"It ain't a fight unless you hit me": Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence in a Sample of African American College Women

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Abstract

Previous research on perceptions of intimate partner violence is limited in that the research has not focused on how college students specifically define intimate partner violence. Additionally, although research has supported that African American college women are at a relatively higher risk for experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) than college women from other ethnic groups, little research has specifically examined the experience of IPV in this specific population. Through the qualitative exploration of responses to an open-ended questionnaire from a sample of African American college women, the current study describes their perceptions of intimate partner violence and expands the understanding of intimate partner violence in this population. Findings indicate that African American college women use a wide range of behaviors in response to conflict in their relationships and, generally, they accurately define emotional, verbal, and physical violence. However, a substantial number of African American college women in the current study did not define acts as intimate partner violence unless it was physical violence. This finding also appeared to be age-related, in that younger women were more likely to define violence as only physical.

Keywords

intimate partner violence, African American, college women, perceptions

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV), defined as a pattern of threats or behaviors encompassing physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual abuse or psychological coercion or degradation that occurs between domestic or intimate partners (Al'Uqdah, Maxwell, & Hill, 2016), is a significant problem across the world.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2017), worldwide, close to 30% of women who have been in a relationship report experiencing some form of physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. In general, intimate partner violence research in the United States focuses on White and poor women

(Bent-Goodley, 2001). However, research has indicated that African American women experience IPV at significantly higher rates (Bent-Goodley, 2004, 2016; Catalano, 2012; Rennison & Welchans, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and are at greater risk for poorer health outcomes than women of other races (Lacy, Sears, Matusko, & Jackson, 2015). Approximately 41% of African American women have experienced violence by an intimate partner during their lifetimes (Breiding, Smith, Basile, et al., 2014). Furthermore, African American women are more likely to receive more serious injuries, kill their partner, or be killed by their partner compared to other women (Violence Policy Center, 2017). Less these findings are overgeneralized to suggest that African Americans are simply more violent than other groups, it is imperative to recognize that historical factors (e.g., legacy of enslavement, continued systemic racism), socioeconomic factors (e.g., living in impoverished neighborhoods, unemployment or underemployment, etc.), external barriers (e.g., impact of labeling, stereotypes, lack of cultural competence on help-seeking behaviors, effective intervention, and retention in IPV treatment), and internal barriers (e.g., racial loyalty, gender entrapment) (Bent-Goodley, 2001; Bent-Goodley, Chase, Circo, & Anta-Rodgers, 2010; Ritchie, 1996) play significant roles in the experience of IPV among African American women.

Research has also demonstrated a high prevalence of dating violence, a form of IPV that occurs among college populations, with estimates ranging from 10%-50% (see Kaukinen, 2014 for review). Research also suggests that African American college women are at a relatively higher risk for experiencing this form of IPV than college women from other ethnic groups. For instance, in a large study of college women (87% identified as Black) attending four Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs;), Barrick, Krebs, & Lindquist (2013) found that, in comparison to findings from a study of women attending two Predominantly White Colleges/ Universities (PWCUs) (Krebs, et al., 2009), twice as many women attending HBCUs (17% vs. 34%) reported being insulted, humiliated, or treated like an inferior by a dating partner since entering college. Additionally, 18% of the respondents in the HBCU study reported experiencing physical IPV (i.e., pushed, shoved, hit, slapped, grabbed; choked, slammed, kicked, burned, or beaten) in the past year in contrast to only 5% from the PWCU study reporting similar experiences (Barrick, Krebs, & Lindquist, 2013). To date, however, there is little research examining the experience of IPV specifically among African American college women (e.g., Walley-Jean & Swan, 2009). Generally, intimate partner violence research focuses on White and poor women (Bent-Goodley, 2001). Furthermore, much of the existing research on African American women and intimate partner violence investigates the experiences of African American women in low-income community samples and who are experiencing more severe violence (Bent- Goodley, 2004; Garfield, 2005; Potter, 2008; Ritchie, 1996; West, 2004; West, 2007). Given the diversity

within the African American population, further exploration of the experiences of IPV among African American college women is warranted.

Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence among College Students

One important area in evaluating the experience of IPV is perceptions of intimate partner violence. Inconsistency in generally accepted definitions of intimate partner violence and the ways in which individuals define their and their partners' relationship behaviors may lead to increased perpetration and/or victimization (Miller, 2011). Additionally, incongruence in how intimate partner violence is defined and perceived may also lead to couples ignoring signs that violence in the relationship may be escalating, to perpetration and/or victimization in future relationships, or an absence or reduction of help-seeking behaviors (Miller, 2011). Studies examining perceptions of IPV, specifically among dating partners, have primarily focused on gender differences in (e.g., Beyers et al., 2000; Dardis et al., 2017; O'Campo, et al., 2017) or gender effects on perceptions of the severity of violent behaviors (e.g., Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Hammock et al., 2015; Hammock, et al., 2017; Sylaska & Walters, 2014). Although important, no studies have specifically examined college students' perceptions of what behaviors they identify to characterize intimate partner violence.

Furthermore, Bent-Goodley, Chase, Circo, and Anta Rodgers (2010) assert that it is vital to the development of effective and culturally-informed prevention and intervention efforts to understand individuals' conceptualizations of intimate partner violence. Researchers have indeed found the conceptualization of intimate partner violence influences the types of interventions those who use and experience IPV seek or are responsive to. In a study of 1,530 college students, Miller (2011) found that although one in four students were involved in a physically abusive dating relationship, over 85% of them failed to self-identify as ever having received and/or perpetrated any act of physical abuse. In addition to influencing the experience of intimate partner violence within individual relationships, similarly, a lack of understanding among practitioners and researchers of how violence is conceptualized among those who use and experience it may lead to a deficit in the knowledge needed to develop and implement effective prevention and intervention strategies. In discussing the necessity of cultural competence in addressing intimate partner violence in the African American community, Bent-Goodley, et al. (2010) voice it is vital that practitioners understand African American women's concepts of intimate partner violence in order to develop a therapeutic relationship that is built on common understanding. Utilizing a community sample of African American women, Bent-Goodley (2004) also previously supported the need to better understand women's specific perceptions of intimate partner violence, particularly in relation to how

their perspective affects help-seeking.

To date, there is little research examining the conceptualizations (e.g., motivations, justification, perceptions, etc.) of IPV specifically among African American college women (e.g., Walley-Jean & Swan, 2009). Yet, in a population that is ostensibly more vulnerable to the experience of IPV (i.e., African American college women), research examining their conceptualization of IPV is lacking. The Walley-Jean Cultural Socialization Model of IPV (Walley-Jean & Swan, 2018), insists it is not only necessary, but imperative, that research on IPV within African American college women consider cultural perceptions, socialization, and interpretations to fully understand the experience of IPV within this population. Walley-Jean & Swan (2018) build upon extant previous scholarship (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Bent-Goodley, 2001; Garfield, 2005; Potter, 2008; Richie, 1996; West, 1998) that asserts that examining IPV through an intersectional framework (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, class, etc.) provides the opportunity to better understand and address the issue of IPV within the African American community. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore perceptions of intimate partner violence in a sample of African American college women.

Method

The sample for this study consisted of 50 African American college women, a subset of a larger study sample of 113 college students, recruited from a medium-sized, predominantly minority-serving institution in the southeastern United States. The percentage of African American women in the overall sample (44%) was representative of the percentage of African American women enrolled at the institution in which the data were collected (45%). The only inclusion criteria were that participants were 18 years or older. Open-ended responses to a questionnaire designed to obtain information about how participants resolve relationship conflict and their perceptions of intimate partner violence were the primary sources of data. The current paper focuses on the African American women in the sample, a consistently underrepresented population of interest in college samples.

