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Ideologies of Control: Understanding the Discourse of Intimate Partner Violence in Memphis

Abstract: Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a major social and public health issue that affects millions of people in the United States, particularly in the city of Memphis, which possesses some of the highest rates of IPV in the country. Though women of color, poor women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately impacted by intimate partner violence, the dominant model of intervention services operates on a guise of colorblindness while primarily catering to the needs of white, heterosexual, cis, middle class feminine victims. Using an intersectional feminist lens, I problematize this current model and employ a historical review of the political advocacy of the Women's Shelter Movement to investigate how white, middle class women became the model victims of intimate partner violence. I argue that intimate partner violence continues to be a major issue in the city of Memphis, over thirty years since the Women's Shelter Movement, because of the way in which Women's Shelter advocates developed an incomplete discourse of understanding intimate partner violence and the way in which advocates across the country and specifically in Memphis appealed to Southern ideologies that dictate who is a victim and who is not.

Intimate partner violence is a major social and public health problem that affects millions of people worldwide. This review employs the term intimate partner violence (IPV) to refer to the use of sexually, emotionally, financially, psychologically, and physically coercive acts against an intimate partner rather than domestic violence, not to reject the guiding lens of gender, but rather to include individuals who have experienced IPV but do not necessarily fall into the strict category of "female." The city of Memphis possesses one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence victimization in the country for a city its size. IPV serves as a major threat with 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experiencing such violence within Shelby County. The Memphis Police Department reports responding to more than forty IPV related calls a day, an overwhelming statistic that does not even account for the totality of intimate partner violence occurrences given that 50-70% of cases go unreported. Furthermore, over half of all violent

crime in Memphis is classified as intimate partner violence. (Memphis Assault Kit Task Force 2015)

I witnessed the scale and significance of intimate partner violence through my work at Hope House, a nonprofit in Memphis for individuals affected by HIV. During this work, I observed a pattern of clients engaging in abusive relationships, for reasons connected to their HIV status. I was interested in figuring out the determinants of such violence and why Memphis has some of the highest rates of IPV. Looking at IPV victimization statistics by race, class, and gender and reading works by intersectional feminists/black feminist, I found that women of color, poor women, and members of LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence. (Sokoloff 2005) Yet despite these statistics the dominant model of IPV intervention “operates on the guise of colorblindness” and primarily assumes a white, heterosexual, middle class model. I was interested in looking at how white women became centered in the discussions of intimate partner violence as well as understanding the historical roots of why “society imagines that it is [a white, heterosexual, middleclass woman] who needs protection” (Morrison 2005:19).

Furthermore, I was interested in investigating what role this model of intervention services played in affecting the high rates of IPV in a city that is predominately African American and that possesses one of the highest poverty rates in the country. This project comes from an interest in gender and sexuality studies as well as working through my position as a white feminist and realizing that though I sit in class and critique the centering of whiteness in the feminist movement, that I too fall into pitfalls of centering my own experiences of gender in theoretical and activist spaces. After seven weeks of investigating space and place in Memphis, learning about the Women’s Shelter Movement, looking into the Cult of True Womanhood and

Southern ideologies of control, reading critiques of the dominant IPV model of intervention services, investigating the city's response to alarmingly high rates of IPV, talking to IPV organizations in Memphis, speaking to social workers in Memphis, and most importantly, speaking with survivors of IPV in Memphis, I have concluded that intimate partner violence continues to be a major issue in the city of Memphis, over forty-five years since the advent of the Women's Shelter Movement, because of the way in which Women's Shelter advocates developed an incomplete discourse of intimate partner violence and the way in which advocates across the country and specifically in Memphis appealed to Southern ideologies that dictate who is a victim and who is not.

Part I of this essay provides a historical review of the Women's Shelter Movement, investigating how whiteness became centered in the movement. This involves looking at the Memphis chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW), which served as the primary feminist organization during the second wave movement. (Gilmore 2013). I connect the centrality of whiteness in the Movement to the development of an incomplete understanding of intimate partner violence, which lead white feminist to rely upon racist, sexist ideologies, rooted in the Antebellum south, in the process of gaining recognition from the state.

In Part II of this essay, I explore how white advocates in Memphis and across the country compromised a feminist agenda when they utilized "regional fears" and appealed to "Southern ideologies of control" to receive political acknowledgement. I reference 2015 public campaigns against intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence in the city to demonstrate the persistence of an incomplete discourse of IPV in Memphis today. I argue that the Women's Shelter's compromised feminist discourse led victim services to center the needs of white, heterosexual, middle class women and ultimately "facilitated the rise of domestic

violence/criminal justice paradigm” (Weissman 2012:3). I subsequently problematize the criminal justice paradigm using both national and regional data, to illustrate how it relies on tactics alienating to victims who fall outside of the white, middleclass, heterosexual model. (Weissman 3) I discuss how the legal system/criminal justice paradigm often fails to protect victims and frequently revictimizes individuals affected by such violence.

Part III investigates how the city of Memphis relies upon the criminal justice system to “combat” intimate partner violence. Using a feminist, intersectional lens, I argue that the city should adopt a structural lens to alleviate poverty in order to reduce its rates of IPV. Yet, through a historical view of Memphis, I demonstrate the cultural restraints that frames IPV as an unessential issue and why Memphis continues to rely upon an ineffective method of intervention.

Theoretical Framing:

Feminist theory views intimate partner violence as an inherently gendered issue. Feminist theorists tend to cite a combination of samples and violence measures that illustrate that women make up 90-95% of victims of intimate partner violence (Melton 2003). Feminist theorists analyze the patriarchal structure of marriages and intimate relationships as well as media images and gender messages that socialize men to engage in violent behavior. These messages further serve to normalize women’s subordination and condone violence against them. Influential feminist scholar, Dobash argues that “men who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western society—aggressiveness, male dominance, and female subordination—and they are using abuse as a means to enforce that dominance” (Dobash quoted in Lawson 2012, 580).

