

Sexual Assault against Women of Color

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This paper approaches the issue of sexual assault against women of color from an intersectional perspective. By analyzing the current body of research on the subject, I argue that women of color's experience of sexual assault are fundamentally different from that of white women for multiple reasons. While the available research does explain certain aspects of women of color's experiences, additional research is necessary in order to improve our understanding of and the care we provide for women of color who have been sexually assaulted. Because women of color have been subjugated to a long history of racism and socioeconomic forces, such as poverty and lack of services, in the United States, better, more refined techniques are needed that can address their multi-faceted and complicated experiences. This paper also outlines what contemporary groups are doing to raise awareness about sexual assault against women of color, how these techniques can be achieved and what they would look like in practical and professional applications.

Keywords: Sexual assault, women of color, Intersectionality

Why Study Sexual Assault against Women of Color?

Sexual assault against women of color is an attack on their identities as women and on their racial identities. Research indicates that women of color are often at elevated risks for sexual assault and that their experience of sexual assault is usually made more difficult by factors such as race, socioeconomic status and location. This paper will argue that women of color face multiple risks and barriers that intersect to make their victimization experience fundamentally different from the victimization of white women. These risks and barriers include battling a long history characterized by racial violence in the United States, stereotypes and racism that mark victims as responsible for their rapes or "unrapable", poverty, distrust of and alienation from public services, and the lack of availability of resources, such as rape crisis centers and health care.

What We Know: Living at the Intersection

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault involves a broad range of aggressive behaviors including: sex without consent, rape, sexual control of reproductive rights, and all forms of sexual manipulation (Abraham 1999). The perpetrator carries out these acts with the intention or perceived intention to cause emotional, sexual, and/or physical degradation to the victim (Abraham 1999). Forced kissing, forced breast and genital fondling, and attempted rape are also components of sexual assault (West and Rose 2002). Although these definitions may challenge traditional conceptions of sexual assault, especially the aspect of control over reproductive rights, I believe that West's (2002) definition of sexual assault allows us, researchers, professionals, and service providers to understand and grasp the broad range of crimes with which women of color can be victimized. To make control of reproductive rights more clear, regarding how it has affected women of color, here are a few examples:

1. *In the Antebellum South, Black women were subjected to forced breeding and rape. When federal laws prohibited the importation of Africans, Black women were required to reproduce children for the depleted slave work force. These acts were committed by slave owners and enslaved men (Donovan and Williams 2002: 96).*

2. *Victimized women of color often perceive less control over their sexuality. Stripped of the authority to make safe sexual decisions, victims of sexual assault and intimate partner violence are less likely to use condoms and more likely to be victimized as a result of requesting condom use (Wingwood and DiClemente 1997).*

However, the National Center for Victims of Crime defines sexual assault quite differently. According to the NCVC:

Sexual assault takes many forms, including attacks such as rape or attempted rape, as well as any unwanted sexual contact or threats. Usually sexual assault occurs when someone touches any part of another person's body in a sexual way, even through clothes, without that person's consent. Some types of sexual acts which fall under the category of sexual assault include forced sexual intercourse (rape), sodomy (oral or anal sexual acts), child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape (NCVC.org).

For my purposes, I have chosen to use the definition proposed by Abraham (1999). I do not feel that the NCVC's definition fully encompasses the range of actions that can constitute sexual assault. The NCVC's definition is problematic because it fails to acknowledge the historical and racial contexts of sexual assault, which severely limits our understanding and application for women of color. For instance, a woman of color who has been the victim of control over her reproductive rights would not be considered a victim of sexual assault. This is a grave oversight.

