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THE VICTIMIZATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS OF COLOR

The diversity of the U.S. population is such that cultural differences and the effects of racism and classism often provide vastly different life experiences. Williams (1981, 18-19) claims that Third World women in the United States (in which she includes African Americans) are disproportionately victims of rape, battering, and sterilization abuse. A study of homeless women found that women of color were more victimized overall—and raped in particular—than White women (Costin, 1992). Using NCVS data for the United States, one study reported that between 1993 and 1998, African American women experienced the highest rates of intimate partner violence, 35 percent higher than White women's rates and about 2.5 times the rate of women of all other races (Rennison and Welchans, 2000). This same study showed no significant differences in

intimate partner abuse rates between Latinas and non-Latinas. A U.S. survey reported that American Indian/Alaskan Native women had the highest lifetime rates of being raped (34 percent), followed by mixed-race women (24 percent), African American women (19 percent), White women (18 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islander women (7 percent) (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998). Finally, an Australian study found that Black/Aboriginal women were at increased risk of male violence, yet they are silenced and their victimizations are too often invisible (Lucashenko, 1996).

Robert Hampton and his colleagues (2003) report that intimate partner abuse is more common and violent in African American than in White communities and attribute this to structural, cultural-community, and situational contexts, where institutional racism affects African Americans' intimate relationships. They cite other research indicating that African American men are displacing onto their wives and lovers the anger, hatred, and frustrations caused by institutional racism (Hampton, Oliver, and Magarian, 2003, 533). Moreover, institutional racism doubly victimizes African American women as they try to break out of the cycle of violence (*ibid.*).

African American women have been particularly vulnerable to sexual assault, historically in slavery and currently because of the negative images associated with them, such as being hot-natured and morally loose (Davis, 1997; Giddings, 1984, 31). DeFour (1990) and Cho (1997) effectively document the intersection between sexism and racism regarding the risk of sexual harassment for women-of-color students on college campuses. In a discussion of racist stereotypes of African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women, DeFour (*ibid.*, 48) describes how "[t]hese images either portray the women as weak and thus unlikely to fight back if harassed, or they are perceived as very sexual and thus desiring sexual attention." Ontiveros (1997, 188) carefully portrays the gender and race dynamics in sexual harassment in the workplace:

Since workplace harassment is a power dynamic, women of color serve as likely targets because they are the least powerful participants in the workplace. Unlike White women, they are not privileged by their race. Unlike men of color, they are not privileged by gender. Although a White man might harass any woman, a man of color is not likely to feel that he has the prerogative to harass a White woman. He may feel that he is not able to harass her because of his lack of racial status or because he knows he could be subject to disproportionate reaction stemming from society's deep-seated, historical fears of attacks on White women by non-White men. Harassers may also prefer those women of color, such as Latinas and Asian American women, whom they view as more passive and less likely to complain.

A study of 37 highly educated African American women ranging from 23 to 56 years old found *racialized sexual harassment* as a distinct construct from either racial harassment or sexual harassment (Buchanan and Ormerod, 2002, 114). One example of this is White coworkers asking sexually explicit questions of them, reflecting an underlying assumption that African American women's sexual

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boundaries, both the behaviors they will engage in and their comfort in discussing sex, are looser than those of White women (*ibid.*). Another example is White coworkers making comments about African American women's clothing, implying that they look like sex workers or that their clothes are exotic or offensive.

Compounding this is the fact that it is common for society or for crime-processing workers to treat women of color as if they are not really victims. Thus, women of color appear to have disproportionately high victimization rates, yet they are much less likely to have their victimizations acknowledged. This limited and racist legal response is even more profound for immigrant women of color, particularly when they are not legal immigrants (Ontiveros, 1997). Chapter 1 discussed the dichotomy of women into Madonnas or whores (Feinman, 1986). Women more consistent with the Madonna image (for example, virgins and White women) are more likely than women in the whore category to be viewed as legitimate victims. None of Young's (1986) categories of African American women portrays a woman who could be perceived as a legitimate victim: Amazons are viewed as capable of protecting themselves, sinister sapphires are viewed as vindictive or as precipitating the violence against them, and seductresses receive no validation as credible victims. Similarly, Tong (1984, 155) discusses how the view of African American women as less sexually puritanical than White women is objectionable and racist, and it furthermore implies that African American women do not want or need protection against male violence. Clearly, these mythical and racist views of women and girls of color affect how they are treated (or not treated) by the crime-processing system.