Given the legacy of feminist theory to project an essentialist claim of intimate partner violence reflecting a male perpetrator and a female victim, while also silencing the experiences of women of color, lesbians, trans men and women, cis men as well as other victims of IPV, I seek to adopt a feminist intersectional lens. My argument positions patriarchy as an influencing factor, while also leaving space to understand how race, sexuality, class, and other systems of domination influence one's susceptibility to such violence as well as their experience. Furthermore, an intersectional feminist lens proves necessary in understanding how "gender inequality is modified by its intersection with other systems of power and oppression" (Sokoloff 2005:43). This intersectional lens further provides insight into improving upon the shortcomings of the dominant IPV intervention model, particularly in Memphis where the majority of victim's experiences cannot be exclusively understood through a lens of gender.

A third notable theory in IPV literature incorporates a structural framework that seeks to understand how concentrated disadvantage shapes the prevalence of intimate partner violence in neighborhoods (Lawson 2012). Concentrated disadvantage refers to neighborhoods with a high percentage of residents with a low socioeconomic status who experience ineffective social systems, struggling families, and an overall lack of opportunities and neighborhood resources. Social Disorganization Theory argues that structural factors influence neighborhood characteristics such as violence and crime. Leading theorists examine structural economic factors and neighborhood compositional influences to understand the prevalence of crime in impoverished communities. Various studies indicate that areas with concentrated poverty and resource deprivation, neighborhoods with high rates of unemployment, and socially disadvantaged communities are at a higher risk for intimate partner violence (Blumenstein & Jasinski 2015).

Furthermore, Blumenstein (2015) found in a Tennessee based study that concentrated disadvantage and urbanity were significantly related to intimate partner aggravated assaults. Employing the structural framework of this theory, I reject neighborhood theorists' argument that impoverished communities experience high rates of crime due to neighborhood values and a lack of social cohesion to police one another, however I am interested in adopting the structural framework of this theory to investigate the role that a lack of neighborhood resources in poor communities in Memphis play in the city's high rate of intimate partner violence. This analysis proves beneficial given that Memphis possesses the highest poverty rate in the nation for an urban area its size. Neighborhood composition proves further insightful for the city remains segregated by wealth and race—inherently intertwined given that the black and Latino poverty rates are higher than the overall poverty rates. (Deloitte)

Centering Whiteness Through the Women's Shelter Movement

A man was legally allowed to physically punish his wife in many jurisdictions in the U.S up until the beginning of the 20th century. (Barner 2011) Prior to the 1970's, there was little public awareness of intimate partner violence in the United States. Rather it was considered a private matter and not to be talked about. Angela Davis explains that the ideological differentiation between the public and private sphere, served to protect male domination by hiding such violence from public scrutiny (Davis, 1999). Growing out of the second wave feminist movement, survivors began voicing their experiences and creating local networks of safe houses for victims in the 1970's. This local activism occurred across the country including in Memphis where the local chapter of NOW worked to establish the city's first rape crisis hotline and other services for survivors. (Gilmore 2013) These community conversations developed into a national "Women's Shelter Movement" that sought to push intimate partner

violence and other forms of gender-based violence from the confines of the home and into the public eye. (Barner 2011)

Though movements are frequently perceived as utopic spaces of equality, campaigns and activist groups are not immune to existing hierarchies. Rather as illustrated by the Women's Shelter Movement (and many other movements), these spaces are structured by existing hierarchies with those with the most privilege, in this case white, cis, heterosexual, middle class women, filling leadership roles, sculpting the discourse, and structuring the agenda. Therefore, though the Memphis chapter of NOW claimed to "work for all women regardless of race" (Gilmore 2013:50), it continued to be an organization primarily working for the concerns of white women. As black activist Leathia Thomas stated when asked why more women of color do not join the Memphis chapter of NOW: "I viewed NOW as being white and therefore suspect. Black people have been used to gain benefits for white people, so I don't think black women will be found flocking to NOW or anything that is primarily trying to do something for women" (Gilmore 2013:50). The Women's Shelter Movement included the presence of queer activist and women of color, who according to activist Beth Richie, were frequently "pushing the most radical dimensions of this work" yet, despite this engagement, white women typically maintained leadership positions. (Richie 2000: 1134).

As white feminist pushed for widespread access to resources, the Women's Shelter Movement advocates promoted the misleading motto that "IPV could happen to anyone" (Richie 1134). Though affective in increasing public awareness, this motto painted intimate partner violence as an epidemic equally impacting every woman in society rather than an act of power and dominance that disproportionately affects vulnerable communities. Angela Harris explains that this slogan reflects an act of gender essentialism: the notion that there is a monolithic

“women’s experience” that can be described independent of other facets of experience like race, class, and sexual orientation (Harris 1990:588). Therefore, when the feminist advocates situated intimate partner violence as an issue affecting all women, they promoted a reductionist discourse of patriarchy and promoted a universal experience of intimate partner violence that reflected the experiences of white, middle class women. Reflecting on the overall feminist movement, Harris warns that through the creation of universal categorization, even amongst the desire to deconstruct oppressive structures, some voices are privileged (who are supported by existing hierarchy) and other are silenced (disadvantaged by existing hierarchy). Black feminist advocate, Beth Richie, reflects on her experience in movement, stating that the assumption of “every woman” fell into the vacuum as “mostly white, straight, and socioeconomically privileged people claim to speak for us all” (Richie 2000: 1135) (Harris 1990: 588). Exclusively centering gender in discussions of IPV resulted in the normalization of existing privileges within the movement, allowing white feminists to utilize their racial privilege to define the public discourse of intimate partner violence.