Statistics

The National Center for Victims of Crime reports that in 2005, 92% of rape or sexual assault victims were female (NCVC.org). An average of 207,754 is estimated to have occurred against victims twelve years old or older (RAINN.org). 44% of sexual assault victims are under age 18 and 80% are under age 30 (RAINN.org). Devdas and Rubin's (2007) number is from the National Violence against Women Survey where over 300,000 women reported having been raped in a 12-month period (701). The NCVC names sexual assault as one of the most underreported crimes with under 39% of rapes and sexual assaults ever reported to law enforcement (NCVC.org). RAINN approximates that 60% of sexual assaults are never reported to the police (RAINN.org) Of these approximately 200,000-300,000 rapes, 7.2 Native American women are sexually assaulted per 1,000 women, African American women 4 per 1,000, white women 3 per 1,000, Latina women 2 per 1,000, and Asian American women 1 per 1,000 (Bubar 2010 :55). These numbers could actually be higher considering that the NCVC is not operating on Abraham's (1997) definition of sexual assault and its trend of being underreported. Bubar's (2010) estimates of unreported rapes are taken from the work of Rennison (2002); 63% of completed rapes, 65% of attempted rapes, and 74% of completed and attempted sexual assaults against females in general were not reported to the police (56). Although stranger rape does and can occur, women are more likely to be raped by acquaintances, boyfriends, and husbands (Bachar and Koss 2001). The NCVC confirms this data: 73% of female sexual assault victims were assaulted by someone they knew while 26% were assaulted by a stranger (NCVC. org).

Specifically, Native American women in the United States have the highest incidence of sexual assault and Alaskan Native women may have the highest incidence of sexual assault of any women in the United States (Bubar 2010 :55). Bubar (2010) uses the work of Greenfield and Smith (1999) to report that 1 in 3 Native American women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime and 9 out of 10 Native American women who are raped were raped by white or African American men. Hence, Native American women are more likely than any other ethnic group to experience violence by someone from another ethnic group (Bubar 2010: 56).

In a national study, 7% of the Black women sampled identified themselves as rape survivors (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Almost 1/3 of a surveyed sample of Black women living in Los Angeles had been victims of childhood sexual abuse and in samples of low-income Black women living in Baltimore and San Francisco, 14% revealed their histories of childhood sexual abuse (Wingwood and DiClemente 1997). West's research argues that Black female victims of sexual assault are, on average, eight years old when they experience their first incidence of sexual abuse (2002: 28). Certain demographic factors leave Black girls and young women more vulnerable to sexual abuse including poverty and marital patterns that are present in the African American community; a substantial number of Black girls and young women are exposed to sexually abusive stepfathers or boyfriends of their mothers

(Abney and Priest 1995). Citing the research of Wyatt, Notgrass, and Gordon (1995), West (2002), this states that many Black survivors of childhood sexual abuse will be re-victimized sexually in adulthood (8).

Unfortunately, specific statistics relating to sexual assault among Asian and Hispanic populations were quite scarce. Sorenson and Siegel's research was consistent with national crime statistics; rates of rape were lower for Hispanic individuals (1992: 96). Compared to white women, of whom 19.9% reported sexual victimization, 8.1% of Hispanic women report sexual victimization (Sorenson and Siegel 1992: 96). This does not mean that Asian and Hispanic women are not victims of sexual assault or that they are not being sexually assaulted.

It should also be noted there are other important implications for all of these data. Sexual assault is arguably the most underreported crime but the majority of victims of sexual assault know the identity of their attackers. Therefore, if the prevalence of not reporting sexual assault to the police is not a matter of not being able to identify the perpetrator, there must be alternate factors influencing women's decisions and intentions to report a rape. This phenomenon will be discussed as it relates to women of color in later sections of this paper. It is also emotionally difficult and traumatic to report a rape and this too influences the statistics available. Consequently, to garner true and representative statistics, we must strive to understand the complexities of sexual assault to make the process of reporting sexual assault safer, culturally conscious, and comfortable for women and women of color.