Racism and the rape laws are unquestionably inseparable (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1983, 110). Even the laws well into the twentieth century stated that women who worked outside the home or whose race had a history of sexual exploitation were outside the realm of "womanhood" and its prerogative (Giddings, 1984, 49). Thus, the law implied that women of color were not legally capable of being raped. In fact, rape laws were originally mandated to protect upper-class White men whose wives and daughters could be assaulted (Davis, 1981). Thus, in addition to the rape laws emerging because of a view of women as men's property, there were significant racist and classist components in the development of these laws.

The criminal legal system and society as a whole, then, tend to minimize female victims of male violence, and this is particularly true if the victims are of color and/or poor. The incongruity between high victimization rates and low validation rates for persons of color in this society serves to further victimize and oppress this group. The lack of response by the crime-processing system may lead victims to take matters into their own hands to protect themselves. However, any female victim of sexual assault or battering who uses self-defense runs the risk of being charged with a crime herself. This is most evident for women of color, as Williams (1981) exemplifies through a large number of cases of women of color who were incarcerated for protecting themselves against violent men. These women failed to be taken seriously as victims but were taken extremely seriously as so-called offenders in their efforts to protect themselves and their children.

There is a significant need for progressives to join forces in fighting *both* racism and violence against women (Matthews, 1993; Tong, 1984; Williams, 1981). Historically, there has been a cleavage between White and African American women fighting male violence because the African American women have also had to fight the stereotype of African American male offenders. In the late 1800s, African American activist Ida B. Wells publicly stated that there was a focus on accusing African American males of raping White females, whereas the rape of African American girls and women by White males was overlooked (Giddings, 1984). While slave masters and other White men raped African American women freely, death was the punishment for an African American man convicted of raping a White woman (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1983, 108). Indeed, because most slave codes did not recognize the rape of African American women, there was no punishment for enslaved, free, or White men who did so (Johnson, 2003).

African American males, the guilty and innocent alike, are still indiscriminately brought to justice for rape (Davis, 1981). More recent research confirms the disproportionately harsh treatment of African American males charged with rape compared to the treatment of White males (Walsh, 1987). Davis (1981) discusses how it has been difficult for African American women to be active in the antirape movement, given the treatment of African American men (particularly innocent African American men) charged with rape. The antirape movement in the United States began at the same time as African American feminism and at the same time that African American women began feeling distrustful of White feminists (Matthews, 1993). In more recent years, however, rape-crisis centers and battered-women's shelters have become more integrated and more dedicated to combating racism as well as sexism and male violence.

Recent research identifies the added burden among African American women to uphold a strong African American woman image (Donovan and Williams, 2002; Potter, 2004). Perhaps this is why recent scholarship found that White women are far more likely than women of color to engage in more advanced help-seeking behaviors, such as police reporting, asking for help from family and friends, and seeking help from psychiatrists and social service agencies (Kaukinen, 2004). However, another study found no racial differences among victims of intimate partner abuse in terms of distrust of the criminal legal system (Bui, 2001).

THE VICTIMIZATION OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND GIRLS

Until recently, the unique experience and challenges of immigrant women and girls who are victimized has been largely ignored, although one study states that intimate partner abuse of immigrant women is at epidemic proportions (Raj and Silverman, 2002, 367). To date, the bulk of the research on the victimization of immigrant women is on intimate partner abuse, with limited research on sexual victimizations (outside of those committed by intimate partners). The research

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includes immigrant women who are partners of immigrant men, as well as immigrant women married to men from the United States. In both cases, whether their male partners are immigrants or not, immigrant status poses unique and troubling experiences for women abused by their partners.

