuse.

Black women are speaking up about the abuse they experience (West, 2005) as a way to urge other women to speak out as well. This form of resistance against male partner violence was also found by Taylor (2002). In her study, women shared that their motivation to participate in the study was to help other women.
In my conversation with Ruth, she spoke of the challenges she faced as a Black woman, including isolation and lack of support. She hoped that sharing her experience would provide necessary supports for other women. As she stated:

I’m a Black woman and I’ve been through a lot of the experience that you’re looking for in the research. So, I thought it’s my way of speaking out on behalf of other Black women generally and women in general that goes through abuse, but particularly Black women. Because I find it’s really hard for a Black single woman with no support. Zero and no support being in this country. I’m like the only one in this country. Like, I have no siblings, I have no aunts, no uncles. It is just me, right. So, it can be difficult, it can be challenging, but without awareness, there is no hope.

Ruth alluded to some of the barriers (e.g. social, legal, economic) that new immigrants face that further complicate their experiences of IPV and with the police.

**Discussion**

While conducting a study involving Black women who experienced IPV and were subsequently involved with the police brought with it a number of methodological challenges (i.e. unresponsiveness and gatekeeping from agencies, rigorous ethical processes, rigid stipulations), interviews with women who agreed to participate in the study provided significant insights on factors that pertain to their motivation and reluctance to participate in IPV research.

Some women’s reluctance to participate in the study was tied to a community code of silence where they were expected to remain silent about abuse in their relationships. There is considerable stigma associated with disclosing experiences of IPV (Bent-Goodley, 2007). As such, some Black women in the study discussed pressures from their families and members of the Black community to remain silent about issues within the home. This fear is further
compounded by negative stereotypes that construct Black women and men as violent. However, some Black women may remain silent to prevent negative perceptions of them; this concern could certainly influence other prospective participants’ willingness to share their experiences. While some women made reference to this code of silence that prevails in Black communities (Bent-Goodley, 2007), not all women shared this sentiment. In fact, some women are encouraged to speak up when they are victimized or experience discrimination.

It is likely that many of the women who participated in the study endorsed beliefs that they should speak up. Nonetheless, the fear of unjust harm to women and their families is warranted considering their experiences of race, gender and class oppression. According to findings from the 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization, Black people reported experiencing discrimination based on race or skin colour, ethnicity or culture compared to their white women counterparts (Simpson, 2018). Thus, it was not unusual that these women were ambivalent about sharing their stories. Some feared that their disclosure may lead to negative repercussions (e.g. increased discrimination, surveillance and further marginalization) not only for themselves but their partners. In addition, Black women were uncertain whether their stories would be used by others to perpetuate stereotypical views that construct them as aggressive and violent.

Consequently, due to their history of marginalization and oppression, the Black women who participated in the study went to great lengths to safeguard themselves and their partners from further oppression by taking additional precautions during the research process. For example, they asked for reassurance that their identity would remain anonymous and their information not shared with social service agencies and the police. Black women’s high level of vigilance and distrust exemplifies the adverse effects of racism (Nash, 2005). It is important to
highlight that myriad factors, including historical, social and political conditions, inhibit Black
women’s willingness to share their experiences of IPV (Richie, 1996; 2012). However, women
in the study exhibited a great deal of courage to dispel and dismantle entrenched stereotypes.

Despite these barriers, some women shared that their reasons for participating in the study was because Black women’s experiences in general are often not heard (Hatchett et al., 2000), overlooked and considered insignificant. The invisibility of their voices and experiences in all facets of society is further exacerbated by societal barriers that contribute to their skepticism and distrust of researchers and the research process. Black women’s understanding of who they are is very much informed by dominant ideologies. As hooks (2015b) eloquently asserted,

We learn that we do not have the power to define our own reality or to transform

oppressive structures…to look to those empowered by the very systems of domination

that wound and hurt us for some understanding of who we are. (p. 253)

However, negating Black women’s voices and experiences is intentionally orchestrated to maintain social inequalities and justify their oppression (Collins, 2000). It is also necessary for Black women to endorse beliefs that they are insignificant for “hegemonic ideologies to function smoothly” (Collins, 2000, p. 284). Subsequently, Black women become convinced that their “lives are not complex, and are therefore unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis and reflection” (hooks 1992, p. 2).

These manipulative tactics are so deeply entrenched in society that Black women who endorse these beliefs are more reluctant to speak out about their experience of IPV or social injustice. Centring Black women’s voices is necessary especially for women whose voices are seldom considered relevant in public discourse (hooks, 2015a) or have been silenced or
subjugated. It provides them with a platform to disrupt dominant narratives about their experiences while informing understanding around the complexities of IPV in their lives.

Black women’s willingness to participate in the study was significantly influenced by my positionality. According to Serrant-Green (2002), a researcher’s positionality as an insider or outsider is “based on a range of issues including the participants’ knowledge of the research; their expectations of the researcher; researcher characteristics; and their experience of taking part in research” (p. 36). My positionality as a Black female and my own experience of racism and other forms of oppression were significant motivators for women in the study. In particular, many women shared that their reason for participating in the study was because the research was being conducted by a Black woman. In this regard, I was treated as an insider and they “saw me as someone who understood their struggles and history and the significance of these to their experiences” (Ochieng, 2010, p. 1730). Being an insider provided me with a unique perspective not only to connect with the women but to elicit raw details about their experiences of IPV and with the police as well as their reasons for participating in the study. I broke down linguistic barriers and easily understood women who spoke with stronger accents, irrespective of the region in which they were born. Engagement with participants was further enhanced when I exhibited cultural awareness and sensitivity (Mattsson, 2014) by capturing and taking into account their cultures/ethnicities and histories. This allowed me to better understand the multiplexities, multi-dimensionalities and interconnections in their lives (Absolon & Willett, 2005).

Despite the commonalities I shared with participants, I never assumed that I would be granted unmitigated ‘insider’ status. In fact, although I shared similar identities based on race and gender with participants, barriers are possible because of differences in class, sexual
orientation or nationality (Few et al., 2003, p. 3). For example, I may be characterized as an outsider because I earned a relatively good salary in relation to the participants, lived in an affluent neighbourhood and was in a doctoral program. I am aware of the power dynamics that inform the researcher-participant relationship. I also recognize the fluidity of the insider and outsider positions that I simultaneously occupy and am cognizant of the tensions that come with both roles (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Merriam et al., 2001).

Some Black women believed that their voices and experiences of racism and various forms of social oppression were often invalidated on multiple levels in society. However, they were motivated to share their experiences to help other women who experienced abuse and inform researchers, social service agencies, the police and policy makers about their unique experiences of IPV. Indeed, sharing their stories was considered by many as a form of resistance to advocate for systemic change.

**Conclusion**

Black women’s unique experiences of IPV have largely been overlooked (Bent-Goodley, 2005) and misrepresented in IPV scholarship (Few et al., 2003). This erasure has contributed to Canadian scholars’ overreliance on the limited U.S. data that exist. However, these data may not accurately capture the cultural and structural challenges faced by Black women in the Canadian context. The results from this study contribute to scholarship that examines the recruitment of Black women for IPV research. Specifically, it provides important insights about the challenges encountered while recruiting Black women as research participants as well as factors that influence their perception of the research process and willingness to share their experiences with IPV researchers. CRF was a relevant theoretical framework that allowed me to centre Black women’s voices and experiences while highlighting issues of race, gender, power and racism.
Black women’s willingness to participate in the research study was compounded by factors related to the invisibility of their experiences, racism and racial loyalty. Their experience of anti-Black racism and marginalized positionality amplify the barriers they face while making them more vulnerable to victimization and criminalization. Moreover, their intersecting identities of race, gender and class as well as pejorative stereotypes inform the decisions they make around disclosure of IPV. Despite the various factors that influenced their decision to participate in the study, women in the study were motivated to share their experiences because of my positionality as a Black female researcher and the possibility that their contributions will help foster political change. Thus, results from this study are timely and advance discussions that consider Black women’s experiences from their perspective.

While findings from this study provided significant insights about conducting IPV research with Black women, there is a need for more research in this area. Black women must not be mere additives in research studies and topics must be relevant to them. Thus, it is recommended that future research position the experiences of Black women at the forefront of IPV research (Potter, 2008). As was evident in my own study, researchers may encounter significant barriers recruiting Black women who have come into conflict with the law. Therefore, recruitment efforts should utilize multiple strategies to locate an appropriate number of participants (Clay et al., 2003; Dichter et al., 2019). In particular, researchers should also adopt methodological strategies that consider Black women’s unique experiences at each stage of the research process (Mechanic & Pole, 2013) as they help promote confidence and build trust in the researcher. Because of their history of social marginalization and everyday racism, improving participation of Black people in research studies requires a “multifaceted approach to remove historic, cultural and socio-economic barriers” (Branson et al., 2007, p. 37). Due to the
significant barriers encountered while recruiting women, future researchers must also be intentional about building partnerships between members of the Black community, community leaders and principal investigators to help increase credibility (Branson et al., 2007). Many Black women may not be aware of the research process, therefore, educational material that informs participants of their rights as research participants and the value of participating in a research study may improve their participation (Branson et al., 2007). While the strategies discussed pertained to women who were victims of IPV, some of whom who were also arrested for an IPV-related offence, these strategies may also prove beneficial to researchers across multiple disciplines who conduct research with Black women.
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Manuscript 2

Victimized and Criminalized: Black Women’s Experience of Intimate Partner Violence

Abstract

Violence against Black women is disproportionately high when compared to other women, yet there is little research that addresses the overlap between their victimization and their criminalization. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how race, gender, class and other forms of social stratification inform criminalized Black women’s experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) and with the police. Specifically, it explored three questions: (a) What are Black women’s experiences of IPV? (b) How do Black women’s intersecting identities of race, class and gender influence how they perceive, experience and respond to IPV? (c) What are the consequences of IPV in the lives of Black women who are both victimized and criminalized? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 Black women who experienced IPV, 15 of whom were also charged by the police. The women were over 18 years of age and lived in the Greater Toronto Area and surrounding regions. The study focused on the 15 women who were charged by the police. Critical race feminism (CRF) was employed to analyze Black women’s narratives. Results revealed that Black women’s experiences of IPV are complex. It was evident that an overlap existed between women’s victimization and their subsequent criminalization. Women reported experiencing various forms of violence and used force in their relationships in response to their partner’s violence. This research has implications for policy, practice and future research with criminalized Black women.

Keywords: intimate partner violence, domestic violence, Black women, victimization, criminalization
Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a complex, persistent and ongoing social problem that disproportionately affects women. Based on a recent Statistics Canada report, in 2018, there were over 99,000 victims (aged 15 to 89) of police-reported IPV incidents involving individuals who were legally married, common law spouses and those in dating relationships (Conroy et al., 2019). Compared to their male counterparts, women (79%) were overrepresented as victims of IPV (Conroy et al., 2019). IPV has had deleterious consequences in women’s lives. For example, women are more likely than men to be victims of sexual violence (Swan & Snow, 2002), experience negative mental and psychological outcomes (i.e. depression, anxiety, fear, low self-esteem) (Ansara & Hindin, 2011), sustain injuries (Feder & Henning, 2005) and be killed by an intimate partner (Conroy et al., 2019; Sinha, 2013). Indeed, women’s experiences of multiple traumatic victimization have compelled some to develop resistance strategies, including fighting back against their abusive partners (Weston et al., 2007), that result in some women getting arrested for violence against their partners (Dichter, 2013).

Over the past few decades, an emerging body of scholarship has shown that women’s victimization and subsequent criminalization are intricately linked (Arnold, 1990; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1996; Gilfus, 1993; Moe, 2004); some writers have referred to this as the victimization-criminalization continuum (Balfour, 2008; Pollack, 2012). Specifically, research shows that women who use force in their relationships have had a history of victimization and do so in response to their partner’s violence (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Swan & Snow, 2002). Yet, since the implementation of mandatory arrest policies there has been a trend in arresting women in IPV incidents, resulting in a significant increase in the number of women arrested for assaulting their intimate partners (Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002; Henning et al., 2006). Women
arrested on IPV charges face a number of challenges, including further victimization (Carbone-Lopez & Kruttschnitt, 2010), immigration issues, child custody issues and loss of employment (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Dasgupta, 2001).

While there is extensive research that explores women’s experiences of IPV and the victim-offender overlap (i.e. Carbone-Lopez & Kruttschnitt, 2010; Muftić, Finn & Marsh, 2015; Tillyer & Wright, 2014), this scholarship focuses predominantly on the experiences of white women. In fact, research that addresses Black women’s unique experiences of IPV and its consequences in their lives is sparse. The small number of research studies that have documented Black women’s differential experiences of IPV have argued that social inequalities shape their experiences (Bent-Goodley, 2004, 2011; Gillum, 2019; Nash, 2005; Potter, 2008; Richie, 2012; West, 2007).

**Literature Review**

**Black Women’s Experiences of IPV**

With the exception of data on Indigenous people, Canada does not officially collect race-based data. Existing U.S. data, however, show that the prevalence rate of IPV among Black women and men is disproportionately high (Black et al., 2011; Rennison & Welchans, 2000; Truman & Morgan, 2014). Between 2003 and 2012, non-Hispanic Black couples (4.7 per 1,000) had one of the highest rates of IPV (i.e. rape, sexual assault, robbery and assault) when compared to non-Hispanic white couples (3.9 per 1,000) (Truman & Morgan, 2014). Although Truman and Morgan (2014) did not address factors that contributed to disparities among different racial groups, other studies have suggested that socio-economic factors, rather than race, explained differences in IPV rates (Rennison & Planty, 2003; West, 2004). Rennison and Planty (2003) found that IPV was more significant along income rather than racial lines for both Black and
white victims. Specifically, Black and white couples with lower annual household incomes experienced IPV at a higher rate than those with higher annual household incomes. These findings highlight the ways in which economic marginalization compounds Black people’s experiences of IPV. Other structural factors (i.e. educational inequality, institutional racism, underemployment and poverty) and situational contexts (i.e. frustrations, drugs, alcohol) have been shown to increase Black women’s risk of IPV (Hampton et al., 2003).

Black women who experience IPV must also confront cultural and familial constraints around remaining silent about their abuse (Potter, 2008) and may be ambivalent to seeking support from the criminal justice system (Goodmark, 2008, p. 98) in order to protect their partners from further discrimination (Nash, 2005). According to Bent-Goodley (2001), “this reluctance is often a reflection of feeling left out of the formal system and a learned behaviour of self-survival” (p. 322). Black women’s experiences of IPV are further compounded by stereotypical images and caricatures typifying them as strong, angry, aggressive and violent. These images conflict “with the notion of the passive, helpless battered woman” (Harrison & Esqueda, 1999, p. 133) that is often used to characterize white women. Stereotypical images that construct Black women as aggressive or violent are problematic as they may also prevent them from being considered credible victims in IPV incidents (Ammons, 1994). Consequently, these pervasive stereotypical images reinforce the belief that Black women are capable of overcoming challenges on their own.

Black women’s experience of IPV is also confounded by sexism and racism, which impede their decision to terminate an abusive relationship (Richie, 2012; Taylor, 2005). Moreover, the lack of resources available to them limit their options for escaping violence (Gillum, 2008). Still, some women rely on internal supports such as family and friends (Few,
Gillum, 2008; Taylor, 2008) and utilize faith-based or religious facilities as a coping mechanism (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006; Potter, 2007a). Nonetheless, informal supports may be insufficient on their own to counter the effects of male partner violence and various forms of oppression. Black women who believe that they have limited options when terminating an abusive relationship may fight back to resist violence and protect themselves (Richie, 2012). However, those who fight back against an abusive partner face a number of collateral consequences, including subsequent criminalization (Potter, 2008; St. Vil et al., 2017).