History

Smith warns that women of color live in the dangerous intersections of gender and race and that community of color often advocates that women keep silent about sexual and domestic violence "in order to maintain a united front against racism" (2005: 1). According to Smith, "Gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism" (2005: 1). Smith proposes that we cannot limit our conception of sexual violence to individual acts of rape; rather, sexual violence encompasses a wide range of strategies designed not only to destroy people but to destroy their sense of being a people (2005: 3). Sexual violence can be viewed as a tool by which certain peoples become marked as inherently "rapable" (Smith 2005: 3). "Rapable" refers to the extent to which a person's rape "counts" or is considered a legitimate act of sexual violation (Smith 2005). A race or ethnicity of people is then violated through direct or sexual assault and a wide variety of state policies; from environmental racism to sterilization abuse (Smith 2005: 3).

Smith's (2005) work centers on explaining the plight of Native American women in terms of sexual assault. Smith (2005) contends that when a Native woman suffers abuse, the abuse is an attack on her identity as a woman and an attack on her identity as Native (7). In the colonial imagination, Native bodies are imminently polluted with sexual sin and theorists Albert Cave, Robert Warrior, and H.C. Porter, among others, have argued that

Christian colonizers often likened Native peoples to the biblical Canaanites - worthy of mass destruction (Smith 2005 :10). Marked by their sexual perversity, Indian bodies are "dirty" and therefore considered sexually violable and "rapable"; the rape of impure and dirty bodies "simply does not count" (Smith 2005:10). Smith writes that "the extent to which Native peoples are not seen as 'real' people in the larger colonial discourse indicates the success of sexual violence...in destroying the perceived humanity of Native peoples" (2005 :12). Native Americans learn to internalize this hatred. As a rape crisis counselor, Smith was not surprised when Native American women who had survived sexual abuse often said that they no longer wished to be Indian (2005 :12-13).

Black women too have been historically viewed as "rapable". This phenomenon will be discussed at length in the section labeled "stereotypes" but it is worth mentioning here to exemplify Smith's (2005) argument. In the South during slavery, as previously mentioned, Black women were objectified and subjected to myriad indignities and atrocities, including sexual assault and forced breeding (Donovan and Williams 2002 :96). Slave owners used incentives to encourage reproduction, such as increased food rations and clothing allotments, but the majority of these women were raped against their wills; this is an example of what Abraham (1997) meant by sexual manipulation. (Donovan and Williams 2002:96). Using the work of Roberts (1997) and White (1985), Donovan and Williams (2002) argue that laws did not protect Black women and there were no legal consequences for sexually assaulting them. The belief that Black women cannot be raped continues to exist in the form of the Jezebel stereotype and its variations.

Smith points out that immigrant women have endured a long history of sexual exploitation in the United States, as well (2005:17). Racially discriminatory employment laws forced thousands of Chinese immigrant women into prostitution in order to supplement their incomes since they were not allowed to legally work (Smith 2005:17). Since their decisions to become prostitutes were compounded by legal and economic factors that prevented them from being able to sustain themselves by non-sexual means, I would view this forced prostitution and sexual manipulation as a mode of sexual assault.

Stereotypes

Racial history, rape myths, and racial stereotypes make women of color more vulnerable sexual assault while simultaneously making accusations of rape more difficult for them (Foley et al. 1995). Our culture's views affect how women of color are evaluated and how they respond to their trauma. These images serve to reinforce rape myths and mark victims of color as responsible for their assaults. Particular stereotypes develop a culture of silence around assault. Devdas and Rubin (2007) use Burt's (1980) definition of rape myths. Burt (1980) wrote that rape myths are prejudicial, stereotyped beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists. With Burt's (1980) work as reference, Devdas and Rubin (2007) explain that this is especially damaging to women of color because rape myths, such as "in the

majority of rapes, the victim was promiscuous or had a bad reputation", are accepted by a number of Americans (Devdas and Rubin 2007:701). By viewing rape as the result of inappropriate behaviors on the part of victims, women justify rape as a crime that only happens to women who "asked for" the violence to occur (Devdas and Rubin 2007:701). European American women are the least accepting of rape myths (Cahoon et al. 1995).

