Interpersonal Violence in the African-American Community

Evidence-Based Prevention and Treatment Practices

Issues in Children's and Families' Lives

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Preface
Interpersonal Violence and the African-American Family

This latest Hartman Scholars volume is devoted to examining the state of knowledge as it applies to violence within the African-American family. As in previous volumes undertaken in the Hartman scholars program, we selected an interdisciplinary group of scholars and practitioners from across the United States. The Hartman scholars program has been in existence for more than a decade. During that time, we have selected social issues of pressing concern and explored in a learning community format how these issues might be best addressed. The issue of interpersonal violence is not unique to the African-American family. What is unique is their experience with slavery, with persistent racism, and in their overrepresentation in the child welfare system and in the criminal justice system. The individuals chosen for this learning community operated shelters and taught. They were individuals whose scholarly interest were children, couples, grandparents, the church, or African-rooted spirituality.

Not surprisingly, our meetings during the past year were lively and those discussions added enormously to the chapters that are before you. This volume speaks both to what is known and what is not known. As the reader will soon discover, contrary to popular belief, ethnic and racial research is the exception rather than the norm. Evidence-based practice derived from that research is virtually nonexistent. To develop effective interventions to treat and, better yet, prevent family violence requires a more comprehensive grasp of the cultural complexity of families than currently exists.

This volume is a starting point in the creation of that knowledge base, with Bob Hampton and William Oliver, in the first Chapter, providing an overview of violence in the black family, identifying gaps in that knowledge, and offering an agenda to closing the breaks in that knowledge base. The next two Chapters blend treatment with prevention to

examine child abuse and couple abuse. After detailing the circumstances of African-American children in the child welfare system, Harden and Nzinga-Johnson suggest several efforts worthy of evaluation. In Chapter 3, Kaslow and her associates build on this effort, examining in detail the current state of evidence-based research and separating child abuse program evaluations into what works, what might work, and what does not work. From this review, specific recommendations are offered.

The next Chapter by Brian Jory provides a transition from child to couple-focused and extended-family issues. Jory examines the most commonly used family violence assessment instruments for appropriateness, the shortcomings of family violence treatment, and the potential value of intimate justice. In Chapter 5, Bent-Goodley addresses the sensitive issue that violence rarely occurs in a vacuum. Her chapter examines the role of the African-American church in addressing or not addressing family violence. This is followed by Rodger's discussion of her use of African-American nonreligious spirituality to achieve nonviolence; and in Chapter 7, Bullock shares with the reader the experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren. This volume concludes with Crusto and her associates examining the challenges of field research and offering suggestions on undertaking those efforts.

This volume serves as a base for practitioners, scholars, and students to develop evidence-based practices that originate within the African-American experience and encourage the healthy development of child, woman, and man.

ROBERT L. HAMPTON
THOMAS P. GULLOTTA

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Interpersonal Violence in the African-American Community

Evidence-Based Prevention and Treatment Practices

Violence in the Black Family: What We Know, Where Do We Go?

Robert L. Hampton and William Oliver

Introduction

Twenty years ago research on the relationships between domestic violence and culture was not acknowledged as being worthy of scholarly investigation. The prevailing beliefs supported race neutral approaches both for research and for practice and presented obstacles for those who wanted to examine the relationship between race, ethnicity, culture, and violence. It was not only difficult to obtain funding for research studies, but many peer reviewers for leading journals were not supportive of such research as well. Despite the growing literature on domestic violence, significant deficits remained in the research, theory, and practice for families and communities of color (Hampton & Yung, 1996).

Because many researchers and practitioners persisted in spite of the obstacles, a greater appreciation for interpersonal violence in communities of color, especially among African-American families, emerged in the late 1980s (Bell & Hill-Chance, 1991; Coley & Beckett, 1988; Hampton, 1987; Lockhart & White, 1989). One explanation for this was the realization that the disproportionate mortality and morbidity experienced in some communities of color was a direct consequence of violence. A primary contributor to the recognition perception of minority violence as a public health problem came from the Task Force on Black and Minority Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 1985). Included in this report were studies that examined the link between violence and health outcomes (Hampton, 1986).

In this chapter, we describe what we know about violence in African-American families and review the research that suggests where we should

be focusing our efforts in the not too distant future. Specifically, we address the following questions: (a) What do we know about violence in African-American families; (b) What are the prevailing conceptual frameworks that might help us understand violence in the African-American community; and (c) What are some of the promising work being done in the field?

What We Know About Violence in African-American Families?