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical race feminism (CRF) is the theoretical approach that informs this study and helps to conceptualize and deepen our understanding about the relationship between Black women’s victimization and criminalization. CRF is relevant to my analysis because it acknowledges that Black women’s experiences have merit (Wing, 2003) and forefronts issues of race, racism, power and various other forms of oppression (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). It also illuminates the multiplicity and intersectionality of Black women’s identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

The basic tenet of CRF is that racism is an everyday occurrence deeply ingrained in society (Razack et al. 2010). Because it is perceived as ordinary and natural, laws or rules that encourage treating everyone equally obscure racism (Matsuda, 1989) and do very little to address covert racism or the everyday alienation, despair and invisibility that racialized people encounter (Brown, 2007). Black women’s experiences are often compounded by multiple and overlapping forms of oppression, such as race, class and gender, histories of exclusion and disadvantage, poverty, unemployment and immigration status (Crenshaw, 1991; West, 2005). The social disadvantages experienced in society often contribute to racial disparities in the criminal justice system. According to Chan and Chunn (2014), “systemic and institutional discrimination is a key
factor in the differential treatment of racialized people” (p. xiv). Furthermore, “racial prejudice has contributed to the dismissal and/or minimization of criminal victimization involving racialized people… and has perpetuated the view that certain racialized groups in Canada are more prone to crime” (Chan & Chunn, 2014, p. xiv). Given Black women’s history of social disadvantage and oppression it is necessary to advance theorizing that exposes the challenges they encounter.

This article explores the complexities and cumulative effects of violence in the lives of Black women by illuminating the connections between their intersecting identities (i.e. gender, race, class) and experiences of victimization and subsequent criminalization. In particular, Black women who have had a long history of victimization and defend themselves against an abusive partner are criminalized for their actions, which leads to harsh and punitive treatment in the criminal justice system. There were three research questions: (a) What are Black women’s experiences of IPV? (b) How do Black women’s intersecting identities of race, class and gender influence how they perceive, experience and respond to IPV? (c) What are the consequences of IPV in the lives of Black women who are both victimized and criminalized?

**Method**

Participants were recruited between June 2018 and January 2019 by posting flyers at social service agencies and in communities across the Greater Toronto Area and surrounding regions and through personal and professional networks. Informed written consent was obtained from each participant prior to their interview. Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that asked questions about their race, ethnicity, age, employment status, income, level of formal education and religious affiliation. These questions were meant to help understand how intersecting aspects of Black women’s identities may influence their experience
with IPV and their experience with the police. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in a private room at a nearby public library or in their homes and lasted for approximately two hours. Some of the questions participants were asked included: 1) Have you experienced abuse in a previous or current relationship? 2) Could you please tell me more about this experience? How often did the abuse occur and how long did it last? 3) How has race affected your response to abuse in your intimate relationship? 4) How has your gender or class influenced your responses to abuse in your relationship? 5) In what ways have external factors such as pressures at work, loss of employment, etc. influenced your experience of abuse? Pseudonyms were used to protect women’s identities. Participants received an honorarium of $35 as a small token for their involvement in the study.

Interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed shortly after meeting with participants. Coding of the data and analysis involved several stages. In the first stage transcribed interviews were read to uncover preliminary themes. In the second stage, NVivo 12 for MAC was used for further organization of recurring themes. NVivo is a computer software that supports qualitative and mixed-methods research and allows researchers to organize and to better catalogue their data (QSR International, n.d.). In the last stage recurring themes were extracted, linked with relevant literature and analyzed using CRF. These themes assisted in describing the overlap between Black women’s victimization and criminalization and highlighting how they linked with various aspects of women’s identities and experiences of social marginalization and oppression.

**Findings**

**Sample Characteristics**

The full sample in this study was composed of 25 Black women who were victims of IPV in a heterosexual common law or marital relationship. Fifteen of the 25 women reported that they were also charged with an IPV-related offence following police contact; these women are the
focus of the paper. Four of the women were in a relationship with a white man, one woman was in a relationship with a man of mixed race and 10 women were in a relationship with a Black man. Women ranged in age from 29 to 57 years old with an average age of 39 and lived in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and surrounding areas. Five of the women were born in Canada, eight in the Caribbean, one in South America, and one in Africa. Except for one woman, English was their primary language. Seven of the women had a high school education, seven had a college diploma and one had a university degree. Women’s annual household income ranged from less than $24,999 to $100,000 or more; the majority (11) of the women had incomes of less than $35,000 a year.

Following police intervention, 13 of the 15 women were charged as the primary aggressor (their partners were not charged) and two of the women were dually charged. Three women disclosed that they had previous contact with the police in which they were the accused, but only one of these women indicated that her previous encounter was related to a domestic incident. Charges included uttering threats, assault and assault with a weapon. All of the women were charged with at least one count of assault.

The next section highlights five main themes that emerged from women’s interviews: 1) Violence in Black women’s lives; 2) Stereotypical images of Black women; 3) Economic constraints as an aggravating factor; 4) Fighting back as a form of resistance; and 5) Consequences of being criminalized.

**Violence in Black Women’s Lives**

During the interviews, the women disclosed their experiences of various forms of male partner violence, ranging from verbal, emotional (i.e. humiliation, degradation), psychological, physical (i.e. kicking, choking, slapping, punching and biting), sexual and financial abuse.
Desiree experienced emotional and psychological abuse on a daily basis, which she began to internalize. As she shared, “At first it was verbal abuse, bitch, slut, whore, every day. And then emotionally. I start accepting…. He was always putting me down, the way I walk, the way I talk, the way I dress.” Similarly, Kiara described being in an abusive marriage where she was denigrated. She stated,

In my marriage I felt like I was nothing … and I was depressed, I didn't talk about it. It didn't help me because my husband made me feel like I'm not worth anything. He made me feel like he was enough, my life stopped there.

Jocelyn also experienced emotional and psychological abuse in her marriage. She said her husband berated her so much that she considered harming herself:

He can insult you in a way you feel like killing yourself, I swear. I don't know how to say the words he says … this makes me so angry. I raise my voice, and from there he gets angry. He would use words like “I'm a nobody, I'm an idiot, I'm useless, slutty cunt.”

Emotional abuse was one of the many forms of violence that characterized Black women’s lives whereby their partners deployed “a set of psychological, emotional, and/or verbal tactics that result in fear, anxiety, or … confusion” (Richie, 2012, p. 32). The manifestation of violence in their lives contributed to feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, disempowerment and entrapment. Women’s narratives alluded to both the short- and long-term devastating effects of psychological abuse. These incidents worsened over time and increased their risk for more severe forms of violence.

With the exception of one woman, all of the women shared that they had been physically assaulted by their husbands or common-law partners. Many women were injured during these assaults. Pamela was married at a young age and had four children with her abusive husband.
The violence was so severe that she was forced to leave her children behind in the Caribbean in order to escape. She conveyed:

I got a lot of beat up with my first husband. He didn't know what he wanted and 16 years old, I didn't even know what I wanted. He used to beat me up a lot and I pray to God and I tell him I want to come abroad, and I did, so I can leave him behind. I leave my kids there. That’s when I realized that I did something terrible, leaving my kids behind. Pamela’s story captured the severity of the violence some of the women were subjected to. With little support from her family, she felt she had no choice but to flee to safeguard against further violence.

A few of the women disclosed experiencing sexual violence in their relationships. Women shared that they were coerced into having sex with their partners; some believed the sexual violence perpetrated by their partners were attempts to gain dominance and control over them. Dixie was coerced into having sex with her intimate partner. She reflected on an incident that occurred while they were going through a divorce. She said she made it clear that she had no interest in him, but he ignored her wishes and raped her. She asserted,

I was trying to get out of it. And the feeling of being raped by your husband is like the worst thing in the world. I always felt like he did that on purpose as a control thing. That was his abuse.

The majority of women who experienced sexual violence, in particular marital rape, did not report these incidents to formal supports or the police for a variety of reasons, including fear they would not be believed. Shortly after moving in with an older man, Gabby said she developed a friendship with him which later evolved into an intimate relationship. She expressed having financial difficulties at the time and was forced to engage in a sexual relationship with
him to receive financial support. Gabby did not report her experience to the police because she believed the age difference between her and her partner would reflect negatively on her. Gabby stated,

Not that I wanted to have a sexual relationship with him but, you know, he was the one in charge of everything. It was his house. Everything was under his name. Yeah, he can't give me money for free…He’s an older guy, I’m 30 plus and um, they might think I'm up to no good, you know.

Black women’s discomfort and reluctance in sharing their experiences of sexual violence are “inextricably linked to gender and race…. Black women rape survivors are judged as less truthful and more to blame for their rapes” (Donovan & Williams, 2013, p. 180). Women’s non-disclosure of forced sex by their husbands or common-law partners is further compounded by the perception that their sexual encounters are consensual. Since these encounters have historically been disregarded as rape (Randall & Venkatesh, 2015), there is increased motivation for women to remain silent.

For some women, the presence of drugs and alcohol increased their risk of severe forms of violence. Evelyn chronicled an incident with her partner in which they were both under the influence of drugs and alcohol. She explained that she was thrown from the hood of his car:

He got physically aggressive with me and started throwing alcohol bottles at me. He almost split my face open and then we tussled on the ground. I went downstairs and I was going to take my shit and leave. Then he came downstairs, he turned the car on. I’m on the hood of the car. He swung so fast I almost broke my arm. Then he drove off with my wallet and everything in the car and I’m like, “Oh my God, what do I do now?” I’m like, “I have no choice!”
There is substantial evidence that documents the relationship between substance use and violence (Carney & Buttell, 2006; Cunradi et al., 2002; Feder & Henning, 2005; Field & Caetano, 2005). It was also apparent from the women’s narratives that the presence of drugs and alcohol increased the frequency and severity of violent victimization in their relationships. However, it is important to note that substance use was one of many factors that exacerbated Black women’s experiences of IPV.

Black women who experienced IPV were also susceptible to injuries. Injuries sustained ranged in nature from minor (e.g. scratches, bruises) to severe (e.g. broken bones, head injuries, internal injuries). Crystal described the injuries that were inflicted by her partner:

I’m always getting hurt. As I said, he will knock me in the shoulders, either the head, the side. I’ve had pictures with my side bruised up all the time…. I guess I just got used to it…. The worst was the side because the tummy and the side always hurt.

Although women who experience IPV are at increased risk of sustaining injuries (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. 1995), many women do not seek medical attention.

**Stereotypical Images of Black Women**

Black women’s experiences of IPV are further complicated by pejorative stereotypes that depict them as angry, loud, aggressive and violent (Collins, 2000). Another characterization is that of the strong Black woman, which has both positive and negative attributes as it depicts Black women as both assertive and self-sacrificing (Etowa et al. 2017; Watson & Hunter, 2016; West, 2012). The women’s narratives reflect some of the stereotypes that framed their experiences.

During our interview, Gabby shared that her neighbours overheard frequent arguments between her and her partner. From her encounters with some of her neighbours, she suspected
that they perceived Black people, particularly Jamaicans, negatively. Her remark captures one of the most persistent stereotypes that Black women encounter daily, one that constructs them as loud. As she stated, “Well, nothing is wrong with being Black, but you know they just stigmatize against Black … ‘She's from Jamaica and she is very loud’ and stuff like that.” It is possible that Gabby’s neighbours normalized the frequent arguments between her and her partner as something that is common among Black couples.

In the following statement, Natalie articulates the negative constructs she believes exist about Black men and Black women:

They think that Black guys, all they do is get girls pregnant, they don't take care of their children. They beat up their women because Black women are very stubborn and they don't listen. Um, let’s see what else, that Black girls are sluts, you know, it’s their fault. They’re very mouthy, they have no respect and, you know, they don't know how to carry themselves as women. And so therefore a man has the right to, you know, show them their place. That’s what I believe.

Natalie’s narrative pointed to a widespread assumption about the absenteeism of Black fathers and their disregard for their familial responsibilities (Roberts, 2002). The other assumption relates to the “angry Black woman” construct. Those who accept these negative racialized and gendered stereotypical assumptions are more likely to perceive that Black women are responsible for their victimization and believe that violence against them is justified.

A stereotype that is often used to characterize Black women is that of the “strong Black woman,” which was endorsed by more than half of the women. The strong Black woman construct is both a stereotype and a reality in Black women’s lives (Potter, 2008). According to Ruth, “Black women tend to portray that they’re big and strong, that nobody can touch them.
And some of them really come across really angry.” For Serena, being strong is a necessary survival mechanism that she was taught at a young age.

Well, I mean just deal with it. You don’t sit there and cry in your Cheerios, get over it.

You know what I mean? You don’t get depressed. You don’t sit there. You just deal every day. It’s just how culturally you’re taught, be strong, don’t be a punk.

Some women believed they had no option than to be strong because they did not have the same protection as white women. As Janice shared, “I just feel like we have no rights. I don’t feel like we have rights … It is racism… I struggle with that even at work. It’s everywhere.”

Women who endorsed the strong Black women stereotype were more likely to remain silent about the abuse they experienced. As Crystal stated:

I was ashamed when a lot of things started happening. So, for me, keeping it private was my best solution because if nobody knew about it and I try to fix it myself, thinking that I was doing a good thing, that was my comfort. But the pain became real, you know what I mean? It’s different when we're trying to do things ourselves but when the pain became real for me, being private wasn’t enough for me anymore.

Some women shared their experiences with others, but they were encouraged to remain silent. According to Jocelyn, both her mother and her partner’s mother were aware of conflicts in her relationship, but they encouraged her to try to cooperate with her partner,

I spoke to my mom, and his mom knew he could be like that. And they’ll be like, “When he starts to insult you or call you names, try and keep quiet and say anything. Just be mute, and don’t let it escalate,” and stuff like that. But they don’t hear what he calls me. They don’t hear him yell and call me names.
Black women in this study discussed being described as strong willed, outspoken and assertive. Endorsement of this stereotype also has implications for how women are treated by their partners, family members, the criminal justice system and society. For example, Black men who hold these stereotypes may rationalize negative treatment of Black women. Stereotypical images of Black women also constrain many to remain silent about their abuse and contribute further to their isolation.

**Economic Constraints as an Aggravating Factor**

Economic constraints further amplified Black women’s experiences of violence and increased their vulnerability to subsequent criminalization. In a few instances, women shared that they were the primary breadwinners because their partners were either unemployed or did not receive enough income to adequately provide for their families. Dixie worked so that she could look after the family. However, conflicts arose in the relationship when her partner refused to help with responsibilities at home.

There was a time when he wasn’t working, but he insisted that the baby should still go to daycare, which was stupid because it was costing more money than we could afford. But he didn’t want to look after her… I had to get up, get the baby ready, take her to daycare at 6 o’clock in the morning, or 7 o’clock…. And then the next one came…and he was getting progressively more abusive, hitting and stuff like that, and extremely antisocial.

Based on Dixie’s statement, it is possible that her work outside of the home disrupted the traditional gendered division of labour where the husband was primarily responsible for the family’s economic stability. Black men’s desire to provide for their families necessitates economic independence; however, their attempts are often hindered by racism and systemic barriers (i.e. economic disadvantages). According to Chaney (2009), “racism greatly minimizes
the likelihood that Black men can educationally and economically be independent and stand on
their own” (p. 119). It is possible that these barriers impact Black men’s ability to fulfill their
responsibilities, which may worsen the family’s economic challenges and contribute to elevated
relational conflicts (e.g. anger, frustration) and spark further violence.

Jocelyn also expressed that she and her husband argued frequently over money. At the
time they were saving for a house, but he was not forthcoming with his earnings.

We had a disagreement about money… and that was what aggravated the quarrel. We
were saving money for the house … and I was like, “Okay, let me see what you're
splitting so I know I’m getting my fair share.” And he didn’t used to show me, and that’s
what escalated the whole thing. He didn’t want to…. He actually slapped me across the
face.

Frequent disagreements over money or the distribution of funds are not uncommon for people
who are economically marginalized. According to Hampton et al. (2003), “the situational context
in which intimate partner violence occurs among African Americans is, in many ways, a product
of the various structural forces (e.g., institutional racism, cycles of chronic underemployment and
unemployment, poverty, etc.)” (p. 542). Consequently, these conditions create unpredictable and
violent circumstances for Black women.

Janice’s economic marginalization was further compounded by her immigration status
and precarious employment. She met her partner while he was visiting the Caribbean. After a
few years of dating, they got married and she immigrated to Canada. However, her husband
started displaying erratic behaviour shortly after her arrival. The little money he received from
his pension was spent mostly on alcohol. She said he only gave her $100 for the entire month to
buy groceries.
I said, you know, “The time you would take money to buy all this booze, you can buy food for us to eat.” Like, it was really a struggle. So, I started braiding hair at home and then the money that I would get … I would buy food and then he would demand that money from me. Then I started standing up. I said “No.”