Women’s Shelter leaders created the public discourse that IPV could exclusively be understood through gender because that’s how white, middle class, heterosexual women experienced IPV and other forms of gender-based violence. Yet, this discourse of IPV was proven incomplete by many individuals, but particularly the lived experiences of black women. Black women’s experiences of violence predates to slavery where white men physically owned black women’s bodies, but persisted into the post-war south where white men employed sexual violence “to demonstrate that a black woman’s body was never her own” (McGuire 2010: xvii). The Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor, an organization helped founded by Rosa Parks to combat sexual violence against African American women, reports in Memphis in 1945:

“Two negro girls were forced into a police car, taken for a ride in the country and criminally assaulted by two uniformed policemen” (McGuire 37). Therefore, intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence could not be exclusively understood through the lens of gender—for it failed to fully theorize all individuals’ experiences of such violence as well as societal acceptance of such abuse, as demonstrated by women of color who experienced “an anti-black misogyny that imagined all black women as disposable laborers and disposable bodies” (Robinson 10).

Despite the criticisms by women of color and queer activist, white privilege allowed white women to assume their own experiences as representing that of all women and therefore conceptualize these criticisms of women of color as “special cases” (Richie 2000: 1136). This centrality of whiteness led Women Shelter advocates, to fall back on racialized ideas of womanhood. This “racialized deployment of womanhood” (Gilmore 2013: 47) is particularly evident in the adoption of Lenore Walker’s “battered woman” syndrome to describe the experiences of abused women getting trapped in a cycle of violence and becoming “passive and submissive” (Rothenberg 2003:7) Walker’s description of victimhood relied upon traditional expectations for women, which particularly locate themselves in the Cult of True Womanhood, a 19th century ideology that defines a woman’s virtue according to her ability to demonstrate “piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness” (Lavender 1998: 1) (Morrison 2005:1084) Despite the presence of multiple theories that explained the behavior and experiences of abused women, the Women’s Shelter Movement selected Walker’s theory recognizing that it could “evoke sympathy from those who were otherwise skeptical of feminist claims” by situating it in these traditional values of women (Rothenberg 7)._ These descriptions of victimhood took on a particular racialized nature for in the Antebellum South the Cult of True Womanhood defined a

woman as the property of her husband, whose duty it was to provide and protect her from the supposedly “menacing black man” (MacDowell 2013:548).

This ideology served to police the conduct and sexuality of white women for only a “true lady” who upheld these values of submission and purity deserved such “protection” (Fenton 1998:21) while simultaneously functioning to subordinate black men. Ida. B. Wells speaks to this stereotype of black men in her article from “The Free Speech and Headlight of Memphis” in 1892, following the unpunished lynchings of three black grocers in Memphis by a mob of angry white men. (McMurry 1998) Wells argues that “the myth of the black male rapist” served to justify violence against black men and “keep them in their place” by painting them as a threat to white women. Therefore, when white feminists described intimate partner violence victimhood according to the characteristics of the Cult of True Womanhood, they evoked a dangerous racialized narrative.

Furthermore, employing this category of “womanhood” in the movement evoked exclusion, for in this Southern tradition only a white woman could possess this social status, which “excluded all men, women presumed to lack sexual virtue, and all black women” (Rushing 2009:181). This ideology defined black women in opposition to “protected” white women, they were subsequently considered “promiscuous”, “immoral, and less deserving of protection from violence or sexual exploitation” (Fenton 1998:23). In the Southern tradition, this ideology served to make a delineation between women who were worthy and unworthy of protection from violence, ultimately functioning to “minimize and deny the seriousness of violence against women that does not fit with this paradigm [of a lady]” (Fenton 1998:25). These racialized gender roles played a vital role in the maintaining Southern social structure by justifying white men’s sexual abuse of black women, which previously stated emerged from

slavery. These interconnected stereotypes “culminate in an ideology of control” a system which Dr. Zanita Fenton terms the “lynch mob ideology” (Fenton 1998: 19). Fenton argues that this “lynch mob ideology functioned to stabilize Southern hierarchy in both the Antebellum and post-War south by “scapegoat some (black men); revictimize others (white women); formulate the disappearance of many (black women); and relieve most everyone else (white men) from responsibility” (Fenton 26). Furthermore, though this “lynch mob ideology” emerges from the Old South, these cultural ideas did not exclusively pertain to this geographic domain, rather this ideology informed national conceptions of race and gender. (Hunter, Robinson 2018). Therefore, when white feminist defined intimate partner victimization according to these traditional ideas of womanhood, they created an image that possessed implicit gendered and racialized stereotypes.

Furthermore, white feminists not only described the “syndromes” of intimate partner violence victimhood according to the Cult of True Womanhood, but casted white women as the face of the public campaign of IPV. (Goodmark 2008) This decision to promote white victimhood, not only reflected the centrality of whiteness in the Women’s Shelter Movement, but it reflected a specific political motivation, for prior to the 1970’s, intimate partner violence was silenced through its categorization as a shameful “private matter” that impacted mostly low-income women and women of color. (Goodmark 2008: 76) Women’s Shelter advocate, Susan Kelly-Dreiss speaks to this prevailing stereotype stating: “the public hold many myths about battered women—they are poor, they are women of color, they are uneducated, they are on welfare, they deserve to be beaten and they even like it” (Crenshaw 20). Furthermore, despite the absence of intimate partner violence from mainstream discourse prior to the 1970’s, African American singers such as Bessie Smith and Gertrude Rainy have historically used Blues music as an outlet to talk about their experiences with male domination and violence. (Davis 1998). In

addition, African American women like Rosa Parks have been leading campaigns against rape and other forms of gender-based violence since 1944. (McGuire xvii) Therefore, the acceptance of intimate partner violence, rape, and other forms of gender-based violence not only reflected patriarchal control, but it also connected to stereotypes about who was affected by such violence and who was excluded from the category of victim. As Morrison states: “the battered woman is a victim, victims are white” (Goodmark 12)

Therefore, both consciously and unconsciously recognizing this historical acceptance of violence against women of color and poor women, white feminist advocates casted white, middle class women as the face of intimate partner victimization as they turned to gain recognition and resources from the state, figuring that “while politicians may not have been terribly interested in the problems of poor black women, it was easier to sell them on the need to protect their own mothers, sisters, and daughters” (Goodmark 14). White feminist across the country and specifically in the Memphis chapter of NOW sought to change the image of a victim of intimate partner violence from “a low-income woman of color to a passive, middle class white woman cowering in the corner” in order to appeal to this “lynch mob” ideology to encourage white male politicians to “protect their (white) women” (Goodmark 3). Stephanie Gilmore explains that activists from the Memphis chapter of NOW utilized these “regional fears of rape” when they casted a white, passive, middle class woman as the face of the IPV campaign. Though the Memphis chapter typically received resistance to their feminist agenda in a town defined by Southern tradition and conservatism, these political tactics “were not contested in part because these concerns allowed Southerners to protect, rescue, and save women in spite of the fact that it also meant addressing feminist issues” (Gilmore 67).