The term domestic violence has had many meanings over the last 20 years. It is commonly associated with wife beating or spousal violence. In addition, it has been used to refer to a broad range of acts of interpersonal violence involving victims and offenders who are in some way related to one another. For example, domestic violence may refer to child abuse, sibling violence, intimate partner abuse, or even elder abuse (Gelles, 1997). Given that the primary focus of this chapter is on violence between men and women who are involved in an intimate romantic relationship, we have chosen to use the term "intimate partner violence" to characterize the specific relational context for the discussion that follows. The term intimate partner violence is generally used to refer to acts of violence that occur between current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends. Moreover, it tends to include violence between persons who have a current or former marital, dating, or cohabiting relationship (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

African Americans are disproportionately represented among victims of intimate partner violence. One of the earliest sources of national data on the prevalence and incidence of intimate partner violence among African Americans are the two national family violence surveys conducted by Murray Straus and his colleagues. In both the First and Second National Family Violence Surveys, Straus and his colleagues reported that African-American males had higher rates of overall and severe violence toward their wives than did white husbands (Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus et al., 1980). For example, in the second survey, African-American families self-reported higher rates of husband-to-wife violence (207 per 1000) than did white families (115 per 1000). This survey indicated that African-American marriages were at significantly greater risk for violence, with rates of severe assault 2.4 times than that of their white counterparts (Hampton & Gelles, 1994).

More recent studies report that African Americans experience higher rates of intimate partner violence compared to whites. For example, estimates from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicate that both African-American men and women were victimized by intimate partners at significantly higher rates than persons of any other race between 1993 and 1998 (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). African-American women experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of

white women, and about 2.5 times that of women of other races. The National Violence Against Women Survey, a study based on "personal safety," found that African-American ethnicity was a significant factor in lifetime experience of interpersonal violence (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). A study of over 3000 women seen at emergency departments found that race (African-American) was among seven independent risk factors for a reported lifetime history of physical or emotional abuse (Dearwater et al., 1998).

African-American women in particular appear to be at disproportionate risk for experiencing intimate partner violence, especially black women, women aged 16 to 24, women with children under the age of 12, and women living in lower-income households. Thus, women who are more vulnerable to domestic violence tend to have less social, legal, and economic power (Robinson & Chandek, 2000a, 2000b).

Among male victims of intimate partner violence, African-American men experienced intimate partner violence at a rate about 62% higher than did white men and 2.5 times the rate of men of other races (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). For some, this raises questions about the extent to which there is abuse by both partners toward each other. When there is abuse by both partners toward each other, such incidents are known as reciprocal, mutual, or bidirectional abuse. Using data from the Army Central Registry of substantiated cases of interpersonal violence from 1998 to 2002, McCarroll et al. (2004) reported that African Americans and whites had about the same percentage of victims in nonmutual abuse cases and that there was a statistically significant difference in mutual abuse cases. There were 11% more African Americans (49%) than whites (38%) in mutual abuse cases. They felt that these data suggest that there may be some different dynamics operating in African-American households that should be examined further in order to develop appropriate intervention strategies. National data that describes the prevalence of intimate partner violence suggest that intimate violence tends to manifest a more reciprocal pattern among African Americans. This pattern of reciprocity is most evident in research that describes domestic disputes that culminate in domestic homicide (Goetting, 1991; Mann, 1996). A survey of murder cases disposed in the courts of eight large urban counties found that among African-American marital partners, wives were just as likely to kill their husbands as husbands were to kill their wives. For example, in cases of domestic homicide among African Americans, 47% of the victims were husbands and 53% of the victims were wives. In contrast, among white victims murdered by a spouse, 38% of the victims were husbands and 62% of the victims were wives (Dawson & Langan, 1994). Racial differences in the occurrence of domestic homicide may be partially related to the findings which indicate that African-American women are more likely to experience severe acts of husband-to-wife violence than are white women (Hampton & Gelles, 1994). Thus, the higher rates of severe, but nonfatal, acts of intimate partner

violence committed against African-American women may account for their greater representation among women who commit acts of victim-precipitated homicide (Goetting, 1991; Wolfgang, 1958).

Although several studies suggest that intimate partner violence may be more prevalent among African Americans than among whites, there is other data that suggest that social and economic factors probably account for much, if not all, of this apparent racial difference. Using data gathered through a purposive sample in a major southeastern metropolitan area, Lockhart (1991) argues that her data support the claim that African-American couples are not inherently more violent. Higher levels of violence, when they do exist, may be due in part to the particular social predicament of African Americans in American society.