Immigrant women are more susceptible to IPV due to the additional barriers they encounter (Menjivar & Salcido, 2002), including structural conditions, lack of knowledge about their rights, lack of family ties, fear of deportation and lack of access to relevant services. Many newcomer women often have difficulties working in the conventional labour force. These results are consistent with those of Erez et al. (2009), who found that women who were immigrants reported having difficulties finding suitable employment. Nonetheless, those who worked were also subjected to abuse and domination.

**Fighting Back as a Form of Resistance**

Although Black women utilized various resistance tactics (i.e. avoidance, verbal aggression) against an abusive partner, the cumulative effects of violence along with structural and community contexts compelled some women to physically fight back against their partners to protect themselves.

A few women shared that they had witnessed their mothers being abused and did not want to have a similar experience. As Candice acknowledged, “I was watching my mom being abused and I wasn’t going to be abused. I don’t even understand how that happens, but I think it has something to do with my mom being abused.” Like many of the women in the study, being hit by her partner amplified Crystal’s motivation to leave.
We got into an altercation…. I don't remember what he used to hit me … as soon as he hit me with it, that was it…. I hit him back because … I’m not going to take any abuse from nobody. So, we rolled … and we rolled, and fight and I fought.

For Jocelyn, fighting back was necessary to stay alive:

I was responding to him hurting me because he was so abusive. He’s really big. I don't want to die with him hitting me. And then I tried to fight back. I’m like, “Don’t touch me. Don’t hit me.” He hit me; I would hit back. Sometimes he laughs, and he’s like, “You think you can fight me?” I was like, “Even if I die trying, I will still try.”

Although Gabby’s partner was physically stronger than her, she disclosed that when he abused her, she had to fight back:

When my partner started abusing me, I don't just sit there and take abuse because I will curse back and abuse back…. I have to fight back, you know, because I have to stand up for my rights, too. It’s impulsive, you're in the abuse.

The women’s narratives provide great insights into the many factors that contribute to their use of defensive tactics against an abusive partner. Although women believed that fighting back was necessary to protect themselves, the barriers and consequences that arose were unpredictable.

**Consequences for Criminalized Black Women**

There were severe consequences for women who experienced IPV and were subsequently arrested, including being charged with a criminal offence, acquiring a criminal record, losing their children following involvement with Children’s Aid Society as well as loss of their homes and jobs.

**Criminal Justice Outcomes**
All of the women were initially charged with an offence, of these women, 11 shared that they received a conditional sentence. A conditional sentence is served in the community and may be imposed by a judge if there is no minimum term of imprisonment for the offence, the maximum length of the sentence is two years less a day and the court is satisfied that serving the sentence in the community would not pose a danger to public safety (Comack & Balfour, 2004). Conditional sentences have mandatory conditions attached to them, including “keeping the peace and being of good behaviour, appearing in court when ordered to do so, reporting regularly to a supervisor and remaining within the jurisdiction” (p. 103). Judges can also impose optional conditions, “such as abstaining from drugs and/or alcohol, abstaining from owning or possessing a weapon, performing up to 240 hours of community service, attending counselling or treatment programs and abiding by a curfew” (p. 103). Women accepted guilty pleas in exchange for a lesser sentence. Typical conditions imposed on the women were signing a peace bond and attending a Partner Assault Response (PAR) Program. Some of the women had to adhere to probation orders. In a few instances, women were issued restraining orders.

A peace bond was presented to many women as an appropriate alternative to those who did not wish to attend a trial and/or could not afford a lawyer. According to the Department of Justice (2017c), a peace bond “is used where an individual (the defendant) appears likely to commit a criminal offence, but there are no reasonable grounds to believe that an offence has actually been committed” (para. 1). Women who sign peace bonds must adhere to specific conditions for a period of time and not be charged with any subsequent offences (Department of Justice, 2017c). Natalie had to sign a peace bond after she was arrested for assaulting her partner. As she articulated:
I got a peace bond. So, for a year, for 12 months, until next year, June 12th, I'm not allowed to be around him. And, uh, I have to be on good behaviour. So, if I get in trouble with the law again, I'll get charged and I'll go to jail for five years. So, I'm on a peace bond at this moment until next year June 12th.

A few women said they felt that they did not have any other choice but to agree to a plea bargain, while others said they felt they were coerced into signing a peace bond. Jocelyn stated,

I told the lawyer, “Why would I even do this when I didn't do nothing? Is there not a way that you can defend me? And since they don't have anything that I touch him, and I push him?” And the lawyer was like, “This can go on and on for years”… And he said that, “You said you wanted it to go very fast,” that I should just do the program and sign the peace bond.

Despite her attempts to explore other options, Zoe said she felt coerced into signing a peace bond. As she stated, “they wanted me to sign a peace bond… I don't want to sign the peace bond or accept the peace bond. I asked the duty counsel to plead to the Crown attorney to ask them… like, is there any other way?” Other women seemed uncertain of the extent to which the peace bond would affect them. When asked if she had to sign a peace bond Ruth said, “Well for a year apparently, we are supposed to, I am supposed to stay away from him.” Adhering to conditions of a peace bond may be challenging for women whose partners continue to intimidate and harass them. According to Dixie,

If we behaved ourselves for a year and didn't have any incidents, then the charges will be completely dismissed. Well, I of course behaved myself. He didn’t. So eventually the charges were fully dismissed against me, but he continued to torment me and bother me, so the drama continued and continues to this day.
Women who sign peace bonds experience negative consequences associated with having a criminal record. As Tia stated, “they're supposed to drop the charges and clear the record, but anybody that checks the record they will see I was charged, a soft check or whatever they call it.” The ramifications of being convicted of an offence are severe (The Canadian Bar Association, 2017), therefore it was not surprising to see the number of Black women who were economically disadvantaged or did not have the necessary resources or supports to forego a court process that may not be favourable to them. However, the process of being arrested and charged with an offence has many collateral consequences for Black women whose records are marred by their encounter with the police, which may dissuade many from turning to the criminal justice system for help in the future.

**Women’s Involvement with Children’s Aid Society (CAS)**

The involvement of the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) was another negative outcome following Black women’s arrest. Women shared that CAS gave them a set of directives that necessitated their cooperation; when they did not comply, they lost their children or had limited access to them. Other women stated that their partners called CAS in an attempt to portray them as bad parents or manipulated children to lie to CAS workers.

Natalie shared that she had a difficult time getting out of very violent and destructive relationships; consequently, there was a history of CAS involvement. She was advised by CAS to stay away from her abusive partner but regrettably informed him of her new address. When her partner showed up at her new apartment, an argument ensued. The police intervened and charged her with assault. CAS was also notified.
My daughter was only three years old, my oldest one. And what happened was that CAS had told me to stay away from him and they were taken away because I still continued to have contact with him, and they found out.

While Natalie was given a difficult proposition, leaving an abusive relationship especially when children are involved is not always easy for women. It is likely that she faced other challenges that complicated her decision to leave, including safety and financial concerns.

CAS was called following an altercation in which Dixie and her partner were charged. Dixie said that once she was separated from her partner, he frequently tormented her and constructed her as a bad mother. She said her partner called CAS on different occasions or got their son to make allegations that she was neglecting him. She described her experience:

One time he told my son to tell the teacher all these awful things that we did to him, which none of them were true. But the child didn’t know better, so the child goes and tells the school that we’re making him do his own laundry and we’re not feeding him. So many things he did that were just awful. And he’s continued long after we were divorced, separated, everything. He continued to just torment me and make my life hell.

In Serena’s situation, both the child welfare system and the criminal justice system failed her. She was given an ultimatum by CAS to leave her partner or lose her children. She complied with their instruction and moved, but in the end, she still lost them. She also reported the violence to the police; they arrested him, but he was released soon after. Over a short period of time, she moved seven times to protect herself and her children. But with each move, her partner showed up and abused her. The last time he showed up and she fought back, the police were called and CAS intervened again. Consequently, they deemed the children in need of protection due to ongoing IPV and her instability. She expressed,
I was given a choice by Children’s Aid, actually. They’re like, “You need to leave now, or we are taking the children.” So, I said, “Okay, let’s go.” I moved out, left with just the clothes on our back, essentially. Uh, he started stalking us at our new house, so we had to move…. They called me and my kids moving too often unstable. Their position was that I would be isolating the children and my lack of ability to connect with people would isolate my social circle, which would isolate there’s.

**Underemployment/Precarious Work Status**

Women encountered additional barriers related to precarious employment and volunteer opportunities. While some women were able to retain employment following their arrest, other women had difficulties acquiring preferred employment or volunteering with vulnerable populations (i.e. children, older adults, people with disabilities). For women whose employment was still intact following their arrest, there was an ongoing fear of losing their jobs if it were discovered that they had a criminal record.

Zoe was one of few women who kept their original employment following her arrest but lived in constant fear of losing her job. As she mentioned:

I’ve had to take off for court and even though they know I’m going to family court because some of the cases had been so close, I had to tell one person and that was just brutally embarrassing. You just think that everybody knows. I’m in fear because I’m thinking I’m going to lose my job. Like, if somebody finds out or if they do a check. Like, what if one day they decide you have to start doing police checks for your job? Like, there’s so many things that go through my mind.

Women who maintained their employment after their arrest worked with companies that did not require a vulnerable sector check, which may have worked to their advantage. However,
other women were not as fortunate. A few women disclosed that they had difficulties acquiring employment or volunteer opportunities. Having a criminal record created significant barriers for Natalie:

I’m not able to get a job that I want. I want to work with children. I can’t do that. And I can’t even volunteer because nowadays they do criminal record checks for volunteering.

So now my life is, it’s shit. Like, I can’t do nothing. I can’t work. I can’t volunteer.

Like Natalie, many women work in the social service sector, providing support to those most vulnerable in society (i.e. children, people with disabilities and older adults). Most agencies who provide support to these populations require a vulnerable sector screening and are less likely to hire someone who has a criminal record. Not being able to find appropriate employment increases Black women’s economic marginality.

Crystal had difficulties finding employment as well as a place to rent. She declared,

Just finding a job, that was the biggest one for me. Number two, finding a place to live.

Nobody would take me because they do a credit check and all that stuff…. I didn’t pay rent, so I don’t have anything financially to show. So that affected me big time.

Crystal’s articulation of the difficulties she experienced finding a job exemplifies the disparate impact of agency surveillance. Indeed, social service agencies reinforce criminalized Black women’s marginality by prohibiting them from acquiring meaningful employment.

In other instances, women spoke about being fired once their employer conducted a vulnerable sector check. As Gabby conveyed, “I was working there for four or five months and she had to let me go because of the vulnerable check. Hopefully, you know, I get other jobs that they don’t do an in-depth police clearance, you know.” For Tia, after she was arrested,
everything seemed to go wrong, as she mentioned, “I lost my apartment, I lost my job, I got sick, I had pneumonia and all kinds of stuff happen the same two weeks right after I got arrested.”

As was evident from their narratives, criminalized women faced a number of collateral consequences that made it challenging for some to regain independence and rebuild their lives. These findings are supported by previous scholarship (Solomon, 2012) which indicates that having a criminal record profoundly impacts Black people who already experience racial discrimination in the labour market.

**Discussion**

The present study sought to examine the intersection of Black women’s victimization and criminalization. In particular, it focused on their experiences of IPV, factors that influenced their responses to IPV and the consequences of being criminalized. Similar to findings reported by Potter (2008) and Richie (1996), results showed that Black women experienced high levels of physical and psychological forms of violence that differed in intensity. Black women were also subjected to sexual violence in their relationships. Comparable findings were reported by Baker et al. (2003). Black women in their study accounted for 82% of the 110 women they interviewed.

The various forms of violence that unfold in Black women’s lives can be understood by examining a number of structural inequalities (relating to race, gender, class) that characterize their lives and increase their vulnerability to IPV. Other factors that complicated Black women’s experiences of violence included the presence of drugs/alcohol, pejorative stereotypes and economic marginalization. Findings from this study are in line with those reported by Carbone-Lopez and Kruttschnitt (2010). In their study, they found that women’s and their partners’ substance use (i.e. alcohol, drugs) increased the frequency and severity of violence in their lives. In contrast, Feder and Henning’s (2005) study showed that alcohol and/or other substances were
more likely to influence men’s perpetration of violence in their relationships than their female counterparts. Although a couple’s use of substances in their relationship may increase their risk of violence, Black people may be more susceptible due to their histories of racial oppression and social and economic marginalization. Researchers have noted that Black women who used substances had lower socio-economic status; their experience of racism increased their use of substances (Stevens-Watkins et al., 2012).

Findings from the current study suggest that stereotypical images that portray Black women as strong, angry, aggressive or violent complicate their experiences and responses to IPV and may contribute to negative consequences in their intimate relationships. West (2004) highlighted the historical significance of negative portrayals of Black women and maintained that these portrayals have been used to normalize violence against them. In her study, Gillum (2002) alluded to the negative consequences of stereotypes. She was interested in understanding the degree to which Black men endorsed stereotypes of Black women. Based on her findings, 71% endorsed the matriarch stereotype (strong Black woman); Black men who endorse these stereotypes were more likely to use violence against women (Gillum, 2002). Gillum cautions that endorsing stereotypical images of Black women is one of many factors that negatively affects relationships between Black women and men. Systemic anti-Black racism and pejorative stereotypes may also lead some to believe that Black women are not credible victims.

Comparable findings were captured in Esqueda and Harrison’s (2005) study, which found that of the 288 white participants (138 women and 150 men) interviewed, the majority of participants believed that Black women were more culpable for IPV than white women. The authors believed that biases based on race and gender influenced participants’ perception of Black women
Findings from the current study suggest that cultural and societal cues silenced Black women from speaking up about their experience of violence (Bent-Goodley, 2001). Many of the participants endorsed the strong Black woman construct. For these women, there was an expectation that they should be strong enough to endure the abuse and resist an abusive partner (Richie, 2012). These beliefs are well supported in the scholarship. As Goodmark (2008) states, “victimhood is intimately tied to traditional notions of womanhood, notions that have been largely defined by a white norm … this construction deprives Black women of victim status and its associated protections” (pp. 85-86). Taken together, it is apparent that Black women’s experiences of racism and social marginalization (Maynard, 2017; Richie, 1996, 2012) contributed to their reluctance to seek formal support.

Black women who believe they will not receive fair and equal treatment by the criminal justice system may fight back to protect themselves and resist further violence, consequently putting them at risk of criminalization. All of the women who used defensive tactics in response to their partner’s violence did not consider themselves primary aggressors. These results reflect those of St. Vil et al.’s (2017) study that explored the survivor strategies of Black women who experienced IPV. According to their findings, women fought back in self-defense to save their lives and to reduce further violence. However, according to Harrison and Esqueda (1999), “Black women who physically resist their batterers may inadvertently confirm stereotypes regarding Black women’s aggressiveness” (p. 133).

There were myriad consequences for Black women who experienced IPV and fought back against an abusive partner. One negative outcome of fighting back against an abusive partner was the criminal justice ramifications that ensued. Other consequences involved having their children temporarily or permanently removed from their homes and experiencing
precarious or loss of employment. These findings are in line with those reported by Richie (1996, 2012) and Lacey et al. (2015), who found that violence had multiple negative consequences in Black women’s lives. Another criminal justice system outcome for women in this study was that most were charged with assault and not their partners. This finding contradicts other research that showed that women are more likely to be charged alongside their partners (Feder & Henning, 2005; Swan & Snow, 2002).

Like other researchers (Pollack et al., 2005) have found, women in the current study believed they were pressured to accept a plea bargain. The majority of Black women accepted plea deals due to fear that they would not be believed or the courts would not respond favourably to them. These women also could not afford a lawyer, forgoing their rights to challenge the charges against them. Subsequently, they opted to plead guilty in exchange for a lesser sentence, such as attending a PAR Program. The majority of the women were offered the option to enter into a peace bond, which may suggest leniency on the part of the criminal justice system. Although there was no actual criminal conviction for women who entered into a peace bond, they faced similar ramifications as those who are convicted of an offence. While women are fulfilling conditions of a peace bond, information is visible on a criminal record check. Even after conditions have been fulfilled, if women have been fingerprinted for an assault or accused of uttering threats, “regardless of whether the charges were stayed, dismissed, withdrawn, absolutely or conditionally discharged, the peace bond will still be there” (Pardons Canada, 2018, para. 8). Breaching conditions of a peace bond has significant implications for women who may be charged with a criminal offence. The stigma associated with their criminalization was severe and increased their isolation and marginalization (Richie, 1996). In particular, the vilification of Black women as offenders shapes how they perceive themselves and how they are
perceived by others. While none of the women described themselves as offenders or perpetrators, they recognized that being constructed as offenders made it difficult to navigate social processes without extreme barriers. The deleterious effects of their overlapping identities of victimization and criminalization are life altering and make it difficult for Black women to regain control and stability over their lives.