Black women must battle two different stereotypes, the Jezebel and the Matriarch, when attempting to disclose or confront their sexual assaults. These stereotypes reinforce rape myths. The Jezebel image is projected onto Black women to mark them as sexually promiscuous, lustful, and immoral or "unrapable" (Donovan and Williams 2002:97). Citing Collins (2000), Donovan and Williams show how the Jezebel was a "powerful rationalization for the sexual atrocities perpetrated against enslaved African women"; the image was necessary because it justified the rape and forced breeding of Black women (2002 :97-98). Donovan and Williams say that contemporary Jezebels can be found in the stereotypes of welfare queens, hoochies, freaks, and hoodrats and that the message has stayed the same even though the names have evolved :Black women are sexually available and sexually deviant (2002 :98). The Jezebel image portrays Black women as responsible for their sexual assaults, that they contributed to their victimization and that the perpetrator is less responsible for his or her actions (Donovan and Williams 2002:98). It is in this fashion that Black women get a "double dose" of rape myths -those that target all survivors regardless of race and those that claim Black women as deserving of sexual assault (Donovan and Williams 2002 :98).

The Matriarch image encourages silence around the issue of sexual assault. It comes from a 1960s government report that claimed that slavery had devastated Black families by reversing the roles for men and women (Moynihan 1965). The Black woman emerged as a super-strong, aggressive female who had "emasculated Black men by taking their leadership role in the family" and her unwillingness to conform to traditional female roles resulted in lower moral values and single parenthood (Collins 2000 and Moynihan 1965). While the persona of a strong Black woman who is sufficient, independent, and able to survive can be a source of pride for Black women, it can also inhibit a Black woman from seeking counseling or admitting her sexual victimization (Donovan and Williams 2002 :99-100). Black women face a double-bind here, too. Donovan and Williams write : "remaining silent may hinder their recovery, but disclosing their rapes makes them more susceptible to being blamed, questioned, and stereotyped at a time when they are most in need of empathy and intervention" (2002 :100).

Devdas and Rubin cite Jimenez and Abreu (2003) in their research, which indicated that Hispanic American women tended to accept rape myths more than European American women did (2007 :701-702). Hispanic Americans are also more likely than European Americans and African Americans to be negative in their views of victims of rape (Lefley et al. 1993). First-generation Mexican Americans are likely to have a high rate of rape

myth acceptance, blame victims for their rapes, and accept stereotypical beliefs about rape (Lira et al. 1999).

In their study of first- and second-generation South Asian American women, Devdas and Rubin found that first-generation South Asian women had higher rape myth acceptance than second-generation South Asian American women and European American women (2007:701). Although rape is a violent act, the violent aspect of the rape is not nearly as important as the sexual aspect to Asians in general (Lee et al. 2005). The fact that victims were no longer virgins or that they had brought shame to their families were worse than the violence (Lee et al. 2005). South Asian refers to women whose origins can be traced to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan (Abraham 2000). South Asian American women and European American women had similar rates of rape myth acceptance (Devdas & Rubin 2007: 704). First-generation South Asian American women are likely to have been socialized to believe that women are responsible for preventing sexual relations of both innocuous and violent natures (Srinivasan 2001). Of course, this presents serious problems because South Asian women may blame victims for their rapes, either for having put themselves in situations where rapes could occur or for having behaved in a fashion that indicated a willingness to engage in sex, and have difficulty not blaming themselves for their own rapes (Devdas and Rubin 2007: 704).

Barriers to Reconciliation

Women of color face an amalgamation of difficulties when it comes to reporting a rape to the authorities and receiving treatment for the resulting health problems that come as a result of sexual assault, including higher rates of use and abuse of drugs and alcohol, depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts, vaginal infections, decreased sexual desire, painful intercourse, and problems conceiving (Curtis-Boles and Jenkins-Monroe 2000; Davis 1997; Marcenko et al. 2000 and Campbell and Soeken 1999). These difficulties stem from the intersection of multiple variables such as poverty, location, marital status, the unavailability of crisis and support centers, and distrust of and alienation from public agencies. The aforementioned stereotypes and rape myth acceptance rates make these difficulties especially complicated for women of color. White women tend to indicate a greater likelihood of reporting a rape than minority women across all potential report recipients (Feldman-Summers and Ashworth 1981:65). Minority women are hesitant to report sexual victimization to the police because they do not think they will be believed (Brownmiller 1976; Comment 1968 and Wong 1975).