In their analysis of data from the NCVS, Rennison and Planty (2003) found that when income, gender, and race are examined collectively, intimate partner violence rates differentiate along annual household income and gender, but not victim's race among black and white individuals. They argue that their analysis supports an economic rather than a racial explanation for victimization. Income inequities may be one factor explaining differences in rates of violence; however, controlling for income alone does not exclusively account for the racial disparity (Hampton & Gelles, 1994). In addition to income, there are several factors that constitute the structural context that contribute to the disproportionate rates of intimate partner violence among African Americans (Hampton et al., 2003). Rennison and Planty (2003) asked "is it the strain directly related to monetary resources available to the individuals or could a concentration of factors (e.g. poverty, drug use, unemployment, single parent family structures, aggressive policing) found in the communities where these individual lives produce the social context that increase the likely use and acceptance of violence as a means for settle disputes" (p. 441).

Carolyn West cautions us not to conclude that blacks are biologically or culturally more prone to violence than other ethnic groups (West, 2004). The elevated risk for violence is a consequence of being socially and economically disadvantaged. One explanation offered for the interrelationship among race, social inequities, and intimate partner violence is that some of the explanation of the risk of violence to women lies in larger social processes that lead some men and women into social settings that foster early school leaving, early family formation, and work histories that entail numerous spells of unemployment (Fox et al., 2002).

Social and Structural Dynamics That Promote Intimate Partner Violence

Theories of domestic violence have tended to be crafted in a manner that ignores how racial or ethnic factors contribute to domestic violence. Consequently, theories specifically constructed to explain the etiology of

domestic violence in the African-American community are rare. In early theoretical works on the subject both Hampton (1980) and Staples (1982) argued that the institutional arrangements characteristic of American society contribute to intimate relationship conflict and domestic violence as a result of the manner in which African-American men have been deliberately denied equal access to educational and employment opportunities. That is, among scholars who have sought to explain domestic violence in the African-American community, many have suggested that the acts of violence African-American men commit against their wives and girlfriends do not occur in a social vacuum or are not merely acts of patriarchal domination and coercion. Rather, acts of intimate partner violence in the African-American community are very much influenced by the confluence of factors that have contributed to the subordinated status of African Americans in the larger society. The ritual expression of domestic violence among African Americans cannot be fully understood without consideration of the structural pressures associated with the legacy of being black in America (Hampton, 1980; Hampton et al., 2003; Staples, 1982; Williams, 1998). There are three distinct contexts in which intimate partner violence should be considered: structural, cultural–community, and situational (Hampton et al., 2003). What is significant about these contextual categories is that they reflect a macro–micro reductionism relative to the factors that influence situations and motivations in which black men batter their intimate partner.

Structural Context

The term structural context is used here to refer to macrolevel structural arrangements and social conditions that have a direct effect on one's access to educational and employment opportunities and the pursuit of legitimate societal goals. The most important structural factor contributing to acts of violence perpetrated by African-American males is chronic frustration associated with their intergenerational exposure to racial and gender oppression (Madhubuti, 1990; White & Cone, 1998). A major feature of the experience of African-American men has involved coping with the challenges associated with institutional arrangements that have been designed to hinder their capacity to achieve political and economic equality with white men (White & Cone, 1998). The poor economic situation of African-American men has been adversely affected by race neutral transformations in the American economy that have led to widespread worker dislocation, particularly for those men who have traditionally sought employment in low-skill, high-wage, heavy industrial manufacturing industries, such as auto manufacturing (Wilson, 1996).

Chronic unemployment and underemployment among African-American men are having a negative effect on African-American women and children. For example, in 1998 nearly one in four (24%) African-American families had incomes below the official poverty level (U.S.

Census Bureau, 1999). One of the significant consequences of chronic unemployment and underemployment is that men who are afflicted by these social conditions are less likely to marry the mothers of their children (Wilson, 1996). In 1996 nearly half of all African-American families (47%) were headed by a single woman compared to 14% of white families (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999).