CAS involvement created additional barriers for criminalized women in the study; these findings echoed those reported by Pollack et al. (2005). Black women’s experience of child welfare was marked by over-surveillance and punitive measures (Roberts, 2002). In a few cases children remained with their mothers, and in other cases, children were removed from the home. It is not surprising that Black women experienced challenges with CAS given that a growing body of scholarship indicates that Black children are disproportionately overrepresented in the child welfare system (Clarke, 2012; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018; Phillips & Pon, 2018). According to Phillips and Pon (2018), Black mothers are constructed as the “racial other” and Black families are perceived as “deficient and dangerous” (p. 99). These negative constructs are informed by “anti-Black racism, colonialism and white supremacy” (p. 99). Consequently, these negative experiences may increase Black women’s anxieties and distrust of the child welfare system (Clarke, 2012). By further subjugating criminalized Black women who come to the attention of CAS, the child welfare system reinforces state power and control over Black families.

The precarity of employment for criminalized women is considerable (Flower, 2010; Visher et al., 2008). In fact, having a criminal record may disproportionately impact Black women who are already vulnerable to greater discrimination (Morris et al., 2008). Existing scholarship suggests that precarious employment is gendered and racialized (Cranford et al.,
Women are more likely to be unemployed and in non-standard forms of employment compared to their white male counterparts (Menendez et al., 2007). Following their arrest, the majority of the women in the current study experienced greater stigmatization and economic marginalization. The multiple stigma of being constructed as a criminal constrained these women. Many women were either unemployed, had low paying jobs, had difficulties finding appropriate work or were receiving some form of government assistance. Although a couple of women earned yearly salaries of over $100,000, their relative economic stability did not afford them the privilege of avoiding the repercussions of a criminalized status. Findings from the study, therefore, draw attention to broader social and institutional processes that contribute to inequitable employment practices and reduces the likelihood of Black women acquiring legitimate income and gaining economic stability.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Mandatory arrest and charging policies have contributed to an increase in the number of women arrested for abusing their partners. Yet, there is a dearth of research that examines the differential impact of these policies for Black women. Penalizing Black women who have been victimized by their male partners and use force in self defence is problematic because it fails to take into account the complexities of violence in their lives. Moreover, such criminalization strategies “deny women choice and fail to acknowledge [Black women's] multiple allegiances to themselves, to their partners, and to their communities. Mandatory policies also ignore Black women’s negative history with and mistrust in the criminal justice system” (Hampton et al., 2008, p. 343). Therefore, further exploration is required that explores the various factors that complicate violence in Black women’s lives and the ways in which these influence their future involvement with the law. Findings from my research suggest that economic marginality
exacerbated Black women’s experience of IPV; however, more research is required that builds on these findings. Although examining differences of IPV and criminalization across ethnicity was not a primary focus of the study, an important finding was that women born in the Caribbean were more likely be involved in an altercation that resulted in their arrest than other women. It is possible that these women’s higher arrest rates were due to police’s negative perception of women born in the Caribbean. Caribbean women remain an understudied group (Lacey et al., 2015). Therefore, examining how police perception of women born outside of Canada influence arrest decisions could better inform this area of research. While findings from this study were based on women’s self-reports of their experiences of IPV, further exploration is required that considers the perspectives of both partners. According to Potter (2007b), including “batterers and the social, cultural, and individual sources of their behaviors will lead to a more holistic understanding of this phenomenon that continues to be shrouded in the belief that partner abuse is a private or personal matter” (p. 368). Thus, efforts must also engage men to critically reflect on their role in helping to eradicate male violence.

**Conclusion**

This study adds to the paucity of research that examines the overlap between Black women’s victimization and subsequent criminalization. Findings emphasize the need for responses that move beyond criminalizing Black women who have been victimized. As was evident from women’s narratives, they were in fact victims of IPV and used force in response to their partner’s violence. Their experiences of violence were further complicated by structural inequalities, cultural expectations and pejorative stereotypes. Black women who were criminalized faced considerable challenges. Specifically, many women expressed feeling further
victimized by criminal justice system personnel, and child welfare and social service agencies. The stigma of criminalization also prevented some Black women from accessing volunteer opportunities and gaining appropriate employment, which made them more vulnerable to economic marginalization. Further complicating Black women’s experiences of IPV is the belief that they will not receive the same level of protection as other women, in particular, white women. Subsequently, Black women were reluctant to seek support. Given these findings, penalizing Black women who resist male partner violence does little to safeguard them against subsequent violence. Further exploration is required to better understand the various manifestations of violence in Black women’s lives and its deleterious effects. Indeed, coordinated efforts between policy makers, community partners and the criminal justice system are necessary to ensure appropriate interventions are implemented and meet Black women’s unique needs.
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Manuscript 3: Black Women’s Experiences with the Police in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence

Abstract

This qualitative study was informed by critical race feminism and explored Black women’s experiences with the police with a particular focus on how issues of race, racism, oppression and subordination inform their experiences. It sought to answer three research questions: 1) What is known about Black women’s experiences with the police in the context of intimate partner violence? 2) Given their experiences with the police, what is their perception of the police? and 3) To what extent do women construct counter-narratives of their experiences with the police and what does that involve? The sample was comprised of 25 participants, 15 of whom were arrested. The women were over the age of 18 and lived in the Greater Toronto Area and surrounding areas. The majority of women expressed that they had negative encounters with the police, which was influenced by the police’s negative perceptions of them. Black women who called the police to intervene in an IPV incident were subjected to great scrutiny and vulnerable to racialized and gendered police violence. Consequently, women were fearful and distrustful of the police and were less likely to seek help from them in the future. The study answers the call for research that examines Black women’s experiences with the police from their perspective. It has implications for social service providers and provides strategies to improve future police interactions with Black communities.

Keywords: Black women, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, police, criminalization
Introduction

For the last several decades, scholars have documented the prevalence and nature of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Burczycka et al., 2018; Sinha, 2012). A disproportionate number of women and men from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are affected by IPV (Black et al., 2011; Truman & Morgan, 2014). In response to this significant social issue, the government implemented mandatory charging policies across the various jurisdictions in Canada to reduce the incidence of IPV (Department of Justice, 2017). The purpose of these policies was to a) recognize IPV as a problem, b) provide directives that required the police to charge an accused when there was reasonable and probable grounds to believe an offence had occurred, c) require the Crown to process and prosecute IPV criminal cases, d) remove the onus on victims for laying charges against an accused, e) deter people from engaging in IPV, and f) prevent people from reoffending (Department of Justice, 2017). While these policies have been hailed by victims and service providers for sending a clear message to people who use violence in their relationships (Barata & Schneider, 2004; Bohmer et al., 2002; Smith, 2000), others have questioned their effectiveness in achieving their intended outcomes (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Fraehlich & Ursel, 2014; Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Pollack et al., 2005). In particular, these policy initiatives have had unintended consequences (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Landau, 2000; Leisenring, 2011; Pollack et al., 2005), including a disproportionate number of women being charged with assaulting their partners (Pollack et al., 2005), higher rates of women’s incarceration and increased economic insecurity for women and their families (Abraham & Tastsoglou, 2016).

There is a well-developed body of IPV scholarship documenting the benefits and consequences of mandatory arrest and charging policies; however, this scholarship is often
oversaturated with the experiences of white women. When Black women are included in IPV scholarship, they represent a small fraction of the sample (Potter, 2015) and there is little or no discussion about intra-group differences (West, 2016). Furthermore, their experiences are seldom the focus of the analysis, as researchers subsume their experiences with those of other women (i.e. Houry et al., 2006; Grace, 2019; Dichter, 2013; Simmons et al., 2008). Many scholars fail to examine Black women’s experiences from an anti-Black racist perspective, rendering them invisible in much of these discussions. Consequently, there is a major gap in existing scholarship in terms of drawing on the narratives of Black women to understand their experiences of being charged for an IPV offence and how they have been impacted following police intervention.

**Literature Review**

With the exception of data on Indigenous people, Canada does not officially collect race-based data on incidences of IPV. However, existing U.S. data show that a disproportionate number of Black women and men are impacted by IPV. They are over-represented as victims and among those arrested for perpetrating violence against an intimate partner (Lipsky et al., 2012; McCloskey et al., 2006). There are a number of risk factors that have been shown to contribute to higher rates of victimization among Black people, including age, gender, income, prior exposure to violence and exposure to discrimination (West, 2016). Despite these risk factors, research shows that Black women are reluctant to report their victimization to the police in order to protect their partners (Bent-Goodley, 2001; Davies et al., 2007; Gover et al., 2013; Nash, 2005). Some are influenced by their communities to refrain from disclosing the abuse (Richie, 2012). Some women may believe that the situation does not warrant police intervention (Davies, et al., 2007). Some may fear further retaliation from their partners (Davies et al., 2007;
Taylor, 2013), distrust the criminal justice system (Petersen et al., 2004), or are dissatisfied with police intervention (Gover et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2003).

Unfortunately, police intervention often does little to remedy Black women’s vulnerable circumstances. Black women are subjected to increased police surveillance (Maynard, 2017; Sudbury, 2016) and experience excessive police use of force and/or brutality (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008; Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015; Maynard, 2017; Richie, 1996, 2012). Police officers have been found to not fully comprehend the complexities of violence in women’s lives (DeJong et al. 2008). In particular, Black women often have histories of prior victimization (Richie, 1996, 2012) and use force in response to their partner’s violence (Potter, 2008). Black women’s experiences with the police are further complicated by derogatory stereotypes held by the police that construct them as aggressive and violent (Maynard, 2017; Richie, 2012). Consequently, Black women who believe that they have been unfairly treated by the police are more likely to view the police less favourably than their white counterparts, contributing to a lack of trust and confidence in the police (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018). Indeed, this lack of trust also increases tension between the police and Black communities (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Lai & Zhao, 2010), which further unravels and exacerbates an already problematic relationship.

This paper examines criminalized Black women’s experiences with the police in the context of IPV from their perspectives and the meanings they attach to these experiences. Issues of race, racism, oppression, subordination and their intersections with Black women’s experiences of IPV and their encounters with the police will be explored. I conceptualize criminalization as the processes through which Black women are surveilled and their behaviours and actions criminalized, leading to harsh and punitive treatment by the police and other criminal justice personnel. These processes are characterized by the tactics used by the police to shame,
isolate and ostracize Black women. Findings presented contribute to the limited research that examines the experiences of Black women who have been charged by the police with perpetrating non-fatal IPV against their partners. Drawing on critical race feminism (CRF), the study highlights ways in which racism and other forms of social oppression manifest in and affect Black women’s experiences with the police.

**Theoretical Framework**

CRF is an offshoot of critical race theory and was developed by legal scholars in response to exclusionary theorizing that failed to recognize the differential experiences and treatment of racialized women within the criminal justice system (Wing, 1996-1997). These theorists maintained that existing theories did not accurately reflect racialized women’s intersecting identities of race, class and gender (Wing, 1996-1997). CRF is premised on several tenets: a) racism is endemic in society; b) the law is not neutral or objective; c) Black women’s voices/experiences have merit and should be positioned at the forefront of discussions; and d) Black women have intersecting and overlapping identities that influence their everyday experiences (Crenshaw, 1995; Wing, 1996-1997). CRF theorists also interrogate issues of power and authority as they relate to race, voice and representation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). They use counter-storytelling to legitimize the voices of Black women while exposing, disrupting and analyzing dominant discourses and practices that negate their experiences (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The act of disrupting dominant or master narratives is known as counter-narratives. Counter-storytelling is used as a tool to extend the personal narratives of Black women to illustrate and underscore larger social issues and legal principles regarding race and racial/social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2013). CRF is best suited to explore Black women’s experiences with the police in the context of IPV because it not only offers an analytic that recognizes that their
experiences have merit but situates their experiences at the centre of analysis. It also enables an interrogation of how issues of race, power and various forms of racism intersect in Black women’s lives.

**Method**

The study adopted a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of Black women’s experiences with the police. Data collection occurred over a 7-month period, between June 2018 and January 2019. Participants were recruited from various communities across the Greater Toronto Area and surrounding areas and were screened by the researcher to ensure they met the criteria for inclusion: participants must self-identify as Black, be over the age of 18 and have had a recent encounter with the police in which they were arrested or charged for abusing an intimate male partner. Data were collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews. Women were also asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that included questions about their age, race, level of education, employment and religious affiliation. During the interviews, participants were asked questions that centred on events leading up to their contact with the police in which there was an investigation and the outcome of their interaction with the police. They were also asked to give their account of what happened when they called the police and what transpired during their encounter with the police to better understand the type of interactions they had with the police, the charges that ensued and the consequences of their arrest. Interviews took place either at a local public library, in the participant’s home or at a community agency and lasted for approximately two hours.

Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Transcribed interviews were then imported into NVivo for Mac (version 12.3) (QSR International, n.d.). CRF was used as an analytical tool to uncover the themes that emerged from the women’s narratives. These themes
were informed by issues around race, racism, oppression and subordination (Hylton, 2012). One of the ways CRF scholars do this is by encouraging Black women to disrupt dominant or majoritarian narratives that construct them as angry, hostile, aggressive, argumentative and uncooperative. These are the elements of CRF that will be highlighted throughout the paper.

Findings

Participants

The sample is part of a larger study of 25 Black women and focuses on the 15 women who were arrested and charged with an IPV-related offence. All women were in heterosexual common law or marital relationships during their encounters with the police. However, at the time of the interview, 14 of the 15 women shared that they were estranged from their spouse or common-law partner and one woman was still living with her spouse. The women ranged in age 29 to 57 years old with an average age of 39. Women’s level of educational attainment was diverse, ranging from less than high school to university. Most of the women were employed either part-time or full-time with earnings of less than $34,999. Some of the women received financial support from the government; four received support from Ontario Works and three received support from the Ontario Disability Support Program (see: Table 1).
Findings from this study focused on criminalized Black women’s experiences with the police and the meanings they attach to these experiences. It is important to note that while the majority of the women were in relationships with Black men, three were in interracial
relationships with white men. Results show that Black women in interracial relationships may face unique challenges which may further intensify negative police interactions. There were several emerging themes: a) fighting back; b) calls to the police: partner’s manipulation and retaliation; c) not feeling heard; d) police aggression, excessive use of force and injury to Black Women; e) negative constructs of Black people and women; and f) Black women’s fear and distrust of the police.

**Fighting Back**

Black women’s accounts of the events that transpired prior to police intervention help to contextualize the severity and extent of violence they experience in their intimate relationships. Primarily, the women fought back and used force in their intimate relationships in response to ongoing and persistent violence from their partners.

Natalie experienced frequent emotional, verbal and physical abuse from her partner of six years. Although she tried to fight back to protect herself, she believed it did very little to stop the violence. As she stated:

One time he punched me so bad that my face was unrecognizable… he would slap me across my face, pull my hair, call me names, call me a bitch. I tried fighting back, I tried, yelling back at him and telling him, “Yo fuck off” and “Get the fuck out my house.” I tried defending myself, but he was a really big guy. I was basically powerless over him.

Dixie expressed that she fought back against her husband in self-defence. She had bought him a barbecue for his birthday, but it sat unopened in their living room for months. She said she got sick and tired of seeing it there and told him to “use it, move it or get rid of it” but he did not listen. When her husband got home and noticed the missing barbecue, he said “I want my fucking barbecue. If that barbecue is not back in the house, all hell is going to break loose.”
Dixie said he kept asking her for the barbecue, but she had already gotten rid of it. A physical altercation ensued. As she expressed, “So at one point he kind of went to push me, and I gave him one swift kick where the sun does not shine. And he then grabbed my leg. I went flying.”

Similarly, Ruth conveyed that she acted in self defence:

I confronted him. I said, “Where are you going? You’re lying to me. I’m not stopping you from going wherever you want, but you're not taking [partner’s daughter], you’re finding your own way and you’re not taking my vehicle.” We got into an altercation. He pushed me, I pushed him. He was on top of me on the couch. While I’m pregnant. I had this black and blue eyes and I bit him.