Women's Shelter advocates appealed to and subsequently reproduced the "lynch mob ideology" when they specifically sculpted a discourse of IPV around conventional notions of victimhood that appealed to white male gatekeepers and politicians to protect their [white, wealthy] women" (Goodmark 14). This call to politicians did not encourage white men to think about how they engage in abusive behavior or uphold a culture of rape and violence, but rather to respond to romantic gender roles of protecting their women. Rather than disrupting this racist patriarchal order, the white feminist made a "neoliberal bargain," to receive support from the state by sculpting a specific image of IPV victimization that appealed to societal conceptions of "the perfect victim: a fictive construct that is generally identified as passive, dependent, white, middle-class, heterosexual, and female" and which is bolstered by a system of racist and sexist values (MacDowell 533). Ultimately, this discourse reinforced a patriarchal structure by providing this instance of gender-based violence in a palatable form that abided by the rule of patriarchy and demanded not male attention, but male protection. By promoting a discourse that failed to provide a structural understanding of intimate partner violence, incidences of abuse became casted as "idiosyncratic and aberrant rather than social and structural" (Weissman 4).

The Efficacy of the IPV Criminal Justice Paradigm:

As politicians responded to the advocacy of white feminists, community shelters and other victim services became institutionalized under the control of the state. The incomplete discourse created by Shelter movement advocates "facilitated the ascendancy of the domestic violence/criminal justice paradigm" (Weissman 4). The state answered the call to protect victims by investing in the criminal justice system to "combat" IPV and ensure the "safety" of victims. The passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994, deemed "the most comprehensive federal effort against gender-based violence," largely prompted the development

of legal and criminal justice responses to intimate partner violence. (Weissman 5) Though the act initially included a human rights framework that sought to address economic conditions surrounding IPV, resistance from Congress led it to be stripped of this civil rights vocabulary and included as a part of the largest crime in U.S history: The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. The 1994 bill caused law enforcement budgets to expand exponentially, resulting in the single largest increase in federal and state prison populations, a development which disproportionately incarcerated communities of color across the nation. (Alexander 2011) The impact of this extensive expansion of the criminal justice system particularly manifests in Memphis with the 50th MLK Poverty report finding that “the incarceration rate for African Americans has increased by 50% since 1980, while the incarceration rate for whiteness has fallen slightly” (Delavega 2018:5). The VAWA Act became enacted in the punitive spirit of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act as the race neutral term of “crime control” and the “War on Drugs” became political mechanisms to undermine the advancements of the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, though the VAWA initially includes funds for shelters and victim services, “the vast portion of funds have been used to fund police, prosecutors, and jails” (Weissman 7).

Legal expert, Dr. Leigh Goodmark explains that following the success of the Women’s Shelter Movement campaign, “the public, the media, and the legal system have coalesced around a stereotypical image of victims of domestic violence” (2008:2). Therefore, the development of legal protections for victims resulted in the institutionalization of this incomplete discourse of IPV that catered to the model victim of “a passive, middle-class, white woman cowering in the corner as her enraged husband prepares to beat her again” (Goodmark 2008:3). Therefore, though the Tennessee law at least discusses “domestic abuse” in race neutral and gender-neutral

language, the dominant discourse of IPV continues to rely upon racist, heterosexist definitions of victimhood rooted in Southern “lynch mob ideology.” The persistence of this ideology is evident in Walker’s Battered Woman’s syndrome, which continues to be employed to train “counselors, police officers, prosecutors, parole board officials, and social service providers” to guide them on how to engage with victims of IPV. (Goodmark 10). Walker’s Battered woman’s syndrome remains incredibly gendered describing abuse in a heterosexual couple with a masculine perpetrator and a feminine victim, subsequently rendering masculine victims and LGBTQ+ victims invisible to the system. Furthermore, Walker’s theory characterizes IPV victims according to historically racialized descriptions of being innocent, passive, and helpless. Morrison explains that women of color continued to be excluded from this helpless victim identity due to the persistence of racialized stereotypes that view them as “too tough or too uncontrollable to be dominated by anyone” (Morrison 2006: 25).

Therefore just as ideologies of victimhood functioned to “minimize and deny the seriousness of violence against women that does not fit with this paradigm [of a lady]” (Fenton 1998:25) in the Antebellum South, under this legal framework, when LGBTQ+ individuals, women of color, poor women, and masculine individuals are victimized, “the problem is cast as something other than a case of gender violence” (Richie 1135). Goodmark explains that legal professionals have internalized these narratives of “real victims” and are therefore “looking for a particular kind of victim telling a particular kind of story in protective order cases: a white, straight (likely-middle class) woman telling a story of passivity, dependency, fear, and inability to address the violence” when deciding if there is “reasonable cause” to grant legal protections. (Goodmark 2008:17). Therefore, though this legal framework possesses a guise of inclusion, conservative ideologies frequently exclude victims who do not fit within this white, heterosexual,

middle class feminine model from legal protections and other victim services, subsequently aided in the persistence of this cycle of violence. (MacDowell)

While criminalizing such violence “sought to correct the historical, legal, and moral disparities” that condoned intimate violence, the addition of legislation enforced a narrow definition of intimate partner violence that is reflected in both the definition of abuse and the definition of a victim. (Goodmark 2004: 11). Though IPV encompasses the use of sexually, emotionally, financially, psychologically, and physically coercive acts against an intimate partner, the law primarily focuses on physical violence. The state of Tennessee law employs the term “domestic abuse” to describe the act of “inflicting or attempting inflict physical injury on an adult or minor by other than accidental means, placing an adult or minor in fear of physical harm, physical restraint, or malicious damage to the personal property of the abused party” (Tennessee Codes). The law therefore does not provide protections for threats or acts of non-physical violence, yet researchers and survivors testify that psychological and emotional abuse often remain just as scarring and threatening to the health of victims as physical abuse. (Goodmark 2004) Furthermore, Goodmark explains that the law primarily responds cases of severe violence, yet much of the “assaultive behavior in abusive relationships is categorized by “slapping, shoving, hair-pulling, and other acts unlikely to prompt serious concern.” (Goodmark 23) Therefore, for victims unable to prove extreme physical violence, the law offers few protections.