One of the earliest treatises on this topic is Margaret Abraham's (2000) book *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence among South Asian Immigrants in the United States*. This and subsequent studies on immigrant women who are victims of intimate partner abuse provide insight into the vulnerability of women in the United States whose national origin, and possibly language and citizenship barriers, place them as outsiders and isolated. Abraham's book explains (1) how immigrant status can serve as a risk factor in domestic violence; (2) how both informal and formal responses to domestic violence are related to immigrant status; (3) how immigrant status is related to resistance factors for battered women; (4) how struggles of advocacy groups for battered women within South Asian communities in the United States (Abraham, 2000). Similarly, Hoan Bui's (2004) book examines Vietnamese immigrant women to the United States and, like Abraham (2000), allows the reader to understand the significant intersection between gender, race, class, nationality, and domestic violence experiences, including how the criminal legal system responds to victims and abusers. A review of the research on the intimate partner abuse of immigrant women explains how immigrant women's cultures, contexts, and legal status can (1) increase vulnerability to abuse, (2) be used by batterers to control and abuse immigrant women, and (3) create barriers to women seeking and receiving help (Raj and Silverman, 2002).

A recent study of Latina immigrants to the United States concluded that although the women unanimously affirmed that intimate partner abuse was an extensive problem in the Latino/a community, they also reported that it was made invisible because victims are expected to see it as their lot in life (Adames and Campbell, 2005). Furthermore, the women reported that intimate-partner abuse in immigrant Latino/a communities is rooted in external factors, including cultural norms and stresses related to immigration changes (ibid., 1359). Another study examined the intimate partner abuse against immigrant wives and fiancées at the hands of U.S. military men (Erez and Bach, 2003). The study concluded: "The immigration circumstances and status interact with the military context to compound the abuse, further marginalize victims/survivors, and weaken the military social service and legal systems' response" (ibid., 1093).

As previously stated, most of the research on the victimization of immigrant women and girls focuses on intimate partner abuse (sometimes addressing marital rape in these cases). Two studies expand beyond intimate partners. A study of thirty-six Ethiopian immigrants to Israel who were admitted as psychiatric patients reported that even prior to Jewish Ethiopians fleeing their country, many were raped, robbed, or murdered by marauding militias (Grisaru, Irwin, and Kaplan, 2003, 242). Upon fleeing Ethiopia, typically through Sudan, the escapees faced serious violations by marauding bands and Ethiopian authorities, who not only stripped, imprisoned, and emotionally and physically tortured them but who also raped the women in front of their families (ibid., 242). A recent study of girls

and young women in racialized immigrant communities in western Canada found that to truly understand these young women's lives, it is necessary to analyze how racism interlocks with other systems of domination to influence the life chances and reality of girls who are racialized (Jiwani, 2005, 853). Indeed, these young women identified racism as the dominant and most pervasive form of violence they encountered in their daily lives (ibid., 858). Racism permeated their lives and resulted in their "othering" through inferiorization, trivialization, exoticization, and erasure (ibid., 867). These girls/young women were described as having to walk the tightrope of trying to fit into a mainstream society that often conflicted with their families' ideals.

THE VICTIMIZATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Many people assume that women and girls with physical or mental disabilities are less at risk for victimization of any kind. This erroneous assumption is based largely on two faulty beliefs. First is the belief that no one would want to harm someone who is already harmed or vulnerable. The second faulty belief, which is most pronounced for sexual victimizations, is that no one would find such women or girls sexually attractive. The reality is that disabled women and girls are at an increased risk of victimization, but the silence surrounding this violence makes their victimizations invisible and unknown (Chenoweth, 1996, 391; see also Roberto and Teaster, 2005). One study reported that children with disabilities in the United States are almost twice as likely as children without disabilities to be sexually victimized (Cross, Kaye, and Ratnofsky, 1995, as cited in Chenoweth, 1996). Mentally and/or physically disabled women and girls who are institutionalized are at particularly high risk of sexual victimization (Chenoweth, 1996). Chenoweth (ibid., 405) also states that disabled women and girls are in a paradox of being perceived as both asexual and sexually promiscuous and depraved. Once a woman's identity is constructed as asexual, the license to commit many abuses usually follows (ibid.).