The Cultural–Community Context

As a result of a combination of structural and community level factors many of the social supports that had constituted buffers against social oppression for generations of African Americans have eroded (Wilson, 1996). Consequently, within the social context of the local communities in which they reside in relative isolation from the conventional opportunity structure, many marginalized and nonmarginalized African-American males adopt and routinely construct alternative definitions of manhood. African-American men like some white men have been socialized to believe that to be a man is to be innately superior to women and that within the context of male–female relationships, men are supposed to dominate their wives and girlfriends (Hannerz, 1969; Liebow, 1967; Staples, 1982). However, African-American men have historically lacked the resources to institutionalize the subordination of women in the same manner as has been achieved by white men (Madhubuti 1990; White & Cone, 1998). Black men's dependence on the economic resources of working wives and girlfriends (Billingsley, 1992; Hill, 1999) has been characterized by Franklin (1984) as African-American manhood as a form of "subordinated masculinity."

This social construction of male identity has led to some African-American men to redefine manhood in a manner that is achievable within the realities of their unique social world. It has been suggested that such men generally adopt various manhood roles (e.g. the tough-guy/gangsta, the hustler, the player) as a means of compensating for their inability to achieve more acceptable manhood roles (e.g., the provider, the protector, the self-made man, etc.) (Anderson, 1999; Oliver, 2003). While these street-oriented masculine roles are adopted by many marginalized black men to compensate for their perceived shortcomings as sons, husbands, fathers, etc., in practice the behaviors associated with these roles are often dysfunctional compensatory adaptations because they compound existing social and psychological problems (Oliver, 2000). It is within this structurally induced cultural and community context that lower and working-class African-American women are at increased risk for becoming victims of intimate partner violence (Campbell et al., 2003). It is our view that African-American men who are frustrated by virtue of their exposure to historical and contemporary patterns of racial and gender oppression and who in response to such oppression adopt manhood roles that condone resorting to violence as a means of resolving disputes are at increased risk of

committing acts of intimate partner violence (Hampton et al., 2003). African-American women who reside in violent communities tend to be socially isolated as a result of their impoverishment and the social stigma associated with being black and poor (Stack, 1974). Consequently, these women tend to have limited access to adequate informal and formal sources of support and help when they experience intimate partner violence (Richie, 1994; Websdale, 2001; West, 1999; Williams, 1999).

The Situational Context

Very little is known about the situational context in which acts of intimate partner violence occur in the African-American community. The situational context in which intimate partner violence occurs among African Americans is, in many ways, a product of the convergence of various structural forces (e.g., institutional racism, cycles of chronic under employment and unemployment, poverty, etc.) that constrict the lives of African Americans. While these adverse social conditions are an omnipresent feature of everyday life for many low-income and working-class African Americans, they are aggravated by the presence of African-American men who cope with their frustrations by defining manhood in terms of toughness, sexual conquest, and manipulation (Madhubuti, 1990; Wilson, 1996). Consequently, the frustrated masculinity of many African-American men along with their exposure to a cultural code that condones the sue of violence as a means of resolving conflicts with men and women (Anderson, 1999; Oliver, 1998) is a major factor contributing to disproportionate rates of interpersonal violence in the African-American community.

Economic dependence on one's wife or girlfriend is said to conflict with a man's perception of himself as the support, protector, and leader in the household (Ucko, 1994). Some men are motivated to commit acts of violence as a means of exerting control over an economically independent wife or girlfriend. In his discussion of why black men are angry, psychologist Ernest Johnson (1998, p. 11), who has provided counseling for many African-American men, has observed: "Because for most black men the definition of manhood includes their ability to hold a job, provide for themselves and a family, and successfully interact with the system. Most men will perceive a man who is not doing these things as failing his first test of manhood. These unsuccessful men may even hate themselves and others because of their circumstances and failures."

Alcohol and illegal drug abuse are often involved in encounters culminating in intimate partner violence. Kantor and Straus (1990) found that husbands' heavy drinking was associated with intimate partner violence among African Americans. Illegal drug use has become a significant risk factor in the occurrence of intimate partner violence among African-American women (Richie, 1994). In a survey of State prison inmates who had experienced abuse in the past, nearly 76% of abused men and 68%

of abused women reported that they had used illegal drugs (Harlow, 1999). African-American women who are involved in illegal drug use are at increased risk for experiencing intimate partner violence (Maher, 1997; Richie, 1994; Sterk, 1999). Women who are active drug users are often isolated from informal and formal sources of social support (Maher, 1997).

We also cannot ignore the disproportionate number of African-American males who have been involved with the criminal justice system, including many who have been in correctional facilities and who have returned to their partners and to their communities. Many of these men have had their views about the use of violence against women reinforced in these settings (Oliver & Hairston, in press; Tripp, 2003).

What We Would Like to Know and What We Still Need to Learn?