According to West, low-income Black women and Black women who receive public assistance are a population that is at an elevated risk for victimization and mental health problems (2002:15). Ending a violent relationship where sexual assault is a facet of the abuse does not necessarily improve the marginalized status of poor Black women; instead, leaving an abusive partner may leave a Black survivor of sexual assault even more impoverished if she does not have financial independence (West 2002 :17). Donovan and Williams write : "If an

African American man victimized the survivor, she may fear that her disclosure will reinforce the stereotype of Black men as sexual predators...she may also be fearful of turning another Black man over to an oppressive criminal justice system" (2002 :101). As Pierce-Baker (1998) revealed about her victimization: "I didn't want to confirm the white belief that all Black men rape...so I'd kept silent about what happened to me" (Donovan and Williams 2002:101).

Bubar argues that when rape and sexual assault are ignored and the response system is systemically underfunded and does not function properly to protect citizens, then the underfunded programs in the areas of law enforcement, criminal justice, and health and safety are "synchronized in their collective violation of human rights" (2010 :57). Bubar's (2010) work among Native American women demonstrates that this group of women is perhaps the most marginalized in the entire United States when it comes to reporting sexual assault. Because many Native Americans rely on the Indian Health Service system for their health care, their access to that health care, specialty, and prevention services is inadequate (Bubar 2010 :58). While there are approximately 1,7000 rape crisis centers in the 50 states, there are less than 5 rape crisis-type programs treating sexual assault victims located in any tribal community within the United States (Bubar 2010 :61-62). Bubar attributes poverty to a vulnerability factor for violence and it continues to plague Native American tribes, particularly women and children (2010:60). Native American women understand these health care and criminal justice system limitations and injustices, Bubar says, and some Native American women are reluctant to seek treatment for sexual assault because they are afraid of being diagnosed with a mental illness, which could result in further marginalization and stigma (2010:64). Bubar puts the situation of Native American women quite eloquently: "Rather than upholding gender justice, the system becomes a perpetrator and structurally facilitates the individual and collective rape of Native women in Native America" (2010:68).

While I would argue that these barriers have not been fully analyzed in Asian and Hispanic populations, there is some information about reporting patterns in these groups. Asian cultural expectations might cause Asian women to be more reluctant to discuss matters related to sex (Feldman-Summers and Ashworth 1981:66). In the research of Sorenson and Siegel, Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites did not differ in their reports of emotional and behavioral reactions to sexual assault; they were also equally likely to develop certain disorders like depression, alcohol abuse or dependence, drug abuse or dependence, phobia, panic, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (1992 :97-98). However, Hispanics in this study were less likely than non-Hispanic whites to use health services regardless of sexual assault experience, age, need, and insurance status (Golding et al. 1989). Despite that Mexican Americans born in the United States reported higher rates of sexual assault than Mexican Americans born in Mexico, Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites were about equally likely (9.6% for Hispanics, 10.8% for non-Hispanic Whites) to report the incident to police (Sorenson and Telles 1991). Feldman-Summers and Ashworth found that

the stronger a Hispanic woman's belief that close-family members would want her to report a rape, she was more likely to report (1981:65). Sorenson and Siegel (1992) attribute the low rates of sexual assault among Hispanic women to *machismo*. *Machismo*, although characterized by male dominance, includes values of nurturance and dedication to the family; these values could serve to protect members of the community from sexual aggression and cultural dating norms could serve to reduce a woman's exposure to situations where date-rape would occur (Sorenson and Siegel 1992: 99).

Contemporary Groups: Who's making a Difference?