Procedure

Participants were recruited in varying ways. Flyers were posted in common areas where students gather and distributed at student organization events. Additionally, the primary investigator contacted institutional faculty via email to request permission to visit their classes to recruit potential participants and/or request the faculty member forward a copy of the recruitment flyer to their class listserv or post to their class websites. The study was also advertised via the institution's online internal communications page. Lastly, research assistants sat at information tables set up in a highly populated building on campus and solicited potential volunteers. Potential participants who expressed interest were provided an information card which included a link to the online study. Participants completed an informed consent form and the study

questionnaire via a secure, online survey system licensed to the university. The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Measure

Participants completed a questionnaire developed by the primary investigator. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions (i.e., age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, length of relationship, and gender of partner). Seven open-ended questions were used to gain insight into the actions participants use to resolve conflict in their relationships, their perceptions of their partners' actions, and whether they perceive their or their partners' actions as "relationship violence." Participants were prompted to respond to the questions with the following instruction, *"No matter how well a person gets along with their romantic partner, there are times when they disagree. The following questions are designed to give you the opportunity to describe the types of things you say or do when you and your romantic partner disagree."* (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The questions are listed in Table I (see Appendix).

Sample

A total of fifty-three (53) African American women provided demographic information. Of those participants, fifty (50) also provided a minimum of one response to the open-ended questions. Participants who did not provide a minimum of one response to the open-ended questions were deleted (n = 3). It should be noted that of the remaining participants, six did not respond to all 7 open-ended questions; however, they were kept in the sample and the responses they provided were included in analysis. Prior to analysis, the data were reviewed for errors (e.g., duplicate data, missing data, etc.). NVivo 10, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was used to organize, code and analyze the data. The software also facilitated reliability checking between coders.

Data Coding and Analysis

A two-stage process was used to code and analyze data. To minimize researcher bias, two researchers (a senior and junior researcher) coded and analyzed the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, guided by the questionnaire questions, the researchers engaged in open coding to develop an initial coding framework (Osborne-Lampkin, Folsom & Herrington, 2014). For example, "communication", "actions", and "violence" were used for initial coding. The researchers used the initial coding framework to establish inter-rater reliability and consistency between coders. For the reliability building process, a random sample of approximately 20 percent of the files (23/113) was selected (Neuendorf, 2002). The researchers individually coded, using both open and axial coding, a subset of the files to assess reliability and to reach inter- coder agreement (i.e., reconcile through discussion whatever discrepancies coders had on coded text). Team members formally communicated once per week to discuss their coding process and progress. After achieving a sufficient level of inter-rater reliability

(a minimum criterion of .80 Cohen's Kappa reached using NVivo 10), the researchers proceeded to the second stage of the process.

During the second stage of coding and analysis, the researchers employed a more in- depth level of data analysis. The researchers re-coded all 50 files of African American participants using the refined coding scheme, including those files initially coded during the inter-rater reliability building process. Sub-categories (e.g., "disengage" became a sub-category of "actions") as well as independent codes (e.g., "perceptions of behavior") emerged from the data.

The researchers used an iterative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to capture common and recurring themes in the data. The researchers met throughout the coding process to share findings, discuss emergent themes, and refine the coding framework. The researchers also discussed connections that were being made, and the meanings and conclusions being applied. Internal documents (i.e., coding schedule and summary notes) were used to track progress and guide analysis (Osborne-Lampkin, Folsom, & Herrington, 2014).

Strategies were also employed to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the data and findings, including outlining the steps and decisions made throughout the process. Internal documents (e.g., coding spreadsheets, memos) were used throughout the process to track progress and guide analysis. Following Osborne-Lampkin et al., (2014), team members met throughout the coding

and analysis process to review emergent categories, discuss differences in individual interpretations, and to arrive at a consensus for any categories included in the analysis. The researchers also employed strategies to test and confirm findings and ensure the quality of conclusions. Researchers were required to provide evidence of any findings used in the analysis, including specific language and corresponding reference numbers for all coded data. As Osborne-Lampkin et al. (2014) notes, this documentation is particularly important for clarification of researchers' interpretation and team consensus to justify including data in the analysis and to guide the formulation of overall findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, 1994; Osborne-Lampkin, Folsom & Herrington, 2014; Yin, 2014, 2009).