Although there has been an increase in the amount of research focusing specifically on violence in families of color, there is still much work to be done. We know that there is a body of evidence that suggests there is an overrepresentation of African Americans as survivors and perpetrators of intimate partner violence and that various structural constraints and the collateral consequences emanating from these constraints may be a major factor. Because of the gaps that exist in our knowledge, however, there is much more that we would like to know and still need to learn if we are to significantly reduce the occurrence of intimate partner violence in the African-American community. For example, there are limited research findings that examine and describe the influence of ethnic and cultural background of survivors and perpetrators of violence and the subsequent influence on violence and traumatic outcomes (Humphreys et al., 2005). Similarly, when mandatory arrest policies were conceived there was no consideration of the potential unintended consequence of disproportionately incarcerating more perpetrator survivors in communities of color than in white communities (Bent-Goodley, 2005).

In recent years a number of domestic violence researchers and service providers have advocated for the need for racially homogeneous support groups for black victims and batterers (Williams, 1998, 1994). However, there are very few studies that have undertaken efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of racially homogeneous batterers interventions designed to serve African-American men who batter. Furthermore, very little is known about the various ways in which the family and friends of battered black women extend care and aid to victims of intimate partner violence. Nor do we know very much about the circumstances in which African-American women make decisions to disengage from abusive relationships (Taylor, 2002). The research on domestic violence in the African-American community consistently reports that cultural expectations often complicate how domestic violence is defined, as well as decisions to report abuse to the

police or to leave the relationship (Asbury, 1987; Few & Bell-Scott, 2002). Additionally, there is a need for research that explores the similarities and differences in the occurrence of intimate partner violence among lower, working, and middle-class African Americans. Finally, there is a need to explore the relationship between the high rates of community or street violence and intimate partner violence in the African-American community.

Nearly five million African Americans reside in rural America, yet there is nearly a complete lack of research that seeks to explain the social context and interpersonal dynamics of domestic violence among rural blacks (Williams, 2000). In addition, there is a need for prevention and intervention strategies that recognize the social and cultural realities of the rural black woman's experience.

The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community (IDVAAC) Research Agenda

Since its inception in the mid-1990s the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community (IDVAAC; www.dvinstitute.org) has played an important role in fostering a dialogue amongst researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Several important initiatives have emerged from the institute which has a bearing on expanding what we would like to know about violence. These initiatives by IDVAAC and others are attempts to bridge the gap between what we know and what we need to know about violence in the African-American community.

Community Assessments

The family violence literature contains little information on how African Americans view domestic violence. Previous research focusing primarily on incidence and prevalence rates, program utilization, treatment complete rates, recidivism, and consumer needs tell the study of clinical outcomes, but do little to address the perceptions and cultural needs of African Americans experiencing violence (Williams & Tubbs, 2002). The absence of research on African Americans' perception of violence in their communities and its affects on their lives represents an important gap in our knowledge that has implications on multiple levels.

In 1998 IDVAAC launched a national effort to learn more about community perceptions of violence. The initial study, funded in part by the Office of Violence Against Women, focused on community perceptions of domestic violence of African Americans living in the San Francisco/Oakland, California, area. Since then, IDVAAC has conducted similar assessments in eight additional cities: Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; Seattle, Washington; Birmingham, Alabama; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Detroit, Michigan; Memphis, Tennessee; and Greenville, North Carolina.

The participants in each of the community assessments has included African-American community members representing a diverse group of stakeholders (e.g., criminal justice officials, child and youth service workers, domestic violence service providers, the faith community and representatives from the gay, lesbian and transgender community) who were involved in occupational activities that offer an insider's perspective about the impact of domestic violence in the African-American community. Two reports have been completed to date (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Williams & Tubbs, 2002).

IDVAAC'S community assessment research has examined issues ranging from community members' perceptions of causes and consequences for domestic violence to their perceptions of what should be done to reduce (prevent) violence in their communities. In these reports, researchers find the beginnings of questions warranting additional study, using either basic or applied research. For policymakers and researchers these reports reenforce the unquestionable need for their presence in the restorative process and the necessity for all stakeholders' input in the development of solutions with African-American community members.