The Criminal Justice paradigm relies on victims reporting incidences to law enforcement, resulting in police serving as the primary and frequently only 24-hour respondent to intimate partner violence cases across the country and specifically in Memphis. The state of Tennessee puts police on the front lines of IPV intervention stating: “Law enforcement officers shall arrest a

person committing domestic abuse unless there is a clear and compelling reason not to arrest” (Tennessee Law Codes). Yet the state of Tennessee declares police involvement its “preferred response” while completely ignoring a contemporary and historical distrust of the police within the LGBTQ+ community, the African American community and other communities of color. Gillum (2008) discusses this distrust in a study with black survivors, consistently encountering a theme of participants voicing a refusal to call the police for fear that it would make matters worse. Therefore, in a city where the demographics are 62.6% black, 31.7% white, and 5.0% Latino/Hispanic, relying on police intervention services to alienate more than half of the city’s population.

A Memphis based study by the Family Safety Center, an organization serving victims of IPV, and Sister Reach, a reproductive justice organization, further confirms and contextualizes this distrust. Amongst a focus group with survivors who identified as black women, black transgender women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or gender nonconforming, only 3 of 71 participants reported having a positive experience with police intervention. One participant explained an experience of overhearing a law enforcement officer condoning her abuser and advising him “to not hit her on her face or anywhere visible to avoid being arrested” (Family Safety Center 2017:11). An overwhelming number of participants across the focus groups, but specifically in the LGBTQ+ focus group reported that officers dismissed the violence and verbally harassed them. One LGBTQ+ participant recalled an incident where the officer said: “all you need is some good dick (penis) and you will be alright” (Family Safety Center 11). Relying on police intervention not only fails to adequately assist all victims of IPV, with reports of victims “doubting their claims and their judgement” (Goodmark 2004:26), but even “subjects victims of domestic violence who are not white (cis, or middle class) to further abuse within a system

purporting to be there to help them. (Morrison 2006: 23). A black survivor in Memphis demonstrates the violence of apathetic responders and their ability to dissuade victims from pursuing help:

With police showing up and they don't give a dam...It's almost like your abuser is right when they say: 'Nobody is going to believe you, nobody can protect you.' You know they tell you that and get that in your head and then the system reinforces it. It makes victims feel like 'wow, they really don't care. They really can't protect me.'

This Memphis survivor not only discusses how negative experiences with the law enforcement not only serve to discourage victims from calling the police again, but from receiving help through the state at all. Employing law enforcement to serve as first responders to intimate partner violence cases through the criminal justice paradigm, neglects a historical mistrust between the police and communities disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence.

Furthermore, the criminal justice paradigm encourages victims to pursue legal action operating on the "promise to stop the abuse and keep them safe from their abusers" (Goodmark 2004: 27). The legal system operates on the assumption that safety for a victim means leaving their abuser and therefore provides legislation through an Order of Protection to keep perpetrators from coming within a certain distance of the victim and harassing them. Yet, seeking to change the behavior of perpetrators and keep them away from victims through the legal system neglects the reality that intimate partner violence is already illegal. Goodmark (2004) states: "victims have openly questioned how a piece of paper, even one issued by a court, can keep them safe" (Goodmark 5). Many victims decide to stay for financial reasons (the system assumes that victims possess the economic ability to leave), emotional, or practical reasons, but many victims also stay with their abusers because it's safer for them. As a Memphis social worker explains: "If they stay with their abuser, they can know when the next attack is

coming and protect themselves accordingly. If they leave, they do not know their abusers' whereabouts leaving them in a constant state of imminent fear." These persisting fears are well-founded, for multiple studies repeatedly show that victims are at the highest risk of injury after leaving their abuser. Furthermore, retaliatory violence following attempts to escape an abuser account for 75% of all women killed by their abusers. (Brownridge 2006) (Goodmark 2). Lisa Peoples of Memphis being killed by her husband 11 hours after a judge granted her an Order of Protection in 2017, ultimately proves the devastating limitations of the legal system/criminal justice framework to protect victims. Her sister, Tameka Peoples speaks to this false promise of safety stating: "I feel like the system has failed her as a young lady trying to protect herself and her kids" (WCMA 2017).

Furthermore, the process of completing an Order of Protection presents many barriers to victims. Filing for an Order of Protection can be a very traumatic process, requiring a victim to repeatedly retell their experiences of victimization without any form of emotional support. The process of receiving an Order of Protection also requires the ability "to take time off from work, acquire transportation, and childcare" and other resources that are not available to many victims in Memphis (Goodmark 2004:33). This lengthy process does not require a lawyer, yet studies indicate a higher success rate for victims with legal counsel. (Goodmark 1, 7). Despite efforts to provide legal services following the passage of the Violence Against Women Act, legal representation for IPV victims remains scarce, particularly in Memphis. (Goodmark 2004). A Memphis social worker speaks to this scarcity in Memphis, stating: "there is only one lawyer at MALS who helps victims and they only take really high-risk cases." If a perpetrator was arrested following an incident of abuse, they could possibly be facing jail time and are subsequently entitled to legal representation. In this case, victims who cannot access legal representation

experience a significant structural disadvantage. Even if a victim successfully obtains an Order of Protection, it only lasts for one year. The legal system therefore assumes that perpetrators forget or give up on their relationship.