Black women who experience male violence are subjected to hostile social environments where there is no sense of safety, conditions are chronically tense, and conflicts build to the point of regular verbal altercations (Richie 2012, p. 33). Although, some researchers argue that women are as violent as men (Buttell & Starr, 2013; Straus, 2010), it was evident that the women’s primary motivation for using force in their relationships was in self-defence. These self-defensive acts were the women’s responses to protect themselves and resist further violence (Potter, 2008; Richie, 1996; West, 2007). Black women who defend themselves against an abusive partner may have more of a desire to protect themselves for fear that they may not have much protection from the criminal justice system. Subsequently, those who act in self-defence are vulnerable to retaliation and revictimization from an abusive partner who call the police.

**Calls to the Police: Partners’ Manipulation and Retaliation**

Despite the persistent violence in their lives, only three of the 15 participants indicated that they had called the police to report their experience of violence in incidents in which they
were charged. When asked why she chose not to call the police, Jocelyn shared that calling the police would make the situation worse for her, her partner and their family. As she stated:

I have never thought about calling the police for anything. Bringing the police in the family is not going to solve anything. It’s only going to make things worse because it’s going to cause problems. It’s going to cause problems in his job. It’s going to really affect the family and my kids.

While many women chose not to call the police, in several cases, it was the women’s partners who notified the police. These incidents were more likely to result in a charge against the women. Specifically, seven of the women’s partners called the police compared to the three instances where the women called the police. In other instances, a neighbour or a family member called the police. Crystal’s partner called the police during a physical altercation. As she stated,

He took my son… I pulled the baby back from him …and then he pushed me and then he's like, “Look how you scraped me, you use something and scraped me.” So, I'm like, “No, I don't scrape you.” He was like, “Watch what I'm going to do to you.” And that's when he called the police.

As was evident in Crystal’s case, prior to calling the police, abusive partners may utilize a myriad of tactics to provoke, manipulate and incriminate Black women to reassert their power and control over them. Threatening to call the police and following through with their threat have significant consequences for Black women who are frequently surveilled and subjected to disparate treatment by the police (Maynard 2017; Richie, 1996).

A few women shared that their partners called the police as a form of retaliation against them. Zoe’s relationship with her partner had dissolved at the time of police involvement. From her perspective, her partner lied about the incident. As she stated:
What bothers me is that, was there enough proof? I don't know what he showed them. Based on what was shown to me, was that enough to arrest me? No.... Like, he claimed that there was a scratch on his face. Well, if I had a scratch then I would be taking a picture of that. No picture was exhibited. So, I don't know how they were able to charge me with assault.

The fact that a large proportion of male partners were more likely to contact the police signals that some of these calls were malicious or retaliatory, which was also evident in Pollack et al.’s (2005) study. Moreover, male batterers may manipulate the system to silence Black women from speaking out about their abuse (West, 2007).

Research has shown there are various factors that influence the probability of charges against women, such as the seriousness of an offence, prior criminal record, use of a weapon or presence of alcohol or drugs (Friend et al., 2011; Simmons et al., 2008; Stuart et al., 2008). Most women in this study were charged with assault and a few with uttering threats or assault with a weapon. Two of the three women received charges related to an actual weapon (i.e. kitchen knife) whereas the third woman’s car keys were classified as a weapon. In a few instances, drugs or alcohol were present. Only three women disclosed that they had previous contact with the police as the accused, and only one woman indicated that her previous encounter with the police was related to a domestic incident.

Like many women in the study, Zoe was surprised when she was apprehended by the police and accused of assaulting her husband. Zoe shared that the police told her it was her partner who charged her with assault. As she stated:
He said, “[Partner’s name] has charged you with assault.” … All of a sudden this … calm came over me and I was like, “Are you serious?” And they said, “Yes, we are. We have to take you. We’re going to arrest you and take you to the station.”

The intention of mandatory charging policies is to remove the onus on victims for laying charges against an accused. While the input of a complainant is considered in IPV incidents, the police have discretionary power to charge an accused in IPV incidents. However, contrary to the intention of these policies, the officer absolved himself of any responsibility or accountability by telling Zoe that it was her partner who charged her. Consequently, the police’s tactics may increase tensions, animosity and subsequent violence between the couple.

As women shared their stories, it was evident that some were confused about how the police made a decision to charge them. In addition, they indicated that the police did not explain the reason for the charges. As Jocelyn stated:

I was definitely wrongfully accused. They didn't even know what to charge me [with] at first. At first pushing, later shoving, and later, slapping. I was like, what brought that about? I never did anything like this.

All the factors that influenced the police decision to charge these women are unknown. However, the fact that most of the women were charged solely is notable and contradicts other studies that report that women are more likely to be dually charged in IPV incidents (i.e. Melton & Belknap, 2003; Roark, 2016). The significance of race on the probability of arrest has been cited by other researchers, which raises questions as to whether non-legal factors such as race influenced the outcome for these women (Kochel et al., 2011).

Not Feeling Heard
Women were asked to discuss their interactions with the police. They shared that the police did not take the time to listen to them or explain why they were being charged. It is highly probable that the police questioned the credibility of Black women (Chan & Chunn, 2014). Participants indicated that the police were suspicious of them and constructed them as future suspects. In some instances, the women believed they were wrongfully charged and arrested for something they did not do; these findings were similar to those identified by Raja et al. (2006).

Evelyn stated, “They wouldn’t even listen to a damn thing I said. There wasn’t a Black police officer. They didn’t listen to any shit I had to say.” For Evelyn, the consequence of not being heard or having an officer that she could identify with on the basis of race had serious consequences, in particular, the risk of not being treated fairly. Similarly, Desiree said she pleaded with the police, hoping they would look closer at the evidence but was disappointed that her efforts were futile. As she explained, “I think if they just listen to what I was just saying for a sec, to say, ‘I didn't do it. Just follow those clues and you'll see that there's just no way.’ They did not listen to me.” Tia shared that she wanted a chance to exonerate herself but did not have an opportunity to provide her account of the events that transpired that day:

I wanted them to listen. At least give me a chance to say what I had to say. They didn’t.
They didn't ask any questions. They just took me in the room. They didn't question me, nothing, they just laid charges based on somebody else’s side of the story.

Dixie’s situation was slightly different from the other women, as both she and her partner were charged. Dixie felt that the police were indifferent, as she maintained:

As far as the police were concerned, I can’t say they were exceptionally rude or mean.
They were just doing their job. That’s kind of how I felt it was. They were completely
unsympathetic mind you, about anything I had to say or anything I’d been through. They were just strictly doing their job and that was it.

Unlike other women interviewed, Melanie said that the police asked her to explain what happened. Reflecting on her experience with two Black male officers, she stated that they were not rude, and they listened to both her and her husband:

I’ve never been in a situation where police came and took me. And especially, um, when they put me into the vehicle, they weren’t rude. They weren’t rough. They just said, “Well, I’m sorry ma'am, your husband called and said this has happened.” … They asked me what happened. They were very, very nice. It was two Black men, two Black police officers.

With the exception of a few women, women believed they did not have an opportunity to tell their side of the story or provide an alternate narrative. Some also shared that they were coerced to accept their partner’s version of the events that transpired. Melanie’s relatively positive interaction with the two Black male police officers was an exception when compared to other women in the study. Also, it did not appear that her race negatively influenced her experience with the police. In the other scenarios, the officers were predominantly white, which may increase the likelihood of a negative encounter. Considering that many women shared that they did not believe the police listened to them, it is not surprising that so many women claimed they were wrongfully charged.

**Police Aggression, Excessive Use of Force and Injury to Black Women**

Another important theme that was evident in this study was the police’s harsh treatment of Black women; in some instances, the police used aggression and/or excessive force which
caused injuries to women. Six of the fifteen women stated that the police were aggressive or used excessive force during their encounter with them.

Janice had recently moved to Canada from the Caribbean and was enrolled in college. Her white husband’s excessive drinking resulted in unintentional injuries to himself, often occurring outside of the home. After being out all night, Janice’s partner returned home the next morning with injuries and blood-stained clothes. When asked about his injuries and stained clothes, Janice stated that her husband lied to her. She left shortly after their conversation to attend her classes at college. To her astonishment, the police showed up at her school, accusing her of assaulting her husband. She shared that the police aggressively handcuffed and mistreated her. As she conveyed,

I couldn’t say anything. Like, the way they just handled me, like, “Just put your hands behind your back.” Even the handcuff, it was so tight. Like, I’m crying. I said, “This thing is squeezing my hands.” Like, they wouldn’t release it. They said, “You’re not allowed to say anything. Why are you talking?” When they take me to the station, another officer came out and he was taking me in, and I begged him to release it and he released it for me. It was like branding my hand.

Crystal had been separated from her husband when they got into a physical altercation. While they were out in public, he tried to take one of their children from her. She said he pushed her after she attempted to get the baby back. She was motivated to speak up because there were people around, so she said she grabbed him and said, “Listen, it ends today.” She said she was very proud of herself but then her partner accused her of scratching him and said, “Watch what I’m going to do to you.” And that's when he called the police. When the police showed up at her
house later that day, she was preparing a lunch for her young children, which she had planned to drop off at the school. As Crystal asserted,

This guy [police officer] wasn’t even listening to me and he's like, “That's it. You're not listening.” Box my hand, box the lunch and everything out of my hand, pushed me against the wall and I’m like, “What is happening here? I respectfully said to you, give me some time and let me drop it off and I’ll come back. I’m not running from you. I live here. I work here. I have three little kids waiting for me.” The school, everybody called me. They couldn’t get me because the police had my phone. They took the keys away for evidence to see if they can scan to see if I stabbed him with my key. Like, what is happening?

Crystal was abused by her husband then revictimized by the police. The officer’s aggressive actions reinforced patriarchal structures inherent in society and the criminal justice system. By asserting power and control over her, the police rendered her powerless to male authority and male violence.

A few women alluded to the gendered and racialized nature inherent in policing practices. They believed they were treated more harshly by white female officers. These women experienced female officers as more forceful, uncompromising and authoritative than their male counterparts. As Ruth shared:

I was treated like garbage and by a woman, by a white woman…. I hated her. She was very arrogant and thank God there was a guy that pulled up in his own cruiser as well and he pulled her aside and said, “Is this necessary? I think we're okay. Just ask her to drive herself to the police station.”
We certainly cannot ignore the gendered nature of policing (Belknap, 2014), for example, recognizing the challenges that female officers may face when working in a male-dominated environment (Garcia, 2003; Morash & Haarr, 2012; Rabe-Hemp, 2009). It is also possible that when Black women encounter female officers, they may expect that female officers will exhibit more understanding or be more receptive to their situation than male officers. However, when there is a contradiction between expected gendered approaches (i.e. nurturing, caring, emotional, gentle), Black women may be more resentful of female police officers who do not abide by these expectations.

In some instances, Black women reported that they sustained injuries, including broken bones. Serena described her experience with police violence. She had made numerous attempts to keep herself and her children safe from an abusive partner who is white by moving multiple times. Although she filed various police reports, they did very little to remedy the situation. When her ex-partner continued to harass her, she felt she had no choice but to protect herself. When the police responded to a call from a concerned neighbour, they had difficulties defusing the situation. The last thing Serena said she remembered was six “giant men” (police officers) running at her. She expressed her frustration with the encounter by saying:

My nose was broken, my wrist was broken. They broke my wrist to get me in handcuffs. Like, I was pretty off the hinges. I was out of line, but really, they should have tased him. They should not have knuckled up with me. They should not have done what they did. Then I could have saved my nose and probably could have saved your face had you guys just done what you were supposed to do.

As was evident in Black women’s narratives, the police were likely to use aggressive tactics to restrain and detain women who fought back against their abusive partners. According
to Maynard (2017), Black women are disproportionately degraded, physically abused, sexually assaulted and neglected by the police. Black women who were viewed as being outspoken, assertive or resistant to police authority were at an increased risk of police violence. The masculinization of aggression or force used by Black women was a deliberate tactic by the police to justify their violence against them.

**Negative Constructs of Black People and Black Women**

Black women were asked questions about the meanings they attached to their encounters with the police. Issues of race, racism, class and power permeated their responses. In fact, many Black women regarded the police, and the criminal justice system in general, as racist. Some women were of the belief that the negative experiences they had with the police were influenced by the negative stereotypes endorsed by the police about Black people in general and of Black women in particular, which resulted in differential treatment from the police and their decision to charge them.

Serena’s view of the police speaks to Black people’s everyday experiences of racism. As she stated, “There are some racist peckerwood around here. These fools ... police are notoriously racist. That’s not a new memo. That’s old news.” In Tia’s opinion, Black people are often constructed as criminals, which might be used to justify police aggression or brutality:

I think for police they have the “shoot first ask questions later” mentality when it comes to Black [people]. I don't know why, but I have seen, and I know not just domestic violence, just violence in a whole. They always assume it’s a Black person that’s doing the violence and sometimes it’s the most quiet, upstanding person that’s doing it, right?

Similarly, Zoe’s impression of police perception of Black people reflected both an anti-Blackness and an anti-Jamaican discourse. As she recounted:
It’s that misconception. They just feel like everybody’s cut from the same cloth. It’s like when they say every Black person’s Jamaican, every Black person is a criminal. I just don’t believe that the police see there are different types of Black women just like there are different types of white people. We’re all painted with the same brush. At the end of the day when you are within the system, you’re all criminals. We are all criminals no matter what.

Police officers who attribute characteristics that construct Black people as aggressive, violent and criminals may utilize racially biased policing practices (Maynard, 2017; Richie, 2012). Implicit or explicit racially biased policing practices may cause the police to treat Black people with suspicion and question their credibility (Comack, 2012). It may also result in the over surveillance and criminalization of Black people (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011).

Most of the women did not believe the police perceived Black women in a positive way and believed that their race was a factor in being charged. Serena postulated that Black women are perceived as loud, aggressive and poor:

We are perceived as loud and this and that and aggressive and so on and so on. Poor, loud, arrogance, you know, there’s a whole list of things that they automatically assume if you’re Black and in this city. You got to be on welfare if you’re Black.

Jocelyn shared that her race and her unwillingness to incriminate her partner influenced the way she was treated by the police. As she acknowledged, “To me, I felt that my race, and the fact that I refuse to say anything for them to get somebody to arrest, that was what made them react the way they did.” Melanie believed that Black women are more likely to be surveilled compared to white people, which she explains is a result of racist police practices:
I don’t think justice has been done properly with, especially with us. If it’s, I would say, I’m not racist, please don't think I am, they don’t check out the white folks as much as they check us out. It’s because of the colour of our skin why they are treating us like that. Gabby was of the view that the police treated her poorly because of her race, gender, class and neighbourhood:

When he came and stuff, it’s a co-op building, I think it, to him, he’s like, “Oh, these two Black persons and she’s a Black woman and oh, the baby is in care and stuff.” Based on what the partner said, he's branded me a certain way. Like, “She’s a lady living in the projects, living in co-op building and government facilities.”

A few women were with white partners at the time the police got involved. While some of these women were unaware of the extent to which race influenced their interactions with the police, others believed that their race in relation to their partner’s race added an additional barrier. In particular, they believed that the police may have been more suspicious of them and assume more culpability in relation to their white partners. Janice was one of the few women who had a white partner. She believed that her race, gender and the difference in age between her and her partner contributed to expeditious charges and police excessive use of aggression towards her.

I think that because [her partner] is white and he’s older than I am, at that time he was 57. Like, I think that’s just it. I feel that they look at me like this young Black girl taking advantage of this old white man. Like, that’s how I feel. Yeah. Because that’s exactly how they made me feel.

It is important to highlight the ways in which Black women’s intersecting identities of race, gender and class influenced their encounters with the police and their interpretation of their
experiences. Stereotypes and biases endorsed by the police reify the belief that Black women and Black people in general are subordinate or inferior, more aggressive, violent and more prone to crime than their white counterparts. Consequently, police officers who have these perceptions may minimize the seriousness of male partner violence and justify police revictimization and criminalization of Black women.

**Black Women’s Fear and Distrust of the Police**

Women were asked to assess their interactions with the police. Some of the women expressed fear following police intervention. Ruth shared that her experience with the police was traumatic and made her fearful of future police encounters. As she stated, “I hated police in general. I couldn’t drive my car or be in the street and hear a siren without panicking because I always think they are coming after me. And I hated it.” Other women were fearful that despite their history of abuse, should they call the police for help in the future, they would not be viewed as credible victims. As Sarah commented:

> I hope to hear some resolution where women are safer and they’re confident that they call the police to get help when they’re abused, and it does not affect them eventually.