Women with disabilities are more at risk than nondisabled women, given their weakened status to defend or care for themselves (Curry, Hassounah-Phillips, and Johnston-Silverberg, 2001; Gilson, Cramer, and DePoy, 2001a, 2001b). Whether their dependence on caregivers is in their homes, hospitals, or other institutions, this dependency places them at risk of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Gilson and his colleagues (2001b), however, also point out that battered women are at risk of developing disabilities, or even an illness, as a result of the intimate partner abuse. Abuse of disabled women can include such actions and inactions as failing to provide medications, threats to institutionalize if they fail to comply with sexual requests or to report abuse, taking away access to telephones and/or wheelchairs, and so on (see Gilson, Cramer, and DePoy, 2001b). A qualitative study of intimate partner survivors who are disabled women found three subthemes characterizing the unique forms of intimate partner abuse directed at disabled women and these women's responses to them (ibid.) as reported in Exhibit 6.1. The types of abuse

EXHIBIT 6

Unique Forms of

Physical and Emotional

- Conveying j
- Threatening
- Threatening

Neglect

- Physical
- Withholding
- Erecting or i
- Lifting a wh
- Not contacti

Control/Restraint

- Withholding
- Controlling a
- Controlling a
- Using disabil
- Refusing acco
- Refusing to c

Types of Disabled

Bad Self

- Trying to be
- Internalizing
- Doubting her

Stuck

- Feeling that s
- Feeling deper
- Not knowing

Movement

- Confronting tl
- Threatening to
- Separating fro
- Finding role m
- Spending time
- Sharing stories
- Developing a s
- Connecting wi
- Volunteering t

SOURCE: Stephen French et al.
Disabilities. *Affilia* 16:228.

EXHIBIT 6.1 Forms of Intimate Partner Abuse Directed at Disabled Women and Their Responses to This Abuse

Unique Forms of Intimate Partner Abuse Directed at Disabled Women

Physical and Emotional Assault

- Conveying judgmental attitudes based on her disability
- Threatening her with the loss of her children because of her disability
- Threatening to institutionalize her

Neglect

- Physical
- Withholding personal assistance
- Erecting or refusing to remove architectural barriers in the home
- Lifting a wheelchair out of the way with her in it
- Not contacting a physician when one is needed

Control/Restraint

- Withholding medications
- Controlling access to needed items on persons
- Controlling assistive services
- Using disability to demean, discredit, or dismiss
- Refusing access to social support
- Refusing to communicate using assistive devices

Types of Disabled Women's Responses to Intimate Partner Abuse

Bad Self

- Trying to be good
- Internalizing blame for the abuse
- Doubting herself

Stuck

- Feeling that she cannot leave the relationship
- Feeling dependent on her abuser
- Not knowing where to go or what to do

Movement

- Confronting the abuser
- Threatening to leave if the abuse continues
- Separating from or divorcing the abuser
- Finding role models
- Spending time with positive people
- Sharing stories with other abused women
- Developing a support system
- Connecting with service providers
- Volunteering to help other abused women

SOURCE: Stephen French Gilson, Elizabeth P. Cramer, and Elizabeth DePoy. 2001. Redefining Abuse of Women with Disabilities. *Affilia* 16:228.

are physical and emotional assault, neglect, and control/restraint, acted out in manners unique to disabled women's vulnerabilities. The women's responses include self-blame (bad self), feeling stuck, moving to confront and/or leave the abuser, and working with other abused women (ibid.).

Elman's (1997, 257) research on disability pornography, the pornography made of disabled girls and women, reports that these media both sexualize and ridicule women and girls whose health and relative immobility make them especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. Although some of these portrayals, such as in *Playboy*, claim to liberate women with disabilities from the stigma of sexual unattractiveness, Elman (ibid., 258) claims that pornography has never promoted sexual liberation for any women, and for disabled women and girls, their disabilities are used to sexualize their passivity and immobility, fetishizing their disabilities. Indeed, one adolescent humor magazine, *Slam*, told how to rape mentally retarded girls and advised that "[the boy readers] will probably get away with it" (ibid., 259). Elman compares the pornography of disabled women and girls to that of African American women, where the woman is portrayed as a sexual object who delights in her brutal subordination (ibid., 262). Finally, Elman (ibid., 265) describes how the sadomasochistic representations of disabled women and girls include tying women to wheelchairs and showing where orthopedic bandages replace the leather and rope in sadomasochistic pornography.