Results

Demographic Information

Age and Sexual Orientation: Thirty-six percent (36%) of the sample reported being 18- 21 years old and 28% reported being 22-25 years old. The remainder of the sample (36%) reported being 26 years or older. The majority of participants identified as heterosexual (88%). Four (4) of the remaining six participants identified as bisexual or lesbian. Two (2) participants did not respond to the sexual orientation question.

Relationship Status and Length: Forty-eight percent (48%) of the sample described their relationship status as "single, not dating." Eighteen percent

(18%) reported their status as "single, dating casually," while twenty-four percent (24%) reported "dating exclusively." Finally, sixteen percent (16%) reported being "married or equivalent." Of those who reported currently being in a relationship, the majority (63%) reported being in their current relationship for a length of one year or less. Fourteen percent (14%) reported being with their partners between one and five years while twenty-two percent (22%) reported being in relationships five years or more.

Responses to Conflict

Three overall themes emerged from the open-ended responses related to what participants and their partners say and do when a disagreement arises (i.e., responses to conflict; Questions 1-5). The themes were (1) forms of verbal communication (i.e., arguing, talking it out); (2) forms of non-verbal communication (i.e., not talking, ignoring); and, (3) disengagement (see Table 2 in Appendix).

Verbal Communication: In response to the questions of what typically happens, what is done, and/or what is said, participants routinely reported that they "argued" or "talked things out" when a disagreement arose in their relationships. For example, Respondent 11 (22-25 years old) reported, "An argument normally occurs, and I become reserved because I don't like to feel uncomfortable." Another participant explained, "It's usually just an argument…" (Respondent 106, 18-21 years old). Other participants reported talking the situation out. For example,

Respondent 13 (>45 years old) explained, "I normally say what I need to say and never mention it again. My partner listens and we always come to an agreement and try to move forward and really try to have an open and honest relationship."

Non-Verbal Communication: Other participants described non-verbal responses to conflict in their relationships. For instance, Respondent 105 (>45 years old) reported she "shut[s] down and not talk" while Respondent 107 (18-21 years old) explained that she typically, "get(s) mad and not talk for a couple of days."

Disengagement: Participants also reported that either they or their partners disengaged from the situation when a disagreement occurs. For example, one participant described that "when we (them and their partner) disagree he generally walks away" (Respondent 1, 22-25 years old). Similarly, another participant explained that her partner "leaves when it's too challenging" (Respondent 105, >45 years old). These responses were consistent with other participant responses who reportedly disengaged as a response to conflict.

Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence

Interpretation of participants' perceptions of what they considered intimate partner violence was a primary focus of the current analysis and was informed by participant responses to questions 6 & 7. Questions 6 & 7 asked, "In thinking about what you (Question 6)/your partner (Question 7) say and do

when you have a disagreement with your partner, do you think any of your/your partner's words or actions are relationship violence? Why or why not?" Generally, most participants did not report that their (98%) or their partners' (79%) actions would be defined as intimate partner violence. In evaluating participant responses, three (3) themes related to their perceptions of intimate partner violence emerged: (1) Perception that actions are not intimate partner violence; (2) Perception that actions are intimate partner violence; and, (3) Intimate partner violence defined as physical violence only (Table 2).

Perception that Actions Are Not Intimate Partner Violence: Some participants provided explicit statements that indicated they did not perceive the ways in which they resolve relationship conflicts as intimate partner violence. For example, Respondent 31 (>45 years old) stated:

> No violence. Before we ever loved each other, we respected each other. We were each other's best friend and protector. Verbal or physical or psychological violence has never defined our relationship or been a component of it. We never lose sight of the fact that the other person, though not perfect, is God's gift to us and we must answer to Him as to our treatment of each other especially when we disagree.