> Because that’s the fear and I actually believe that’s why a lot of murder and crime is going on in this world. Because men, they study the system and they recognize that it can go any way, even if the woman is innocent.

Black women disclosed fear following negative encounters with the police. The fears that the police may discredit their victimization, of future mistreatment by the police and of future arrest (Miller & Becker, 2019) have deleterious emotional and psychological consequences for Black women. Black women’s experiences also exemplify the myriad ways in which the
criminal justice system continues to ignore Black women’s precarious circumstances, reinforcing commonly held beliefs that they are insignificant and what happens to them is irrelevant.

Women’s narratives also indicated a general distrust of the police. Specifically, women who believed they were not protected by the police or wrongfully accused were less likely to trust them. Janice, for example, shared that she lost trust in the police because when she went to them prior to being charged, they did not help her. Subsequently, she was wrongfully accused of assaulting her partner. She described her reason for not trusting the police: “I just don’t, because of what I went through and because of my experience with them, I can’t say I trust the police. I don’t know if I can.” Similarly, Desiree asserted that she did not trust the police and the criminal justice system in general. She disclosed that she was coerced into accepting a plea for a crime that she did not commit. While crying uncontrollably during the interview, she remarked, “I didn’t trust the system enough to fight it. I just didn’t.” For Anna, her lack of trust in the police was informed by her own experience as well as witnessing police abuse of power. She presumed that it would take time to trust the police:

It’s something that would take time... I don’t want to feel like I have to protect myself. I don’t want to feel like the law is against me when there’s laws in place, and then people abuse the laws because they’re the holders of the law.

The lack of trust expressed by these women aligns with other research documenting Black people’s negative perception or mistrust of the police (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Lai & Zhao, 2010). Negative police encounters undermine women’s trust in police officers and the criminal justice system in general (Henry & Tator, 2005) and contribute to less confidence in the police (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2009).
Discussion

Findings from the study highlight the overlap between Black women’s victimization and criminalization. Their experiences of emotional manipulation, physical abuse and social abuse were complex and multifaceted (Richie, 1996, 2012). The violence they encountered from their intimate partners was further compounded “by a community code of silence, racial loyalty, and a desire to maintain their relationships in order to disprove stereotypes that characterize Black families as dysfunctional” (Taylor, 2013, p. 162). In an effort to protect themselves, some women in the study used force against their abusive partners; this finding was congruent with results reported by Potter (2008).

Despite their experiences of ongoing victimization, many Black women, particularly those whose partners were Black, were reluctant to call the police. Other researchers (i.e. Bent-Goodley, 2001; Gover et al., 2013; Lanthier, 2008; Moss et al., 1997; Nash, 2005) have documented women’s reluctance to notify the police in IPV incidences. Findings from the current study suggest that Black women may have a greater desire to protect men who share the same racial identity for fear they may be more vulnerable to subsequent racism and unfair treatment by the police. In their study, Moss et al. (1997) found that most Black women did not rely on police intervention in IPV incidents. This also echoes findings in other studies that revealed that racial loyalty and protecting Black males from racism influenced women’s reporting of IPV (i.e. Bent-Goodley, 2001; Nash, 2005; Richie, 1996). For many women, their families may act as a refuge from discrimination, racism and other forms of oppression. However, their reluctance to report incidents of IPV increases their vulnerability for further victimization and subsequent criminalization (Dasgupta, 2001; Richie, 2012). Richie (2012) problematizes racial loyalty as a “trap” by arguing that it leads women to conceal their
victimization, avoid support or intervention when they need it most and turn their backs on other women and their children. This trap also makes it difficult to address the effects of patriarchy and gender oppression in the Black community (Richie, 1996, 2012).

The significance of race was also apparent for women in interracial relationships. In particular, these women believed they received disparate treatment from the police compared to their white male partners. Indeed, Black women in interracial relationships may also be reluctant to report the abuse because they may fear being penalized more severely by the police. These findings suggest that Black women in interracial relationships may experience unique barriers which may elevate their risk of IPV (Brownridge, 2016). Previous research has also found that the racial composition of couples impacts the likelihood of an arrest (see, e.g., Dichter et al., 2011, McCormack & Hirschel, 2018). In their study Dichter et al. (2011) found that Black females were more likely to be arrested if their male partners were white. They posit that racial bias may impact police arrest decisions.

Despite their attempts to provide their account of the incident leading up to contact with the police, many women did not believe that the police listened to them. Consequently, Black women were simultaneously victimized and criminalized by a criminal justice system that failed to protect them from their abusers. The distinctive classifications and mutually exclusive categorizations of victim/offender are evident in the criminal justice system. However, this dichotomous classification fails to take into account the racialized, gendered and classed dynamics inherent in Black women’s experiences of IPV. It also overlooks the fact that many Black women engage in defensive actions in response to ongoing victimization. From my interviews with Black women, it was evident that they rejected criminal justice ascribed categorizations that constructed them as offenders and deemed them complicit in their
experience of male partner violence. The women did not believe that police understood them as victims. It was also evident that Black women’s actions were mostly defensive (Larance & Miller, 2017); yet, they were less likely than their male counterparts to be constructed as credible victims. These women did not fit within the stereotypical images of femininity and “stray from the path of ‘true’ (passive, controlled, and constrained) womanhood” (Chesney-Lind, 2006, p. 11). Black women and Black men both hold oppressed statuses in society; however, police failure to hold Black men accountable for their actions minimizes the effects of violence in Black women’s lives and reinforces gendered violence against Black women (Richie, 1996).

Police officers who endorse racist patriarchal attitudes and beliefs towards Black women are more likely to engage in victim blaming; these results are consistent with those documented by DeJong et al. (2008). In their study exploring police perception of IPV, the authors found that officers who engage in victim blaming usually state that victims “deserve or are partially responsible for their abuse” (p. 688). As was indicated in the current study, Black women believed that police officers often trivialized and discounted their victimization while masculinizing their use of force against their partners. In fact, police’s denial of Black women’s victimhood and characterization of their actions as criminal reflect anti-Black racist beliefs and attitudes held by the police alongside pervasive and deeply embedded negative stereotypes about Black women and men in Canadian society. Stereotypical beliefs that associate Blackness with crime and criminality (Chan & Chunn, 2014; Maynard, 2017) or vilify Black women as innately violent also place them in a precarious position and increase their risk of male violence. These findings further indicate that the demonization of Black women in this regard means that they are not afforded the same level of protection as other women and police violence and brutality against them are justified.
Another significant finding in the study is police use of force and excessive violence against Black women. As Maynard (2017) asserts, since Blackness is often associated with criminality “policing of Black people extends quickly into bodily harm” (p. 250). Some of the women experienced dangerous encounters with the police where they were disrespected, denigrated and abused. The police were more likely to assert their dominance, use aggression and reinforce violence against Black women whom they characterized as assertive, aggressive or violent. These results support observations made by Maynard (2017) who stated that Black women who called the police to intervene in an IPV incident were vulnerable to racialized and gendered police violence against them. In particular, Black women were more likely to be scrutinized and targeted. The use of police force and brutality was also supported by a recent study conducted by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2018). In their study, they found that the Toronto police are more likely to use physical force against Black people than white people and are cleared of wrongdoing in over 95% of all SIU investigations involving the Toronto Police Service.

This study further reveals that following their contact with the police, Black women were generally fearful of the police and were more apprehensive to call them for help and report future victimization. The disregard the police have for Black women seemed to have contributed to and, in many cases, exacerbated their fear and distrust of them. It has been demonstrated by others that Black people have had a long history where relations between the police and members of the Black community have been strained due to injustice and racism (Cole, 2020; Maynard, 2017; Tator & Henry, 2006).
Conclusion and Recommendations

Canadian research that examines Black women’s experiences with the police, particularly in the context of IPV and from their perspectives, is sparse. Their experiences have largely been dismissed or rendered insignificant (Maynard, 2017). The lack of race-based data that focus explicitly on the experiences of Black women creates significant barriers in chronicling police mistreatment of and violence against them. Subsequently, it is difficult to understand the extent of the problem, making public policy and interventions inadequate (Richie, 2012, p. 23). Thus, this study is timely and contributes to the small amount of research in this area with its inclusion of a gendered and racialized analysis as well as its focus on IPV. It also has the potential to enhance policy initiatives by informing knowledge of Black women’s experiences.

Black women are disproportionately impacted by IPV. Women deciding whether to call the police to intervene in an abusive situation must not only negotiate their safety and subsequent retaliation from an abusive partner but consider how stereotypes and discriminatory police practices may influence their experiences (Richie, 2012). Women who believe their safety is compromised may also resort to violence to protect themselves (Nash, 2005; Swan & Snow, 2006). These factors underscore the complexities of violence in their lives. Criminalizing Black women who have been victimized by an intimate partner increases their risk for further violence. It reduces the likelihood of them contacting the police, preventing them from receiving appropriate support. There is an overreliance on criminal justice approaches to hold women who use force in their relationship accountable, with little evidence supporting their effectiveness (Goodmark, 2017). Additionally, these approaches overlook the context of women’s actions and treat all acts of violence as equivalent regardless of motivation, intent or impact (Larance & Miller, 2017). They also fail to recognize the intersections between Black women’s
criminalization, victimization and institutional racism (Richie, 2012). There is an urgent need to move beyond criminal justice responses to IPV (Decker et al., 2019; Potter, 2007). Non-legal supports and interventions such as community-based programs must be considered that address the complexity of violence in Black women’s lives. These interventions must address structural causes as well as the “harms created by IPV and deter further violence and abuse” (Goodmark, 2017).

Police responses to incidents involving Black women and their intimate partners may result in negative outcomes. As was evident from the women’s narratives, they believed the police treated them unfairly because they were Black. Therefore, enhanced training is required to assist police officers to effectively respond to IPV (Ruff, 2012) and identify the primary aggressor in IPV incidents (Gover et al., 2011). It is strongly recommended that police receive appropriate anti-Black racism training that allows them to grapple with issues around anti-Blackness. In particular, police training should include discussions around implicit/explicit biases and how these influence their perception and treatment of Black women who are accused of perpetrating violence against an intimate partner.

The study also offers valuable insights for social service agencies. Racism and systemic barriers exacerbate Black women’s experiences of IPV. Black women who experience discrimination and racism may distrust and not access needed supports. Women reluctant to seek support may resort to violence in response to their partner’s violence. However, resorting to violence should not be the only option for women who struggle to protect themselves and their children. Service providers must understand the interconnections between victimization and criminalization. There must also be an increase in resources and services provided to Black women that specifically address their needs. Social services should also continue to diversify
frontline staff so that there is a higher representation of racialized people. This increased representation may be welcomed by Black women who are reluctant to speak with staff who are not racialized.

More research is needed that positions the experiences of Black and other racialized women at the forefront of IPV research. Specifically, researchers must place a greater emphasis on conducting research that explores how Black women’s intersecting identities of race, gender and class influence their experiences of IPV (Decker et al., 2019). In addition, research that focuses on Black women’s experiences with the police helps to enhance understanding of relations between Black communities and the police, the effects of police violence and the ways in which police violence reinforce structural marginality, and to reaffirm that Black lives matter (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). Although the study sample included Black women from different ethnic backgrounds, a future investigation is needed that examines variations across different cultural and ethnic groups (West, 2004) and how these differences influence Black women’s experiences with the police. Larger sample sizes would also provide additional insights.
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Discussion of Entire Dissertation

This qualitative study was informed by critical race feminist theory (CRF) and sought to understand Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police. There were three central research questions: 1) Why do Black women choose to participate in a research study exploring their experiences of IPV and with the police? 2) What are Black women’s experiences of IPV? and 3) What are the experiences of Black women who are arrested for an IPV-related offence? The discussion that follows presents data outlined across the three manuscripts.

Manuscript one identified a number of challenges encountered while recruiting Black women participants for the study and highlighted the strategies I utilized to address these challenges; these are briefly highlighted below. I conclude by discussing participants’ initial concerns about participating and their reasons for deciding to participate.

Conducting research with marginalized populations presents a number of challenges related to access. Findings from the study suggest that research must be relevant to the target population, and researchers must utilize a number of different strategies in order to yield the best results. Some strategies may not be appropriate or effective when recruiting marginalized populations. The strategies that were most advantageous in recruiting participants were establishing relationships with agencies, utilizing leads from professional contacts, and using multiple sites to advertise and recruit. One of the most crucial aspects to gaining access to participants was establishing and building trust with social service agencies. These findings were consistent with those found in other research (Bonevski et al., 2014; Ellard-Gray et al., 2015) that emphasized the importance building relationships with key informants.

Five salient themes were identified in my interviews with Black women that provided great insights about their initial concerns prior to participating in the study and the factors that
influenced their decision to participate. Some participants discussed feeling a sense of obligation to remain silent about their abuse due to a community’s code of silence. For some women, speaking about IPV in their homes was discouraged. Results also emphasized women’s commitment to safeguard not only themselves but Black men from undue racial oppression. Despite their initial concerns, Black women were aware of the invisibility of Black women’s narratives and were motivated to participate to help elevate their voices and experiences.

The results also emphasized the significance of my racialized and gendered insider positionality in building trust. In her study, Ochieng (2010) alluded to her shared experiences of racism and social exclusion with participants, which she believed contributed to her being more empathetic. Nonetheless, due to the variations in our experiences, “being a member of a minority group does not ensure that a researcher will understand a potential minority participant’s experience” (Coker, Huang & Kashubeck-West, 2009, p. 161). Women were also motivated to participate in the study with hopes of bringing about political change, particularly those who believed that they experienced injustice.

It is important to highlight that Black women’s motivation to participate in the study was influenced by the ongoing systemic barriers they face and their experience of everyday racism. Many Black women may decide not to participate in research studies due to fear, stigma, misinformation or simply a lack of interest. However, in order to optimize their participation, it is vital that researchers remain cognizant of their unique needs and implement strategies that not only make their research accessible but break down barriers. By exploring factors that may hinder their participation and highlighting strategies that proved effective, findings from this research may help to increase Black women’s participation and improve their experiences of the research process.
The second manuscript built on the previous manuscript by examining Black women’s experiences of IPV and the complexities of violence in their lives. It also addressed the overlap between their victimization and criminalization. As was suggested by others, the intersection between victimization and criminalization was not clearly defined (Moe, 2004). Women’s histories of victimization are often interconnected with various factors (i.e. race, gender, class) and other systemic barriers that amplify not only their experiences of violence but the consequences for those who engage in defensive tactics against an abusive partner (Richie, 2012). By framing women’s experiences from this perspective, it contributes to a more nuanced and complex understanding of the context within which they become ensnared in the criminal justice system.

Similar to findings reported by Melton and Belknap (2003), it was evident that criminalized women in my study had a history of victimization; thus, I question claims (i.e. Archer, 2000; Fiebert, 2014) that suggest that women use violence at equal rates as men or are more violent than men. To highlight the different ways in which violence unfolded in Black women’s lives, I presented data that captured their experience of various forms of abuse (i.e. emotional, physical, sexual, religious) in their common law and marital relationships; these findings are consistent with those reported by Potter (2008), who found that women in her study experienced both interpersonal and institutional forms of violence. Highlighting the various forms of victimization that Black women experience is further complicated by examining the hyper-invisibility of violence both within and outside their communities. For example, women who experience violence and use force in self-defence are exposed to heightened scrutiny and oversurveillance. Their experience of violence becomes invisible when there is an erasure or lack
of attention to their victimization and services are inadequate or ineffective to mitigate the adverse effects of violence (Richie, 1996).

It is necessary to consider all the factors that impact Black women’s experiences of violence, including communities that reinforce violence against them and “externally imposed state policies that control marginalized communities and limit access to services, resources, and power” (Richie, 2012, p. 17). Black women’s experiences of male partner violence, and community and structural violence suppress them from speaking out about violence in their lives. Black women must not only negotiate their safety but consider how their disclosures of violence will contribute to further pejorative stereotypes about them and other members of the Black community. Black women experience further entrapment who feel a sense of obligation to protect their partners and families from further oppression, yet this increases their vulnerability to further violence. With little or no external support, some Black women feel coerced into silence (West, 1999) and resolving conflicts on their own. Subsequently, their use of force, though in self-defence, is criminalized and results in severe consequences, including acquiring criminal records, apprehension of children, job loss and loss of their homes.