INCITE!, as self-described on their Internet site, "is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and our communities through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing" (Incite-National.org). The main focus of INCITE! is targeting "violence against women of color", which includes violence *directed* at communities through police violence, war, and colonialism, and violence *within* communities in the form of rape and domestic violence (Incite-National.org). Working with groups of women of color and their communities, INCITE! develops political projects that address the multiple forms of violence women of color experience in their lives and "on [their] bodies" (Incite-National.org). The chapters and affiliates of INCITE! actively engage in strategies and projects that address personal and state violence; they also acknowledge how different forms of oppression intersect in the experiences of women of color. To date, INCITE! has produced a women of color radio show, organizes rallies on street harassment, trains women of color on self-defense, organizes mothers on welfare, builds and runs grassroots clinics, publishes a bi-weekly e-newsletter, and gives public talks. INCITE! also organizes conferences, gatherings, and events "designed to build critical connections, develop political thinking and ideas, and strengthen movement building efforts" (Incite-National.org).

The Women of Color Network (WOCN) has also made progress towards ending violence against women of color. WOCN names itself as "a national grassroots initiative responding to violence against women and families in communities of color" (WomenOfColorNetwork.org); WOCN is committed to promoting women of color leadership, facilitating dialogues, and mobilizing for social justice issues. The mission of WOCN includes domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, police brutality, and examines the global context of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and the multiple forms of oppression that intersect with violence against women of color (WomenOfColorNetwork.org). WOCN prides itself on providing women of color access to information that they may not have received otherwise, challenging the systems and institutions that create barriers for women of color and their communities, promoting the development of independent, women of color-led initiatives, examining local, state, federal, and tribal policies, and giving women

of color opportunities to organize and exercise their voices (WomenOfColorNetwork.org).

What We Don't Know: The Direction of Future Research

Unfortunately, the research on sexual assault against women of color is lacking in certain areas and it is necessary to garner information and data about these areas before we can claim having a complete understanding of these complex issues. Perhaps I did not find the sources, but through the course of my research, I identified three key areas that I believe warrant further investigation.

Hispanic and Asian Populations

I found a wealth of data on African American and Native American women. However, information pertaining to Hispanic and Asian populations was often scarce and not given a sufficient explanation. Since Hispanic Americans are more likely than European Americans and African Americans to be negative in their views of victims of rape (Devdas and Rubin 2007:701), the scarcity of available information on Hispanic populations could be because Hispanic victims of sexual assault are even less willing to disclose their assaults on the basis of cultural pressures and high rape myth acceptance rates. Similarly, South Asian women may blame victims for their rapes and have difficulty not blaming themselves for their own rapes; this presents serious problems because South Asian women may blame victims for their rapes because of rape myth acceptance (Devdas and Rubin 2007 :704). Although these reasons have not been fully studied, they warrant future investigation to gather better data on Asian and Hispanic populations.

Incomplete Analysis on the Function of Racism

The sources I used in this paper usually presented the issue of racism in the context of the individual and the institution. Nevertheless, while useful, I believe that this data is somewhat superficial because it does not address how racism and the race of the perpetrator affect a woman of color's decision to report her rape. For instance, we know that Black women may be reluctant to report their rapes if the perpetrator was a Black man because they do not want to perpetuate stereotypes about Black men being sexually aggressive and rapists (Donovan and Williams 2002 :101). But we need to investigate whether or not this phenomenon is present for women of other races and ethnicities. Better analysis and a targeted focus on this issue may acquire better statistics and a more complete understanding of racism and how it relates to sexual assault.

Rates of Abortion among Victims of Sexual Assault

There was almost no discussion whatsoever of the reproductive consequences that can affect victims of color of sexual assault. Pregnancy, especially within abusive relationships where sexual assault is occurring, can be difficult for women of color to avoid. Because victims of color may not have the authority to make safe sexual

decisions, victims of sexual assault and intimate partner violence are less likely to use condoms and more likely to be victimized if condom use is requested (Josephs and Abel 2009 :222). Citing Wyatt et al. (1995), West writes that Black women who have experienced multiple victimizations report higher rates of unintended pregnancies and abortions (2002:18). Of course, this is compromised by the fact that many women of color are battling poverty or have limited access to health care services and providers. The problem of pregnancy and sexual assault needs to be addressed for women of color.