While the legal system provides Order of Protections to defend victims, they are rarely enforced. Though police in Memphis maintain constant surveillance in many areas of the city, they do not closely monitor Order of Protections, as evidenced by the Lisa Peoples case. If a victim violates an Order of Protection, a victim must have proof, their word does not stand in court) and a hearing occurs where a victim is once again forced to face their perpetrator. In the rare case that a perpetrator is found in violation of their Order of Protection the most they receive “a slap on the wrist or a maximum of 11 days in jail.” (Hanna 1997) This points to a larger theme in the treatment of intimate partner violence cases in the criminal justice system: laws are rarely enforced and perpetrators are rarely arrested.

Therefore, despite legislation requiring arrests, researchers and survivor testimonials indicate that IPV criminalization is rarely enforced. Legal expert, Dr. Leigh Goodmark (2004) states: “Client after client has told me how the police refused to arrest their batterers, refused to listen to their stories, and refused to honor their restraining orders” (Goodmark 2004: 26). Though legislation criminalizes intimate partner violence, under Tennessee law, an IPV violation serves as a misdemeanor. Therefore, the maximum amount of jail time a perpetrator could serve is 11 months and 29 days, yet Dr. Cheryl Hanna states: “few batterers ever see the inside of a jail cell, even when convicted of a serious offense” (Hanna 1997:1253). To provide perspective, individuals are more likely to go to jail in Memphis 2 counts of nonviolent drug possession as a more severe crime than abusing an intimate partner. (Hanna 1997: 1254)

In addition to frequently failing to protect all victims as well as consistently enforce IPV laws, legal expert, Dr. Deborah Weissman states: “the legal system rarely remedies the structural inequality that contributes to criminal behavior” (Weissman 3). Even in the event of arrest, police involvement does not stop intimate violence, rather abusers simply wait to continue abuse outside of the guise of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, if abusers go to jail, placing them in a hyperviolent space fails to alter their violent behavior. Rather, some studies even suggest a positive correlation between arrests and increased levels of violence” (Ms 2001:14). The city of Memphis particularly contributes to this ineffectual punishment by requiring prosecuted perpetrators to attend anger management course. A Memphis social worker states: “If it’s a perpetrator’s first offense they can go to anger management and get it expunged from their record.” Yet, multiple scholars have asserted that intimate partner violence “is not a matter of losing control over one’s behavior; rather, it is a systematic and deliberate pattern of abuse used to gain control over one’s partner.” Therefore requiring perpetrators to complete anger management classes does not impact their abusive behavior (Poon 2011:110).

Therefore, despite language that aims to protect “all victims” the persistence of a historical ideology of control that minimizes violence against women of color results in “women of color being more likely to be processed by the criminal legal system as offenders while their white counterparts have a better chance of being treated as victims and referred to services” (MS 18). Even in the event of arrest, rates of perpetrator detention involve “disproportionately high number of poor men, African American men, and Latinos” (Ms Foundation for Women 2003:16). These results indicate that just as the “lynch mob ideology” excludes women of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and poor women from the status of victim, these ideas led men of color to be viewed as “perceivable perpetrators” which results disproportionate arrests

under the domain of the criminal justice system (MacDowell 533). Researchers indicate that rates of intimate partner “increases in structural disadvantaged households and communities” (Weissman 15). Furthermore, research indicates that the expanded criminal justice system has a disproportionately devastating result on “communities of color, poor, and immigrant peoples” (MS 2001:16). Therefore, as the criminal justice system incarcerates disproportionate numbers of men of color, immigrants, and poor people, “domestic violence itself can become a collateral consequence” (Weissman 12).

The domestic violence/criminal justice paradigm has frequently failed to stop the cycle of violence, while taking resources away from other community-based victim services like shelters and hotlines. (Weissman) Despite the expansion of the criminal justice system to protect victim, research indicates that “the rate of women’s victimization by intimate appears to be about the same as it was in the 1970’s (Ms. 2001:13). The criminal justice paradigm has ultimately narrowed the options for victims, a development which fails to fully support all victims and display particularly detrimental effects for women of color, poor women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Casting a Structural Lens on Memphis

When local white feminists began organizing around intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence through the Memphis NOW chapter, Gilmore (2013) states: “the issue of rape took on a personal tone as women confronted their city’s reputation as “the rape capital of the nation” (Gilmore 59). Efforts by these local feminists led to the creation of the city’s first shelter and other victim services, yet despite the presence of this active chapter, the city of Memphis maintains a national reputation for gender-based crimes with one of the highest rates of IPV in the country. Feminist legal expert, Dr. Elizabeth MacDowell clarifies the

persistence of these high rates of IPV in Memphis, stating: “domestic violence is a serious social problem that is frequently unrecognized, minimized, or ignored because of stereotypes about who is at risk and from whom” (MacDowell 532). When white feminists in the Memphis NOW chapter led the Women’s Shelter Movement in Memphis, they both recognized and were inhibited by their own regionally informed ideologies. Gilmore speaks to this regional ideology stating:

The political and religious conservatism that defines [Memphis] has been buttressed by the racialized deployment of womanhood and the need to protect Southern white womanhood through attacks on and murders of Black men and rape and physical violation of Black women (Gilmore 47).

White feminists in Memphis therefore followed national campaigns of essentialism and IPV “affecting all women” while also casting white middle-class women as the face of intimate partner violence victimization and appealing to a regional “lynch mob ideology” to receive governmental funds.