Another participant asserted, "No, because I am not verbally abusive nor physically abusive." (Respondent 105, (>45 years old). Yet another participant declared, "No, there is no verbal or physical abuse. We do not curse at one another when we are heated."

(Respondent 2, 31-35 years old).

In addition to these types of statements, participants also voiced utilizing non-violent, respectful ways of resolving conflicts. Respondent 33 (>45 years old) stated, "No, their [*sic*] is no violence because I will always try to work through the disagremment [*sic*]." Additionally, Respondent 60 (22-25 years old) voiced, "No, I don't disrespect or provoke him in any kind of way. If we cannot talk about it like adults then we'll leave it alone until we can." Respondent 63 (26-30 years old) explained, "No. I try to respect whoever [*sic*] I am dating enough to come to them as a woman in a disagreement, and not belittle or provoke them to a point where they begin to act out of character."

Perception that Actions Are Intimate Partner Violence: Although most participants did not perceive their and their partners' actions as intimate partner violence, some participants (18%, n=9), indeed, reported that their or their partners' actions could be defined as intimate partner violence. In these cases, participants explicitly stated their actions could be defined as either physical, verbal, or emotional violence; however, the behavior most often identified as violence was "verbal abuse." As an illustration, Respondent 49 (22-25 years old) described, "I would consider it more so as verbal abuse because we may say mean things to each other" while Respondent 47 (>45 years old) reported, "Yes, verbal violence mainly." and Respondent 38 (>45 years old) described, "Yes, because it borders on verbal abuse."

Those who defined their or their partners' actions as intimate partner violence were also generally accurate in

their evaluation. That is, they identified behaviors which are generally consistent with the formal definition of intimate partner violence. In addition to verbal aggression, other respondents described what they perceived as "emotional violence." For example, Respondent 29 (22-25 years old) stated, "Yes, because we have some emotional violence where I do not care how my actions make my partner feel." Participants also accurately identified physical violence, such as Respondent 62 (35-40 years old), "Yes, he did have a physical fight with his ex-girlfriend years before we got together…" and Respondent 97 (18-21 years old) who described, "I might fight him, but he won't fight back as in throw punches. He'll just hold me down."

Of interest was the finding that how a participant specifically defined intimate partner violence could potentially influence whether they classified their or their partner's actions as intimate partner violence. For instance, even among the participants who identified their or their partners' actions as violence, participants provided responses that differentiated physical violence from other actions. As an example, Respondent 11 (22-25 years old) stated, "…I know it's not okay to be in someone's face hollering and pointing fingers, but I definitely don't push or get physical but I do feel I can be verbally abuse [sic] at times" and Respondent 7 (26-30 years old) who asserted, "…I punched him once, otherwise, it's not physical. My words are ruthless, but I assume that is typical when an individual is irate."

Intimate Partner Violence Defined Only as Physical Violence: This conceptualization of intimate partner

violence as *only* physical actions was also supported by responses from participants who did not perceive their or their partners' actions as intimate partner violence.

Specifically, of the forty-five participants who did not perceive their or their partners' actions as violence, fifteen (33%) made statements that suggest their conceptualization of violence only includes acts of physical violence. For example, respondents made comments such as, "No, we don't hit each other." (Respondent 32, 18-21 years old) and "No, we never hit each other." (Respondent 77, 22-25 years old). Other participants made similar comments such as, "No, we don't put our hands on one another," (Respondent 106, 18-21 years old), "No, because don't put our hands on each other...No, not touching me." (Respondent 24, 18-21 years old), and "No, I do not put my hands on someone." (Respondent 93, 22-25 years old).

Participants also made comments that specifically distinguished physical touch that was enacted violently, "No, we have never put our hands on each other in a violent manner….No, he would never hit me." (Respondent 8, 26-30) and "No, because it is not physical violence…No because he isn't hitting me." (Respondent 26, 18-21 years old). At least one participant also reported their past actions could be defined as violence yet described only her use of physical violence. She explained, "No, not anymore! However, I use to physically hit him when I was angry, but he never hit me back until he got tired of it and he grab [sic] me very harshly. I stopped

being physical because he is a man and is much strong [*sic*] and I wouldn't want neither of us to get hurt" (Respondent 109, 22-25 years old). One of the most definitive responses was provided by Respondent 75 (22-24 years old) who specifically noted, "No, because the definition of violence is the 'intentional use of physical force' and it hasn't come to that."