Prisoner Reentry and Intimate Partner Violence

According to data released by U.S. Department of Justice, in 2004, 61% of prison and jail inmates were racial and ethnic minorities (Harrison & Beck, 2005). An estimated 12.6% of all black men in their late 20s were in jails or prisons, compared to 3.6% of Hispanic men and 1.7% of white men in this age category. The disproportionately high rate of imprisonment among African-American men is one of the most significant challenges confronting African-American families and communities in contemporary America (Harris & Miller, 2003). However, little is known about the intersection of prison reentry and intimate partner violence and some scholars regard this as one of the missing links in both areas of research (Oliver & Hairston, in press). Given the disproportionate rate of imprisonment and postincarceration community reentry, clearly there are implications for families—including intimate partner violence. There is research which reports that incarcerated and paroled men experience significant levels of conflict with their intimate female partners during and following their incarceration (Tripp, 2003). However, this research does not examine the situational context and the interpersonal dynamics associated with acts of intimate partner violence involving returning prisoners or how returning prisoners and their partners attribute meaning to acts of intimate partner violence that occur during reentry (Oliver & Hairston, in press). Fortunately, there is research under way that is examining the intersection of prisoner reentry and intimate partner violence among African-Americans (Oliver & Hairston, in press; Oliver et al., 2004). Consequently, comprehensive prisoner reentry planning must include a programming

focus on intimate partner violence that is equal to the current emphasis on substance abuse, employment, mental illness, and housing, in addressing the public health and community safety implications associated with prisoner reentry.

Popular Culture

Popular culture is an omnipresent, pervasive, and influential factor in the lives of African Americans (Boyd, 1997). Indeed, there is an ongoing debate about the role of black popular culture and its relationship to a variety of forms of interpersonal violence (e.g., gang violence, robbery, and dating violence) in the African-American community (Dyson, 1996; Kitwana, 2002). Although there has been considerable discussion about the various ways in which hip-hop culture glorifies overt displays of manhood and promotes misogyny, denigrates the image of African-American females, and possibly condones acts of intimate partner violence, (Kitwana, 2002; Morgan, 1999; Plough, 2004; Powell, 2003), insufficient research has been conducted to determine if there is an empirical association between exposure to and identification with hip-hop culture and intimate partner violence.

Carolyn West (2002) has argued that some of the images portrayed in hip-hop videos and the lyrical content of some hip-hop artists reenforce historically crafted images of black women. Some of these oppressive images, subtle or overt, contribute to the acceptance of beliefs (e.g., black women are promiscuous and immoral Jezebels, black women are aggressive, black women do not carry themselves in a respectful manner, etc.) used to normalize violence against black women. Furthermore, the broad dissemination of these stereotypes may lead criminal justice officials and domestic violence service providers to believe that black women are less credible victims of domestic violence (George & Martinez, 2002) and that violence directed toward them is justified (Gillum, 2002). West suggests that while these stereotypes are unpleasant and often minimized, researchers should explore how they influence personal and institutional responses to black women who are victims of domestic violence (West, 2004).

In contrast, to the point of view that black popular culture contributes to attitudes and beliefs that can support violence against women, there are those who believe that aspects of black popular culture can be effectively used to enhance awareness of intimate partner violence among African Americans and to facilitate secondary and tertiary treatment of domestic violence victims and batterers (Oliver, 2000). According to Oliver (2000), black gospel musical plays and black popular music has the potential to raise community awareness about domestic violence and to facilitate the prevention of domestic violence through their use as forms of "edutainment."

An innovative example of the use of popular culture to raise aware-ness about domestic violence in the African-American community is the "It's Your Business" program. This program is a radio-based, educational campaign that was designed by the Family Violence Prevention Fund to promote nonviolence in intimate relationships among African Americans (Mitchell-Clark, 1999). The campaign was designed to be culturally rel-evant by incorporating twelve 90-second segmented public service an-nouncements in the form of radio talk show/soap-opera format. The cultural relevance of the "Its Your Business" program is the inclusion of characters, settings, and situations that reflect the "true to life" or ordi-nary realities and experiences of African Americans. The primary goal of this intervention is to change how the African-American community defines and responds to partner violence. This intervention should be evaluated so that we have a clear sense of its effectiveness and util-ity as a culturally specific approach to addressing African-American domestic violence.

Conclusions

Current and future researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and oth-ers are certainly aware of the progress that we have made over the past 20 years in bridging the gap in our knowledge regarding intimate partner violence in the African-American community. To advance the field we must continue to think critically and creatively about our conceptual, frames of references, methodology, and our intervention/prevention strategies. In addition, we must be willing to use evidence, conceptual or empirical, to inform our practice. We must do so within the context created by the diversity within American society and within the African-American com-munity. We must be willing to bridge the cultural waters and respond to issues with both cultural sensitivity and to the extent possible and willing to use evidence-based, conceptually sound approaches.

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