The stigma of criminalization has many collateral consequences (Hoskins, 2017) that extend beyond the criminal justice system. These collateral consequences are greater for Black women who often experience social inequities in society and face severe social, economic and legal ramifications. Consequently, these processes simultaneously contribute to Black women’s marginality and invisibility. Criminalizing Black women’s defensive actions is ineffective in eradicating violence in their lives. There is an urgent call for alternative responses to criminalization that prioritize and promote Black women’s safety.
Expanding on themes highlighted in both manuscripts, the third manuscript sought to provide insights on Black women’s experiences with the police. A consistent theme across all three manuscripts was the centrality of race and racism in Black women’s lives. The third manuscript examined Black women’s experiences in the Canadian criminal justice system, particularly, racially biased policing tactics that resulted in their criminalization. Findings contribute to the dearth of Canadian research that examines Black women’s experience of both the investigative and charging processes of the criminal justice system for IPV-related offences.

Compared to their male counterparts, Black women were disproportionately arrested as primary aggressors for IPV-related offences. The overcriminalization of Black women could be attributed to gendered and racialized policing tactics (Maynard, 2017). The majority of women in my study were arrested solely for an IPV-related offence. Their partners used a number of manipulative schemes to construct them as hysterical, aggressive and violent, which reinforced negative stereotypes of Black women. In particular, participants believed their experiences with the police were influenced by their race, gender and police perception of them. These women were of the belief that they received differential treatment due to stereotypical views the police may hold that constructed them as aggressive and violent. Endorsement of these stereotypes by police officers could result in bias and inadvertently influence how they responded and handled IPV incidents involving some of these women.

There were also inherent power dynamics that were operationalized in police interactions with Black women, which alluded to the reproduction of patriarchal values. These results were echoed in Decker et al.’s (2019) study in which disparate power dynamics were inherent in participants’ encounters with the police. She found that power dynamics were amplified for Black women. As she stated, “the consequent layering of IPV related trauma and power
disparities with their perpetrators, coupled with race related concerns about police power disparities, created unique barriers to engagement with police following violence experiences” (p. 777). In my study, women discussed not feeling heard or being taken seriously, while others expressed feeling disrespected. For example, women expressed that they did not believe the police listened to their side of the story. Consequently, some asserted that this was one of the factors that led to being wrongfully arrested as primary aggressors. With their experiences of violence minimized and discounted, Black women were unable to provide a counter story that could exonerate them.

Encounters with the police were more severe for some of the women. Specifically, nearly half of the women reported excessive use of force by police, which sometimes resulted in bodily harm to the women. These findings are in line with those reported by Richie (2012). The police reinforced their use of violence against Black women by masculinizing their defensive actions. Because police violence against Black women is largely invisible (Maynard, 2017), racial and gender bias against Black women go unnoticed. The invisibility of police violence against Black women also makes it difficult to hold police officers accountable for their actions. Subsequently, women who experience the police as unjust are less likely to have positive perceptions of them or contact them for help in the future.

**Strengths and Limitations of Dissertation**

A primary strength of this dissertation is that it focused exclusively on the experiences of Black women. It further contextualizes Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police by highlighting some of the unique barriers they face. There was also a diverse representation of Black women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which provided some insight into the heterogeneity that exists among Black women. Due to practical constraints, this study
focused solely on women who were English speaking and had easy access to a phone and email. These criteria may certainly pose a limitation for women who do not meet these criteria; however, access to a phone and email were necessary requirements that allowed me to communicate with potential participants and share information pertaining to the study. These limitations could be partly addressed by using interpretation services to increase accessibility to women who do not speak English.

**Recommendations**

My first recommendation is for the criminal justice system to utilize non-legal alternatives rather than criminalizing Black women who are impacted by male partner violence. The number of Black women charged solely with perpetrating violence against their partners in my study merits further exploration on how these policies continue to negatively affect women who have had a history of victimization. Rather than rely on legal interventions, alternative approaches may utilize “community officials, faith leaders, local advocacy groups, community activists, or family members” (Richie, 2012, p. 163). By utilizing these alternative approaches, it prioritizes women’s safety, minimizes the number of unwarranted arrests of Black women and reduces harm to women who respond to violence in self defence.

My second recommendation is to increase the number of community-based services and supports that are race- and gender-responsive (Larance & Miller, 2017). Services should take into account the historical trauma Black women have experienced (West, 2002) and should be relevant to their needs (Bent-Goodley, 2004). It is also essential that supports and interventions are implemented early and are ongoing so that Black women are aware of the choices they have for leaving an abusive relationship. As was evident in my study, many Black women had violent encounters over the course of their intimate relationships. Yet, some were reluctant to seek
formal support. Their reluctance to seek services was directly related to barriers they faced within their families/communities and broader society. Some of the ways in which services can be relevant to Black women is through the delivery of an Afrocentric curriculum, Afrocentric environment, holistic and spiritual approaches and representative staff and board (Gillum, 2008).

My third recommendation is for service providers to adopt approaches to remove barriers that restrict criminalized Black women who wish to volunteer or work in the social service sector. Several women experienced significant barriers finding employment and volunteer opportunities once they were charged (Pollack et al., 2005), which increased their economic marginalization. These barriers may contribute to women remaining in abusive relationships longer or utilizing dangerous or illegal means to acquire an income. By removing these barriers, Black women are less likely to live in poverty and experience severe economic hardship.

My fourth recommendation is to implement mandatory anti-Black racism training for police officers or law enforcement officers. Training must consider Black women’s intersecting identities of race, gender and class, as these significantly impact how Black women perceive and engage with law enforcement officers. It may also help them to understand the historical and social construction of Black women as angry, aggressive and violent, recognize their own implicit or explicit bias and take steps to disrupt harmful constructs that negatively impact their interactions with Black women.

Implications and Conclusion

Black women’s experience of IPV and use of force in their intimate relationships are complex and multi-faceted. The emotional, psychological, physical, social and financial challenges they face are considerable. There is a growing body of scholarship that maintains that there is an overlap between women’s victimization and subsequent involvement in the law
Black women are at greater risk of IPV because of their marginalized status and experience of systemic racism (Maynard, 2017; Potter, 2008; Richie, 2012). Thus, my research has potential benefits for social work knowledge, practice and policy. It adds to the scant body of Canadian research that considers Black women’s experiences of IPV and their experiences with the police from their perspectives. By using a CRF framework, my dissertation takes into account the ways in which race, racism and power intersect in Black women’s lives.

Findings from the study can also inform social work practice by providing front-line workers with relevant information so that they can consistently and effectively respond to issues faced by Black women. Specifically, social workers would be positioned to better assess, intervene and support Black women who experience IPV and have been criminalized. As social workers practice within diverse communities, there is an increased need to understand the unique barriers that these women face (Crabtree-Nelson et al., 2016, p. 384). There is also a need to determine whether Black women are responsive to services that are currently available. My research provides social workers with an analytic to challenge social inequality, particularly for those who live at the margins of society. Findings that are gleaned from my research advance a social justice trajectory by increasing awareness of the various ways violence unfolds in Black women’s lives. It also has the capacity to shape social work approaches by providing tools for social workers to identify and critique colour-blind or neutral approaches that prevail in service delivery. It encourages social workers to advocate for Black women from micro through macro contexts by questioning stereotypes and negative constructs that depict Black women as angry or aggressive.
My research provides a unique perspective that helps to inform policy initiatives (e.g. mandatory arrest policies). It also informs police responses to IPV to help them consider the context within which women engage in defensive and retaliatory actions against their intimate partners. As discussed previously, although the implementation of mandatory arrest policies was meant to protect women who were abused by their male partners, they have had unintended consequences for women. Black women were charged more frequently than their partners, which resulted in deleterious outcomes. Women with a history of victimization were also unlikely to contact the police in the future (Henning et al., 2006; Henning & Feder, 2004; Rajah et al., 2006), which makes them more vulnerable to subsequent abuse. The ramifications of these policies need to be further explored, particularly in terms of how they may cause and complicate violence in Black women’s lives (Richie, 2012).

**Future Research**

More research is needed that positions the experiences of Black women at the forefront of IPV research. There is a scarcity of Canadian research centring on the experiences of Black women, particularly in the context of IPV. Thus, it is challenging for Canadian researchers to utilize contextually relevant data to make meaningful assessment of the frequency and severity of IPV in Black women’s lives. This body of scholarship could build further on women’s intersecting identities of race, gender and class.

Little research has been conducted that examines the diversity that exists among Black women. Future research should explore differences that exist in women’s experiences with the police, particularly among those who are born and live in Canada, the Caribbean, Africa or other parts of the world. Another area that could benefit from more investigation is research that
examines the extent to which negative stereotypes or representations of Black women impact their encounters with the police.

Further work is also needed that looks at the consequences for Black women charged with an IPV offence. Women ensnared in the criminal justice system encounter multiple barriers and are often in a precarious position. For instance, they may have difficulties gaining access to shelters for abused women or other services that focus primarily on victims of IPV. They also have difficulties acquiring volunteer opportunities and employment that involve working with vulnerable populations.

Researchers may also wish to conduct more research that focuses on women whose primary language is not English, for example, newcomers or refugees. Research in this area may help to remove barriers and increase accessibility to relevant services. Another area that requires further exploration is same-sex relationships. There are various external factors such as homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (Ristock, 2005), which may prevent women from speaking out about their experience of violence or their experience with the police. A recurring theme that was evident in my study is the interconnections between mental health, substance use and IPV. More research is needed to explore the relationship between mental health, addictions and the extent to which they influence Black women’s experience of IPV and with the police.
References


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Appendix A
Ethics Approval

June 05, 2018

Dear Patrina Duhaney

REB # 5723
Project, "VICTIMIZED AND CRIMINALIZED: BLACK WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES WITH THE POLICE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE"
REB Clearance Issued: June 05, 2018
REB Expiry / End Date: August 31, 2019

The Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier University has reviewed the above proposal and determined that the proposal is ethically sound. If the research plan and methods should change in a way that may bring into question the project's adherence to acceptable ethical norms, please submit a "Request for Ethics Clearance of a Revision or Modification" form for approval before the changes are put into place. This form can also be used to extend protocols past their expiry date, except in cases where the project is more than four years old. Those projects require a new REB application.

Please note that you are responsible for obtaining any further approvals that might be required to complete your project.

Laurier REB approval will automatically expire when one's employment ends at Laurier.

If any participants in your research project have a negative experience (either physical, psychological or emotional) you are required to submit an "Adverse Events Form" within 24 hours of the event.

You must complete the online "Annual/Final Progress Report on Human Research Projects" form annually and upon completion of the project. ROMEO will automatically keep track of these annual reports for you. When you have a report due within 30 days (and/or an overdue report) it will be listed under the 'My Reminders' quick link on your ROMEO home screen; the number in brackets next to 'My Reminders’ will tell you how many reports need to be submitted. Protocols with overdue annual reports will be marked as expired. Further the REB has been requested to notify Research Finance when an REB protocol, tied to a funding account has been
marked as expired. In such cases Research Finance will immediately freeze funding tied to this account.

All the best for the successful completion of your project.

(Useful links: ROMEO Login Screen; REB Students Webpage; REB Connect Webpage)

Yours sincerely,

Jayne Kalmar, PhD  
Vice-Chair, University Research Ethics Board  
Wilfrid Laurier University

OR

Robert Basso, PhD  
Chair, University Research Ethics Board  
Wilfrid Laurier University

OR

Rosemary A. McGowan, PhD  
Vice-Chair, University Research Ethics Board  
Wilfrid Laurier University

Please do not reply directly to this email. Please direct all replies to reb@wlu.ca
Appendix B

Twitter Ad

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED...

The purpose of this study is to better understand Black women’s experiences of intimate partner abuse and with the police in which they are charged with and or arrested for a domestic violence related offence.

Criteria:
Black woman over the age of 18
Have been in a previous/current heterosexual relationship
Have experienced domestic violence and/or have been charged with an offence related to domestic violence

Participation is voluntary and remains confidential. Participants will receive an honorarium of $30.

To learn more about this study, please contact Patrina Duhaney at (647) 797-1104 or duha1720@mylaurier.ca
Appendix C

Flyer

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED...

The purpose of this study is to better understand Black women's experiences of intimate partner abuse and with the police, in which they are charged with and or arrested for a domestic violence related offence.

Criteria:

- Black woman over the age of 18
- Have been in a previous/current heterosexual relationship
- Have experienced domestic violence and/or have been charged with an offence related to domestic violence

Participation is voluntary and remains confidential.

Participants will receive an honorarium of $30.

To learn more about this study, or if you wish to participate, please contact Patrina Duhaney by phone at (647) 797-1102 or by email at duhar720@mylaurier.ca
Appendix D

Recruitment Letter (Organization)

Date:

Dear [insert name],

My name is Patrina Duhaney. I was provided with your contact information from a staff at the organization.

I am writing to request your assistance with a research project that I am conducting as part of my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree at Wilfrid Laurier University, under the supervision of Dr. Shoshana Pollack.

The title of my research project is “Victimized and Criminalized: Black Women’s Experiences with the Police in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University (REB #5723).

The purpose of this study is twofold, to better understand Black women’s experiences of IPV and with the police in which they are charged with and or arrested for a domestic violence related offence. Results of this study will be disseminated in my dissertation, journal articles, presentations and conferences.

To be eligible to participate in this study, women must live in the Greater Toronto Area, self-identify as Black and in a heterosexual relationship. Participants must also be over the age of 18 years and must have been married, in a common law or cohabiting relationship at the time they were charged.

Interviews remain confidential and would be conducted either over the phone, by Skype or in person. There would also be a formal consent form provided to women identifying their rights as participants. Consent forms will be emailed or mailed to participants who are completing their interview over the phone. The decision to participate in these interviews is voluntary and participants can say that they are not interested in participating or decide to withdraw at any time during the interviewing process. Participants will receive $35 for their participation in the study.
I hope you will assist me to recruit Black women who have experienced IPV and/or have also been charged because of police intervention. I look forward to speaking with you to discuss whether it would be possible to post my research flyer at your organization.

If you have any questions or require further information to assist in your decision, I can be reached by email at duha1720@mylaurier.ca or by phone at (647) 797-1104. I will follow up with a telephone call in approximately one week and would be happy to provide more information about my study as well as answer questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Patrina Duhaney, PhD Candidate, MSW, H.BSW, H.BA
Faculty of Social Work
Wilfrid Laurier University

Dr. Shoshana Pollack, PhD
Professor
Faculty of Social Work
Wilfrid Laurier University
Appendix E

Telephone Recruitment

Hi,

My name is Patrina Duhaney and I am a PhD Candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University in the Faculty of Social Work; my supervisor’s name is Dr. Shoshana Pollack. I am contacting you to determine if you might be interested in participating in a research study that explores Black women’s experiences of intimate partner violence and with the police.

The purpose of this study is to better understand Black women’s experiences with the police in which they are charged with and or arrested for a domestic violence related offence.

To be eligible to participate in this study, participants must live in Canada, self-identify as Black and in a heterosexual relationship. Participants must be over the age of 18 years and must have been married or in a cohabiting relationship at the time they were charged with a domestic violence-related offence.

While every effort is made to ensure that the study does not cause harm or impact the dignity and privacy of participants, there are some risks or discomforts that you might encounter because of your participation. First, because of the personal nature of the questions asked, you run the risk of becoming emotionally distressed while disclosing your experiences of past or current domestic violence in your intimate relationship. Second, you run the risk of becoming emotionally distressed as you express your encounter with the criminal justice system. There may also be some unforeseeable risks to you. Participants who become emotionally distressed and require support will be provided with a list of local resources and services they can access.

Your identity remains confidential unless you have explicitly given your permission otherwise. All information gathered during the discussion will be kept confidential. Only the researcher, Patrina Duhaney, and her supervisor, Dr. Shoshana Pollack, upon request, will have access to the data. The only exceptions to the rule of confidentiality are the legal requirements for mandated reporting of child abuse and if there is serious contemplation of self-harm or harm to others stated during the interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and if you agree to participate you have the right to refuse to answer any questions and you can end the conversation at any time. This will in no way impact any services you receive from organizations or agencies that may have referred you. The interview will last for approximately one hour and thirty minutes and will be audio tape-recorded with your permission. You have the right to refuse be audio-taped, in which case the interviewer will take handwritten notes.