Discussion

The current exploratory study offers valuable insights into conceptualizations of intimate partner violence among African American college women. Although an extant literature on African American women and intimate partner violence exists (e.g., Bent-Goodley, 2001; Garfield, 2005; Potter, 2008; Richie, 1996; West, 1998, 2002), this literature has primarily addressed IPV in poor African American women and African American women who are experiencing more severe violence. Although few, some studies (Barick, Krebs, & Lindquist, 2013; Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, & Field, 2005; Walley-Jean & Swan, 2009) have specifically investigated the experiences of IPV in African American college women; however, none have examined African American college women's perceptions of IPV. Furthermore, the literature on perceptions of violence among college students is limited in that the research has not focused on how college students specifically define intimate partner violence (as opposed to gender differences or effects on the definition of intimate partner violence). Thus, describing African American college women's perceptions of how they and their partners' resolve conflict within their intimate relationships adds significant new knowledge to our understanding of this specific population.

The current findings indicate that African American college women use a wide range of behaviors in response to conflict in their relationships. These behaviors can be effective (e.g., talking it out, etc.) or ineffective (e.g., shutting down, disengaging). Unlike previous findings of college students' perceptions of intimate partner violence (i.e., Miller, 2011; Fass & Benson, 2008), it is also encouraging that most women in this sample accurately identified verbal, physical, and emotional aggression as intimate partner violence and did not seem to minimize or deny the existence of these behaviors within their relationships. However, the finding that a third of the sample who did not define their or their partners' behaviors as intimate partner violence unless it was physical violence is concerning and demonstrates that how African American women perceive and define intimate partner violence is multi-faceted and warrants further study.

Researchers have demonstrated that psychological aggression is one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of physical aggression in romantic relationships (e.g., Baker & Stith, 2008; O'Leary, 1999). It is also estimated that psychological aggression occurs in approximately 80% of college student dating relationships while physical aggression occurs in approximately 20-30% (Bell & Naugle, 2007; Shorey et al., 2008). Barrick, Krebs, & Lindquist's (2013) findings that 34% of the women in a sample of African American college women reported being insulted, humiliated, or

treated like an inferior in contrast to only approximately 18% reporting experiencing physical IPV (i.e., pushed, shoved, hit, slapped, grabbed, choked, slammed, kicked, burned, or beaten) are sobering. This finding also demonstrates that, among African American college women, physical violence is only one form of intimate partner violence being experienced. These findings are even more disturbing when coupled with the fact that African American women in the current study who perceived their or their partners' behaviors as intimate partner violence most often described the behavior as "verbal abuse." Therefore, the propensity of some of the women in the current sample to not classify behaviors as intimate partner violence until those behaviors reach the level of physical violence may increase the likelihood of their remaining in an unhealthy relationship that contains other forms of intimate partner violence that are not physical. Future studies should expand on the current exploratory study by holding focus groups or conducting individual interviews with African American college women to gain more in-depth understanding of what they perceive constitutes intimate partner violence.

The identification of behaviors as intimate partner violence only if the behaviors are physical in the current sample also seems to be associated with age. That is, of the participants who made comments supporting this category, the majority (73%) were 18-25 years old. It may be that younger women have not yet had experiences that broaden their definition of intimate partner violence past physical violence. Yet, as illustrated by the findings of

Barrick, Krebs, & Lindquist (2013), African American college women are indeed experiencing additional forms of intimate partner violence other than physical violence. Bent-Goodley, et al. (2010) note diversity within the African American population must be considered when examining intimate partner violence. The difference in conceptualization of IPV by age in the current study suggests the possibility that the development of IPV in African American women might have a specific trajectory that involves an intersection of different factors, including age, and maybe other variables such as socioeconomic class, education, etc. Thus, future studies should compare the conceptualizations of intimate partner violence in African American women of varying ages, socioeconomic class, education levels, relationship status, and perpetration and victimization histories.