Theoretical Perspectives: Black Feminist Theory and Intersectionality Theory

I would argue that West (2002) presents Black feminist theory in a light that can be applied to women of varying races who have been victims of sexual assault. Black feminist theory considers how living at the intersection of multiple oppressions shapes Black women's experiences; it uses a broad definition of violence, acknowledges diversity among Black women, explores the influence of historical events and oppressive images on victimization, and values Black women's activism and resistance (West 2002 :190). It is necessary to recognize the overlaps and the intersections of multiple forms of oppression because it can make it difficult for Black women to disclose their sexual assaults (West 2002:191). Black women are vulnerable to violence in all areas of their lives, such as intimate relationships, in their communities, and their workplaces (West 2002:191). Certain groups of Black women are especially vulnerable to victimization, including Black women who are HIV positive, in the criminal justice system, or lesbian (West 2002:191). The history of oppressive images like the Jezebel continues to influence Black survivor's self-perceptions and the responses they receive from service providers (West 2002:192).

Crenshaw's (1995) theory of intersectionality deals specifically with Black women and domestic violence but, if the information I have previously presented is reflected upon, it becomes evident that intersectionality theory can be applied to women of color in general. Intersectionality "denotes the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences" (Crenshaw 1995:358). Crenshaw (1995) poses several concepts that are components of intersectionality: a) structural intersectionality b) political intersectionality and c) intersectional subordination. Structural intersectionality refers to how the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes their experience of domestic violence, rape, and reform fundamentally different from that of white women (Crenshaw 1995:358). Consequently, intervention strategies based in the experiences of women who are of different class or race backgrounds will be "of limited help to women who face different obstacles because of their race and class" (Crenshaw 1995:358). Black women are repeatedly burdened by poverty, child care responsibilities, and lack of job opportunities (Crenshaw 1995:358). Political intersectionality describes how race and culture contribute

to the suppression of the recognition of domestic violence; patriarchal ideas about gender and power also prevent "the recognition of domestic violence as yet another compelling form of Black-on-Black crime" (Crenshaw 1995 :361). Intersectional subordination is commonly "the consequence of the imposition of one burden interacting with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment" (Crenshaw 1995:359).

Where We Should Go From Here: How to Encourage Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

Here, I will discuss strategies that can be employed by health care providers, therapists, and law enforcement personnel to help alleviate the oppression of women of color in the context of sexual assault and sexual violence. I am not suggesting that these strategies will significantly reduce the occurrence of sexual assault against women of color. Rather, it is my hope that these strategies can move service providers, therapists, and law enforcement personnel to consider and become more familiar with the complexities that living at the intersection of race and gender creates for women of color who have been sexually assaulted. This familiarity should prompt better care and treatment for victims of color. These strategies encompass the various components of both Black feminist theory and Crenshaw's (1995) theory of intersectionality.

Although West's (2002) plan of action relates to Black women specifically, it is my conviction that West's suggestions are applicable and relevant to other women of color. West (2002) advocates for a culturally sensitive approach that recognizes the multiple and broad dimensions of violence that women of color face in the course of their lives. Educating professionals, such as therapists, nurses, and police officers, is paramount and West advises the people in these sectors to expand their knowledge about violence against women of color in general (2002:192). Using the work of Young et al. (2001), West proposes that these services providers should also be able to conduct comprehensive assessments of the violence in the form of abuse histories (West 2002:192). In this sense, service providers need to acknowledge the "web of trauma" that numerous women of color experience, including violence at their homes, in their communities, and their workplaces (West 2002:192). To improve her plan of action, West includes parameters identified by Scurfield and Mackey (2001); historical violence (against the race as a group or against family members) and violence based on race, social class, and sexual orientation constitutes the "web of trauma", as well (West 2002: 192).