My study has been approved by Wilfrid Laurier ‘s Research Ethics Board. If you require additional information about the ethics of the project, you can contact the Chair of the REB, Dr. Robert Basso, by email at rbasso@wlu.ca, or by phone at 519-884-0710 Ext. 4994.
If you require additional information, I will phone you to arrange another agreeable date and time to meet.

Are you interested in participating in this research project? If so, please let me know when you would be available to participate in this study?

Thank you very much for your time.

Have a great day.
Appendix F

Informed Consent

Wilfrid Laurier University
Informed Consent Statement

“Victimized and Criminalized: Black women’s experiences with the police”

Principal Investigator: Patrina Duhaney (PhD Candidate)
Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work
Wilfrid Laurier University
120 Duke Street Avenue West
Kitchener, ON
N2H 6P6
Email: duha1720@mylaurier.ca
Phone: (647) 797-1104

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Shoshana Pollack (PhD)
Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work
Wilfrid Laurier University
120 Duke Street Avenue West
Kitchener, ON
N2H 6P6
Email: spollack@wlu.ca
Phone: 519.884.0710 Ext. 5220

You are invited to participate in a research study, conducted by Patrina Duhaney. Patrina is a Wilfrid Laurier University graduate student in the Faculty of Social Work under the supervision of Dr. Shoshana Pollack.

The purpose of this study is to better understand Black women’s experiences of intimate partner violence and with the police in which they are charged with and or arrested for a domestic violence related offence.
INFORMATION:

Participants will be asked to discuss their experience and use of abuse in their intimate relationships. They will be asked to discuss their experiences once the police intervened in an altercation involving their intimate partners, including the outcome of police involvement.

Approximately 18-25 research participants who live in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), self-identify as Black, and over the age of 18 will be recruited for this study. These women must have experienced and/or charged either solely or dually with a domestic violence-related offence within the last 5 years in their intimate relationships. Participants must have been married, or in a common law or cohabiting relationship at the time they were charged with a domestic violence-related offence.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY:

You are being asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will take place at a location agreed upon by you and the researcher. The expected duration of the interview will be approximately one and a half hours to two hours. A follow-up interview may be required; however, this information will be communicated with you once the interview has been transcribed.

None of the procedures used in this study are experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this study is the gathering of information for analysis.

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS:

While every effort is made to ensure that the study does not cause harm or impact the dignity and privacy of participants, there are some risks or discomforts that you might encounter because of your participation in this study. First, because of the personal nature of the questions asked, you run the risk of becoming emotionally distressed while disclosing your experiences of past or current domestic violence in your intimate relationship. Second, you run the risk of becoming emotionally distressed as you express your encounter with the criminal justice system. There may also be some unforeseeable risks to you. To address these potential risks or discomforts, you are advised that if you feel uncomfortable at any time during the study, you may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently without loss of compensation. The researcher will also provide you with a list of local community agencies that you can contact for support.

BENEFITS:

While I cannot guarantee that you will receive any immediate benefits because of participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to speak about your lived experiences as a Black woman. Additionally, by participating in this study you will have an opportunity to help researchers and policy makers learn and understand some of the challenges that Black women who have experienced abuse in their relationships and/or have been charged with a criminal offence. Furthermore, the information that you provide will contribute to future research, the development of new and alternative policies and practice decisions.
CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your identity in the one-on-one interview remains confidential unless you have explicitly given your permission otherwise. No identifying names will be recorded or transcribed and any potentially identifying information will be deleted. While in transmission on the internet, the confidentiality of data cannot be guaranteed. If you consent, quotations will be used in write-ups/presentations and will not contain information that allows you to be identified. You can contact the researcher to discuss how verbatim quotations may be used by emailing her at duha1720@mylaurier.ca or calling her at (647) 797-1104 by March 2019.

The data and consent forms will be stored in a locked office/on a password-protected computer/on a password-protected recording device located at the researcher’s home. The de-identified data will be kept for 5 years and will then be destroyed by the principal investigator.

Only the researcher, Patrina Duhaney will have access to the recordings and transcripts. My supervisor will also have access to these data upon request and once all identifying information is removed. The only exceptions to the rule of confidentiality are the legal requirements for mandated reporting of child abuse and if there is serious contemplation of self-harm or harm to others stated during the interview.

Results from this study will be published in academic journals. Quotations will be used in all write-ups or presentations; however, quotations will not contain any identifiable information.

COMPENSATION:

For participating in this study, you will receive $35. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will still receive this amount. Any compensation received related to the participation in this research study is taxable. It is the participant’s responsibility to report the amount received for income tax purposes and Wilfrid Laurier University will not issue a tax receipt for the amount received.

CONTACT:

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects due to participation in this study) you may contact the researcher, Patrina Duhaney, at duha1720@mylaurier.ca or her supervisor at spollack@wlu.ca.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION:
Your participation in this study is voluntary, you may decline to participate without penalty. If you are referred by a social service agency, your decision of whether to participate will not impact the services you receive from the agency. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The data provided by you will be audio-recorded, then transcribed. However, you reserve the right to stop the recording at any time during the interview. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity you choose. If you withdraw from the study, you can request to have your data removed/destroyed by emailing me at duha1720@mylaurier.ca until March 2019.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION:

The results of this research might be published/presented in a thesis, course project report, book, journal article, conference presentation, class presentation. You can request the executive summary by emailing duha1720@mylaurier.ca. If you choose to provide your email address for this purpose at the end of the study, the executive summary will be emailed to you by November 2019.

CONSENT:

☐ I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

☐ I have read and understand the above information. I do not want to participate in this study.

Participant's signature:_________________________________________ Date: _________________

Investigator's signature:_________________________________________ Date: _________________

☐ I agree to be audio-taped.
☐ I wish to review quotations that will be used in future publications.
☐ I wish to receive an executive summary of the study.

Participant's signature:_________________________________________ Date: _________________

Investigator's signature:_________________________________________ Date: _________________

CONFIRMATION OF HONOURARIUM FOR PARTICIPATION

☐ $35 CASH
☐ Participant's signature: __________________________ Date: ________________
Appendix G

Demography Questionnaire

Wilfrid Laurier University

Demographic Information

Victimized and Criminalized: Black women’s experiences with the police
(REB # 5723)

Principal Investigator: Patrina Duhaney, PhD Candidate, MSW, H.BSW, H.BA
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Faculty Advisor: Dr. Shoshana Pollack (PhD)
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Wilfrid Laurier University
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N2H 6P6
Email: spollack@wlu.ca
Phone: (519) 884-0710 Ext. 5220

The purpose of this demographic questionnaire is to provide the researcher with valuable insights about who you are as an individual. The information shared also informs how the researcher analyzes the results from the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or complete this questionnaire.

Please answer the questions as accurately as possible. If you have any questions about the information that is requested on this form, please speak with the researcher before you begin.
1. Age

How old are you?

2. Race and ethnicity

How would you describe yourself?

☐ Black
☐ Mixed-raced
☐ Other

3. Place of birth

What is your place of birth?

☐ Canada
☐ Caribbean
☐ Africa
☐ United States
☐ Other

4. Marital status

What is your current marital status?

☐ Single (never married)
☐ Married
☐ Common law relationship
☐ Widowed
☐ Divorce/separated

What was your marital status at the time the police were involved in your domestic violence altercation with your partner/ex-partner?

☐ Single (never married)
☐ Married
☐ Common law relationship
☐ Widowed
☐ Divorce/separated
5. **Children**

Do you have children?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How many children do you have? _____

If you have children, what are their ages? _________________

What is the gender of your children? _________________

6. **Education**

What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Less than high school diploma
- ☐ Graduated from high school
- ☐ Graduated from college
- ☐ Graduated from University
- ☐ Other

7. **Employment**

What is your current employment status?

- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Unemployed

How would you describe your current employment status?

- ☐ Full time
- ☐ Part time
- ☐ Occasional
- ☐ Other

What type of work do you now? _________________

Has your employment status changed/income changed since your most recent encounter with the police? _____

If so, how has it changed?
8. Household Income

- Under $5,000
- $5,000 to 9,999
- $10,000 to 14,999
- $15,000 to 19,999
- $20,000 to 24,999
- $25,000 to $34,999
- $35,000 to $49,999
- $50,000 to $74,999
- $75,000 to $99,999
- $100,000 and over

9. Social Assistance

Do you currently receive any form of social assistance from Ontario Works (OW)?

- Yes
- No

Do you currently receive any form of social assistance from Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)?

- Yes
- No

10. Religious Affiliation

Do you affiliate yourself with any religion?

- Yes
- No

If so, what religion are you affiliated with?

- Christian
- Roman Catholic
- Protestant
- Seventh-Day Adventist
- Baptist
- Islam
- Judaism
- Other
11. Research Interest

How did you hear about this study?

☐ Flyer on community board
☐ Flyer at agency
☐ Staff at agency
☐ Facebook
☐ Twitter
☐ Eventbrite
☐ Other ____________________

What do you hope to gain from participating in this study?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Please share any other relevant information

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Appendix H

Interview Guide (Victimized/Criminalized Women)

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and completing the consent form. Before we get started, I would like to remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary and you may decline to participate at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. The interview will last for approximately 1.5 hours and will not go beyond 2 hours. Does this time frame still work for you?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interest if research

Could you please tell me how you heard about this research study?

Why were you interested in this study?

What was your reason for agreeing to participate?

What do you hope to gain from participating in this study?

Rapport building

I would like to get to know you. Could you please share something interesting about yourself? What are your interests or hobbies? What got you interested in this study? What are you hoping to gain from your experience with me today?

Inform participants about principal investigator’s educational and professional background. Discuss passion for conducting current study. Inform participants of plans for using findings from study.

Now, I would like to begin by asking you about your experience of intimate partner violence. Then I will ask you to discuss your experience with the police. Do you have any questions?

Previous experience of abuse

Have you experienced abuse from a previous partner?

Could you please tell me more about this experience? For example, how often did the abuse occur and how long did it last?

Current experience of abuse
Have you experienced abuse in your current relationship? Could you please tell me more about this experience? How often did the abuse occur and how long did it last?

What do you believe caused your partner to be abusive?

Did you believe that you were abusive in your relationship?

Did you talk to anyone about the abuse you experienced in your relationship?

How has the abuse affected you?

**Influence of race, gender, class**

How has race affected your response to abuse in your intimate relationship?

How has your gender or class influenced your responses to abuse in your relationship?

**External factors**

In what ways has external factors such as pressures at work, loss of employment, etc. influenced your experience of abuse?

**Coping Strategies**

What are some ways you have coped with abuse you have experienced?

**Formal/informal support**

Have you shared your experience of abuse with anyone?

Were you satisfied with the support you received?

**History of previous contact with police**

Have you been charged with a domestic violence related offence within the last 5 years?

Did you have any previous involvement with the police prior to the most recent encounter? If so, please describe. What were the reasons for their involvement in the past?

**Current contact with police**

Please describe the situation leading up to your encounter with the police

Did you or someone else call the police?

What were your reasons for calling the police?
If you did not call the police, what was your reason for not calling the police?  
How would you describe your most recent encounter with the police?  

How did the police respond to your account of the situation?  

**Midpoint Reminder**  
We have just 1 hour remaining before we are finished. Would you like to take a break before I continue?  
Now, I would like to better understand the contact you have had with the police.  

**Outcome for partner**  
Now, I would like to ask you about how your partner was treated by the police.  

Was your partner charged with an offence?  

What charge was laid against him? What happened with those charges?  

If a charge was laid against your partner, do you agree with the charge?  

**Substance use**  
Did you or your partner use any form of substances (drugs/alcohol) in the most recent IPV incident involving the police?  

Do you believe that the use of substances influenced your experience of abuse or your interaction with the police?  

**Influence of race/ethnicity/culture**  
Do you believe that your race/ethnicity or culture influenced your encounter with the police?  

Do you believe that your race/ethnicity or culture had any influence in you being charged with an offence?  

**Perception of the police**  
I am interested in learning more about your perception of your experience with the police.  

What is your perception of the police?  

Looking back at your most recent encounter with the police, do you believe they were helpful?  

Did the police provide you with any information such as name, badge number, etc.?
Did they refer you to community agencies?

How do your race, gender or class influence your perception of and experiences with the police?

Was Children’s Aid Society (CAS) notified?

What was your experience with CAS?

Was your child (ren) apprehended?

Is your child (ren) currently in the care of CAS?

Has your involvement with CAS impacted your relationship with your child?

Was there a follow up after your encounter with the police?

**Consequences of Charges**

Now, I would like to better understand the consequences of these charges.

How has this experience of IPV impacted your life?

How has your experience with the police impacted you?

**Future contact with police**

I am interested in knowing whether you would call the police again in the future. How likely are you to call them again should you need help? Why?

**Support System (formal and informal)**

Have you spoken to anyone, other than the police about your experience of intimate partner violence?

What was the outcome of this encounter?

**Counter-narrative**

If you could share your experiences with other women, what would you like them to know?

If you could share your experiences with the police, what would you say?

**Experience of research process**

Why did you agree to participate in this study?
What outcome do you expect because of your participation in the study?

Is there anything you would like to share about your experience of the research process?
Appendix I

Domestic Violence Resources

Crisis Services

**Assaulted Women’s Helpline** 24-hour telephone crisis line
416-863-0511 or 1-866-863-0511
http://www.awhI.org

**Distress Centres of Toronto**
416-408-4357
https://www.torontodistresscentre.com

**Durham Region Mobile Crisis Services**
905-666-0483 or 1-800-742-1890
http://dmhs.ca/cause/crisis-response/

**Gerstein Crisis Centre**
416-929-5200
http://www.gersteincentre.org

**Halton Regional Police Service Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST)**
1-877-825-9011
http://halton.cmha.ca/our-services/in-a-crisis/

**Peel Region Mobile Crisis Service**
905-278-9036 or 1-888-811-2222 (Caledon & Dufferin)
https://cmhapeeldufferin.ca/programs-services/24-7-crisis-support-peel/

**York Region Mobile Crisis Service**
1-855-310-COPE (2673)
http://www.yssn.ca/Crisis-Response-Services

Community Legal Services

**Legal Aid of Ontario**
1-800-668-8258
http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/

**Parkdale Community Legal Services**
416-531-2411
http://www.parkdalelegal.org/

**Rexdale Community Legal Clinic**
416-741-5201
http://www.rexdalecommunitylegalclinic.ca/

Unison Community Legal Services 416-645-7575 x 3
http://unisonhcs.org/community-services/legal-services/

Counselling Services

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic
416-323-9149
http://www.schliferclinic.com/

Catholic Family Services Toronto - Woman Abuse Services 416-228-0048
https://www.cfstoronto.com/Client/CFS/CFS_LP4W_LND_Webstation.nsf/page/Woman+Abuse

Elizabeth Fry Toronto (Female PAR) 416-924-3708 or 1-855-924-3708
http://www.efrytoronto.org/

Rexdale Women's Centre 416-745-0062
http://www.rexdalewomen.org/

Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre - Violence Against Women and Children Program
http://www.riwc.ca/ 416-465-6021

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office 416-424-2900 x 0
http://www.thorncliffe.org/

Unison Health and Community Services 416-653-5400 or 416-787-1676
http://unisonhcs.org/

Websites

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence

OWJN- Ontario Women's Justice Network
http://owjn.org

Violence in the Family - Ministry of the Attorney General
http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/family/violence.php

Women Abuse Council of Toronto
http://www.womanabuse.ca/
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<tr>
<td>Police perception of Black people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Files</td>
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<td>Question 3 Black women's counter-narratives of experiences with police</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counter-narrative</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advise to other women</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving forward and lessons learned</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remorse</td>
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Appendix K

Personal Logs

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<th>Name of participant</th>
<th>Date contacted</th>
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<th>Referring source</th>
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### Appendix L

Specs of Participants

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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victimized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminalized</td>
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### TABLES

#### Demographic

**Table 1**

*Age Range of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>55 to 64 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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**Table 2**

*Current Marital Status of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single (never married)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce/separated</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Common law relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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### Table 3

**Education Level of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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### Table 4

**Household Income Level of Participants**

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<th>Income level</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>5,000 to 9,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>10,000 to 14,999</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 to 19,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>$20,000 to 24,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000 to $34,999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>50,000 to $74,999</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75,000 to $99,999</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>$100,000 and over</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Unclassified (1)</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Table 5

*Place of Birth of Participants*

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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caribbean islands</td>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African countries</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>