Though the Women’s Shelter Movement emerged in Memphis over forty-five years ago, the discourse, which was sculpted by white middle-class women, persists in the city today, as evidenced by the 2015 “Memphis Says No More Campaign.” NO MORE campaign echoes similar sentiments as “IPV could happen to anyone” through its informative videos of local Memphians stating: “my neighbor, my friend, my sorority sister, my family friend, my grandmother, my mom, my sister” could be a victim and that it could happen in “East Memphis, Orange Mound, Midtown, Binghampton, U of M area, Chickasaw Garden, East Parkway, South Memphis, Evergreen” (Memphis Sexual Assault Kit Task Force 2016). This campaign reflects the essentialized discourse created by Women’s Shelter advocates, as well as indicating support for the developed criminal justice paradigm to combat IPV, encouraging victims to trust and call

the police, as Representative Steve Cohen states: “The victims need to be protected and the perpetrators need to be found and prosecuted. The quicker we can do this, the quicker our society can rest assured” (2016).

This campaign is a product of the Memphis Sexual Assault Kit Task Force, a group appointed by the Mayor in 2013 in response to general public’s discovery that the Memphis Police Department failed to test over 12,000 rape kits, some of which date back to the 1970’s. (Grant 2017) These untested rape kits reflect just one of many incidents that contribute to a pattern of misconduct in gender-based violence cases by the MPD, such as an MPD detective leaking confidential investigative information regarding a rape victim. These allegations provide context to the persistence of high rates of rape and intimate partner violence in the city, as well as a structural failure of the criminal justice system to adequately protect victims and end cycles of violence. Yet, despite these larger national trends as well as a clear evidence of victims of IPV and other gender-based violence to not trust the Memphis Police Department, this government appointed taskforce continues to encourage victims to “tell the police” (Memphis Task Force). Furthermore, in response to these allegations Shelby County Commissioners approved more than \$51,000 for the Sheriff’s Office to “battle domestic violence” in 2015.

This continual investment in the city’s criminal justice system begs the question of why does the city of Memphis continue to focus on “the symptoms of oppression” rather than “the sources of oppression?” (Weissman 17). What would adopting an intersectional feminist lens reveal about the city of Memphis? Adopting an intersectional feminist lens would threaten the white, middle class heterosexual framework of intimate partner violence to reveal that victims who live at the “intersections of gender and racial oppression” are disproportionately affected by IPV. This theoretical framework would require changing the discourse to center on the

experience of black women and other women of color. Adopting a feminist intersectional lens would reveal that “the causes of violence are indeed varied and complex and indeed are often the product of historical and structural conditions” (Weissman 12).

Adopting an intersectional feminist lens would require facing the racialized and gender inequities in this city. The city’s demographics are 62.6% black, 31.7% white, and 5.0% Latino/Hispanic, yet despite a black majority, whites hold 93% of the city’s wealth and blacks possess only 4%. (Facebook) As literature on IPV in the African American community and amongst impoverished communities illustrates, male unemployment increases the likelihood of IPV as violence becomes an alternative avenue to gain a sense of masculine control. Such theories serve to conceptualize the frequency of IPV in Memphis particularly in light of its unemployment rate of 11.7%, yet only 6.2% of white Memphians remain unemployed compared to 15% of blacks, with particularly 15.6% of African American men filling the status of unemployed (Groenendyk 2016).

Furthermore, such violence is compounded by gender disparities within the city, with the average man’s salary being \$15, 316 higher than the average woman’s salary. Therefore, the largest demographic living in poverty in Memphis is black women ages 25-34 (Deloitte). As feminist theory demonstrates, patriarchal power structures are maintained and reinforced through access to resources such as occupational, educational status, and income earning potential, a finding that remains particularly racialized in the city of Memphis. Therefore, adopting a structural and feminist intersectional lens of IPV in Memphis would force the city to realize that poverty is not just as a “how those black people do” but a product of historical and persisting barriers enacted to maintain the subordination of neighborhoods of color in Memphis.

(Interview)

Alleviating the high rates of intimate partner violence in Memphis would therefore require implementing social and structural policies that alleviate poverty in Memphis, a development that Memphis displays little interest in as evidenced by the city's annual budget. Despite the plethora of research that demonstrates the effectiveness of combating crime through the enactment of social and structural policies that alleviate poverty, 2/3rd of the Memphis budget goes towards providing "safety" which particularly involves investing in law enforcement strategies to increase surveillance in African American neighborhoods. Meanwhile, more restorative approaches to structurally combat crime through the reduction of neighborhood disadvantage are incredibly underfunded with only 0.68% of the City of Memphis budget going towards Housing and Community Development (Groenendyk 2016). The city of Memphis displays such resistance to taking a more holistic approach to understanding crime and poverty, because enacting social policies that alleviate poverty would threaten the Southern hierarchy of this town.

Though these "idealized master-slave, male-female relations of the past" no longer remain enforced by slavery or Jim Crow laws, this Southern hierarchy remains deeply embedded and reinforced in the city's leadership, economy, and criminal justice system. As a black survivor of IPV from Memphis states: "If you look at the power dynamics and who has been in power in Memphis from the 1800's till now you'll see. Follow the family tree. It's old money. Look at the major streets in Memphis, those are the families. It's the founders of this city that still run this city, or whoever they prop up." The reinforcement of Southern hierarchy through leadership can be found in the role of institutions such as the Memphis Carnival (formerly known as the Cotton Carnival), which "remains a viable part of contemporary city life" (Rushing 2009: 155). Rushing (2005) explains that despite its present-day inclusion of African Americans,

the Carnival shapes the social landscape of Memphis through its reproduction of “class, race, and gender boundaries” (Rushing 2009:155). Carnival rituals, bolstered by the city’s white upper-class leadership, “not only help maintain distinctions of wealth, power, and status but reproduce local culture” (158). These distinctions abide by Antebellum power structures as evidenced by the ritual honoring of a festival King, an older established, white businessman from a prominent Memphis family, and Queen, a young, white woman also from a prominent Memphis family. The Queen “symbolically embodies southern womanhood” while the King embodies “community values and displays “hegemonic masculinity” presiding over the Queen and the city. (164) Furthermore, the Carnival serves to maintain generational wealth and dominate civic engagement by investing “human, social, and cultural capital that yield’s social profits for the city’s elite” (Rushing 2009: 156).