West argues that service providers should concentrate on drawing on the survivor's strengths while encouraging activism to promote healing and feelings of self-worth (2002:193). Service providers, activists, and survivors can develop collaborative relationships in order to create media campaigns or violence prevention programs; professionals can volunteer their expertise to assist these efforts (West 2002:193). West writes: "it is particularly helpful if activism takes place in a Black feminist environment in which participants are working to eliminate race, class, and gender oppression" (2002:193).

Service providers can strive to improve the social support networks of women of color, too. Educating friends, relatives, and community members about the risk factors and symptoms associated with victimization can facilitate the rebuilding of victims' lives (West 2002:193). West (2002) notes that both survivors and therapists can internalize oppressive images and stereotypes about women of color and West contends that these images can influence the survivor's self-perception and the therapist's response to the survivor (2002 :193). Therefore, it is imperative that these images and stereotypes can be recognized and addressed by service providers.

Finally, according to West, service providers can utilize literature, art, and music that reflects the experiences and challenges faced by women of color to promote healing (2002:193). Faith, religion, or spirituality can be viewed as a form of feminist activism or a source of comfort for violence survivors (West 2002: 193). It is the job of the service provider to not minimize the significance of faith, religion, or spirituality in the lives of victims (West 2002: 193).

On a similar note, Bent-Goodley (2009) advocates for a "Black experience-based approach" in regards to violence against women of color. Again, Bent-Goodley's (2009) suggestions are targeted to Black women specifically but it could be modified to include all women of color if the specifics of racial, historical, and social contexts were addressed. As historically and socially oppressed racial groups, women of color have endured marked similarities in their experience of sexual assault such as racism and sexism. Bent-Goodley's approach draws from a social work emphasis on Black experiences, Black values, Black perspectives, and Black methods of problem solving (2009:263). It consists of three major concepts: moaning, mourning, and morning (Bent-Goodley 2009:263). These concepts represent a linear progression from suffering, to collective healing and support, and toward an ideal state of health, happiness, and transformation (Bent-Goodley 2009:263).

Moaning refers to Black pain, suffering and grief, and social workers are encouraged to focus on the problem of separation and loss and its associated trauma (Martin and Martin 1995). Bent-Goodley (2009) argues that the survival of Black people has depended on their ability to mask their problems, and Martin and Martin (1995) identified three challenges that service providers face when attempting to assess their clients: 1) being able to see beyond the mask 2) developing a trusting, helping relationship and 3) the prevalence of assessment tools that do not consider cultural influences.

Bent-Goodley says of Martin and Martin's (1995) work that mourning "pertains to a collective effort to overcome grief [and] involves a collective process of identification, empathy, and catharsis" (2009:265). The mourning process covers problem-solving and healing in Black communities. Bent-Goodley proposes that part of diminishing the secrecy and shame associated with gender-based violence is helping the community understand vulnerability, racism, discrimination, and oppression (2009:265). Using the work of Gondolf and Williams (2001), Bent-Goodley writes that a result, color-blind

approaches counter "effectively meeting the needs of the individual and the community" (2009:265).

Bent-Goodley takes Martin and Martin's (1995) last stage morning to signal a breakthrough, meaning "the arrival of a brighter day, a new beginning, a transformation, or a change" (2009 :266). The goal of morning is to strengthen the capacity of Black people to face their problems and take action toward "collective, social, economic, and political empowerment that leads to social change" (Bent-Goodley 2009:266). Service providers should focus on helping the client strengthen her sense of identity and connection to the community; educating and organizing the community can further the objective of healing (Carlton-LaNey 2001 and Schiele 2002).

With these strategies, it is possible to promote healing, strength, and cultural awareness in the communities and individual lives of victims of color who have experience sexual assault. Inherent in these strategies is the imperative to organize and support activism that confronts the intersection of social, economic, racial, and gender oppression that women of color live in. Without recognizing the breadth of violence and how this violence interacts with the other forms of oppression for women of color, it will be impossible to make any significant progress towards easing their suffering.

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