Limitations

Although providing important information about perceptions of intimate partner violence within an under-researched population, the current study has limitations. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the researchers did not obtain information about specific incidences of intimate partner violence. Thus, the current project does not allow for a comparison of participants' perceptions of IPV with their actual, self-reported experiences of IPV. Future studies should obtain information on participants' behavior to compare whether it aligns with their perceptions of the behaviors. Additionally, future research should obtain information from both partners. The participation of both partners

allows for corroboration of each partners' perceptions as well as comparison between partners.

Another limitation in relation to the questionnaire used as the method of data collection for the study was that the questions were not piloted before use. Additionally, questionnaire data is self-reported, relying heavily on the ability of participants to accurately and honestly recollect their experiences. The use of an online questionnaire enabled the researchers to obtain information that participants may perceive as sensitive that they might not have otherwise provided using other methods of data collection (e.g., focus groups, interviews). And while the use of the online, open-ended questionnaire provided an opportunity for participants to provide more complete and detailed responses and further clarification, researchers have noted some concerns about the inability to control the environment in which the online questionnaire is being taken. More explicit qualitative methodology, particularly focus groups or individual interviews, may have provided a better opportunity for participants to contextualize their responses.

Conclusion

In a population that is ostensibly more vulnerable to the experience of IPV, research examining their conceptualization of IPV is noticeably lacking. Women of color scholars (e.g, Bent-Goodley, 2004; Garfield, 2005; Potter, 2010) have asserted and demonstrated the importance of studying the lived experiences of African American women to our overall understanding of intimate partner violence within this population. Building upon this foundation, the Walley-Jean Cultural Socialization Model of IPV (Walley-Jean & Swan, 2018), insists it is not only necessary, but imperative, that research on IPV within African American college women consider cultural perceptions, socialization, and interpretations to fully understand the experience of IPV within this population. The continued study of the experience of IPV in African American college women provides a much-needed intersectional lens to IPV research. To fully understand and eventually eradicate IPV, it is vital to investigate how the intersectionality of varying social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class contribute to and impact the experience of IPV.

Findings from the current study contribute to our knowledge of how African American college women conceptualize and understand their and their partners' use of verbal, emotional, and physical violence to resolve conflict in their relationships. No group, including African American women, are monolithic and the current findings provide evidence that further study of the diversity of experiences and conceptualization among varying groups of African American women is necessary. Future studies can expound on the findings of the current study by exploring the definitions of verbal, emotional, and physical violence in African American college women who have or are currently experiencing IPV. Additionally, future studies should specifically evaluate these conceptualizations across African American college women of varying ages or longitudinally to investigate whether there is a developmental trajectory to the

conceptualization of IPV in this population. Finally, it is also important that future studies include partners to obtain an understanding of how the conceptualizations of IPV are mirrored or not within couple dyads. ∎

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Appendix

Table 1

Questions
1. Describe what happens when you and your partner disagree.
2. Describe things that you might say and how you say it when you have a disagreement.
3. Describe things that your partner might say and how they might say it when you have a disagreement.
4. Describe things you might do when you and your partner disagree.
5. Describe things your partner might do when you disagree.
6. In thinking about what you say and do when you have a disagreement with your partner, do you think any of your words or actions are relationship violence? Why or why not?
7. Now, in thinking about what your partner says and does when you have a disagreement, do you think any of your partner's words or actions are relationship violence? Why or why not?

Table 2

Themes: Responses to Conflict	Themes: Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence
➢ Verbal Communication	➢ Perception that Actions Are Intimate Partner Violence
➢ Non-Verbal Communication	➢ Perception that Actions Are Not Intimate Partner Violence
➢ Disengagement	➢ Intimate Partner Violence Defined as Physical Violence Only