Given the city’s “local elite’s” dedication to maintaining this Southern hierarchy it is unsurprising that the city of Memphis does not enact policies to structurally alleviate poverty and crime. (Rushing 156) The city of Memphis has yet to introduce measures that address the social determinants of intimate partner violence, for structurally addressing such determinants such as poverty and inequality would threaten the social fabric and hierarchy of the city. A black survivor reflects upon her experiences as well as the city’s high rates of IPV, stating:

We live in Tennessee where it’s owning class, you know class category. You got rich, poor, owning class. Owning class is people who feel like you have a place. If you black, you have your place. This is where you supposed to be and whatever is happening to you, I’m not really concerned about that because that’s your place. I feel like women fall into that same thing. You’re a woman I don’t really care what happens to you. This is your norm. I do think people have that going on. Men and women tolerate and really perpetuate violence against women.

Furthermore, inattention to intimate partner violence in Memphis against primarily black women and poor women can be understood, for the same ideology that exalts “Southern

womanhood” serves to “scapegoat black men; revictimize others (white women), formulate the disappearance of many (black women); and relieve most everyone (white men) from responsibility” (Fenton 26). Therefore, the city’s inattention to intimate partner violence remains an incredibly racialized issue, given that poor women of color are disproportionately affected by this issue. This same survivor continues: “When it comes to race we’re getting into what is valuable and what’s not.” Therefore, the city’s neglect of intimate partner violence not only speaks to the presence of patriarchy but particularly an acceptance of violence against black women and other women of color. This same survivor speaks the value the city places on women’s lives and particularly black women’s lives, stating: “the city has more dog shelters than IPV and rape shelters.”

In the famous words of Dr. Charles McKinney: “who is benefitting off the current status quo? What does the city of Memphis have to gain by investing in the criminal justice system? Furthermore, given that the city remains so invested in “law and safety” begs the question of what does safety mean and who does it exist for. If the most common type of crime in Shelby county is intimate partner violence wouldn’t one infer that the city would be investing money into creating intervention and prevention programs even if it meant working outside of the scope of the criminal justice system? Though the city of Memphis created the Memphis Rape Kit Sexual Assault Taskforce and allocated money to law enforcement, these changes did not occur in responses to tragic cases like Lisa Peoples and other Memphians who were killed by their abusers while under the “protection” of law enforcement. Rather the Memphis Rape Kit Sexual Assault Taskforce was established following a series of scandals in the Memphis Police Department which cast an unfavorable light on the city and its law enforcement. Therefore, an activist from the People for the Enforcement of Rape Laws group ultimately deems the creation

of such campaigns and taskforces a “publicity stunt” for the city of Memphis, not an attempt to address its high rates of gender-based violence crimes (Memphis Sexual Assault Kit Task Force 2016).

I do not seek to speak for all victims when I highlight cases of the criminal justice system failing to protect victims, rather I seek to question “why is it that calling the police is the only option for victims?” (Chen, C. Dulani, J. & Piezpna-Samarasinha, L 2011:xviii). When looking at Memphis’ reliance on the criminal justice system, it’s important to investigate what purpose “law and safety” plays in the city. The city’s law enforcement remains deeply invested in policing drug possession. A study by the ACLU indicates that the city spent approximately \$ 42,948,820 to enforce marijuana possession laws in 2010 alone. Marijuana arrests (often non-violent) account for almost half of all drug arrests in Memphis. Despite equal rates of usage by race, blacks are 4.0 times more likely than whites to be arrested for marijuana possession in Memphis, the highest racialized disparity in the country. These racialized arrests suggest that the criminal justice system does not ensure the protection of all its citizens, rather that it serves as another institution to maintain this Southern hierarchy in Memphis. Intimate partner violence activist, Ching-In Chen speaks to these broader national intentions behind investing in the criminal justice system, stating: “the story that safety will come through increased prosecution and criminalization is not a new one—it comes out of a much older story that says (implicitly white, middle class and owning class) safety will come when “dangerous” (implicitly black, brown, and poor) people are disappeared by death or detention” (Chen, Dulani, & Piezpna-Samarasinha 2011:7).

Conclusion

Intimate partner violence continues to be a major issue in the city of Memphis, over forty-five years since the advent of the Women's Shelter Movement, because of the way in which Women's Shelter advocates developed an incomplete discourse of intimate partner violence and the way in which advocates across the country and specifically in Memphis appealed to Southern ideologies that dictate who is a victim and who is not. Women's Shelter advocates appealed and subsequently reproduced the "lynch mob ideology" when they specifically sculpted a discourse of domestic violence around conventional notions of victimhood that appealed to white male gatekeepers and politicians to protect "their [white, wealthy] women." While this political strategy gained the attention of politicians, by relying upon this historical "lynch mob ideology" advocates did not challenge conventional gender norms that condone violence against women nor did they challenge the normalization of violence against women of color and any other individuals who fall out of the narrow category of white, middle class, heterosexual victimhood that remained integral to this historical ideology. Therefore, white, middle class women became understood as the primary victims of intimate partner violence and public discourses of such violence became situated as "aberrant" rather than "social and structural" (Weissman 2012:4).

As IPV services came under the control of the state, this incomplete discourse of IPV prompted the development of the "domestic violence/criminal justice paradigm" (Weissman 3) that sought to incarcerate abusers and legally protect victims. Though this movement helped created vital services for victims and brought widespread attention to the issue, the system of intervention services primarily relies upon tactics that frequently serve to re-victimize IPV victims while particularly alienate victims who fall outside of the category of white, middle, class, heterosexual women. Despite the documented evidence of the failure of the criminal

justice system to protect many victims in Memphis, the city continues to exclusively invest in policing tactics to address such violence, for reasons connected to the persistence of this “lynch mob ideology” and Southern hierarchy that remains embedded in the social, political, and economic structure of the city. Ultimately, the city of Memphis continues to demonstrate high levels of IPV victimization because of its reliance on an ineffectual model that primarily serves the need of white, middle class women and its disinterest in addressing an issue that primarily affects poor women and women of color.

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