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An Intersectional Analysis of Structural Racism and Police Violence Against Black Women

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An Intersectional Analysis of Structural Racism & Police Violence Against Black Women

By

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of the Requirements for
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Abstract

Structural racism in the United States affects racial and ethnic minorities in many areas of life. The Black community, specifically, faces the highest risk of police violence and brutality. In particular, this paper explores the ways in which adverse police violence experiences affect Black women. Black women often face marginalization in movements for racial justice and gender equality, so this paper investigates the intersectionality of how Black women experience police violence. They often face overlapping forms of discrimination and racialized gender violence at the hands of police. The negative ways in which Black women are stereotyped are discussed to further highlight how their perpetrators of police violence “justify” their actions and often have impunity. The role of institutions is examined to demonstrate their role in promoting racial hierarchies and white supremacy and to further illustrate how police violence and racism are not individual, micro-level issues. This thesis heavily utilizes literature published on the subjects discussed and draws on literature from legal, anthropological, and public health perspectives.

Foreword

I sat in class, listening to Raymond Santana's personal account of his years-long wrongful incarceration and the story of the Exonerated Five. Santana visited the University of South Carolina in October 2019 and made a stop by my African American Cultures class prior to the lecture he gave later that evening, which was perfectly timed with our unit on injustice and exoneration. Thinking about the importance of truth and racial injustice in the case of the Exonerated Five led me to think of the incidents of police violence I have heard about in the media over the last years. Santana discussed the difficulty the Exonerated Five faced even after they were exonerated, as they were given no state assistance in transitioning back into daily life. I thought about how easy it was to watch the Netflix series and think about how issues of racial injustice happened in the past, but Santana's message and recent events I have seen in the media highlighted just how relevant and timely these discussions were, as this issue continues to prevail in the American criminal justice system. My interest in health and educational disparities in ethnic and racial minorities in the United States prompted me to consider how different issues of structural racism and police violence were related. I wondered, more specifically, how Black women were affected, as it was rare that I heard incidents of the brutalization of women by police violence in the media. Similarly, my interest grew to find out where structural violence intersected with the experiences of the Black community, but more specifically in Black women, a demographic that is oftentimes marginalized, erased, or overlooked in the movements fighting both gender discrimination and racial injustice.

Introduction

Social inequalities are oftentimes a root of structural issues, such as classism, racism, and power hierarchies, that are in place. This paper seeks to explore structural violence in relation to

police brutality with a distinct focus on racialized gender violence. Structural violence is defined as violence exerted systematically and indirectly by everyone who belongs to a certain social order (Farmer, 2004). Farmer argues that social inequalities are the driving force behind structural violence; similarly, disparities in health and education often stem from inequitable socio-political and economic structures (320). Additionally, structural racism is defined as “the macrolevel systems, social forces, institutions, ideologies, and processes that interact with one another to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups” (Gee and Ford, 2011, p.3). For the purposes of this paper, the arguments will draw heavily from critical race theory, which emphasizes the role of structures and institutions in perpetuating racism. When discussing specific instances of police violence, the race of the officers is often unmentioned and also irrelevant to the paper because even if the officer and victim were of the same race, the issue of racism still remains. Though I will employ a variety of individual instances, these occurrences further illustrate how institutions are the main culprit in continuing to maintain racist ideologies and how these cases are linked to broader patterns of discrimination. The police officers, though they may exhibit individual racism, are actors of larger power structures. This paper will utilize the framework of the political economy approach to explore the social factors and structures that influence the issues of racism and police violence and the theory of racial ontologies, which is defined as “the fundamentally racialized grounding of various states of being,” to explore the ways institutions play roles in promoting racial hierarchies (Rosa and Díaz, 2020, p. 120). Specifically, how Black women experience police violence and structural racism, while focusing on individual instances and negative stereotypes, will be the main focus of this paper.

Background

Rosa and Díaz (2020) present the theory of raciontologies to explore the roles that institutions play in reproducing white supremacy. A large part of their arguments center around the role of institutions as actors in perpetuating structural racism. They cite various cases in which Black men were killed by a Black police officer and how the societal response was to immediately disqualify racism, as both the victim and perpetrator were Black. However, when considering the role of the institution, we can understand that structural racism was a driving force in these cases. Their ontological approach to institutional racism and white supremacy relies heavily on Aime Cesaire's concept of "thingification." Rosa and Díaz (2020) look to a prime modern example of thingification in the 2013 Zimmerman trial, in which George Zimmerman was tried in the murder of Trayvon Martin, a fifteen-year-old African American boy. Zimmerman's perception of the pack of skittles and juice can Trayvon was carrying as a potential weapon or drug paraphernalia is tied to the concept of things are only constituted as things when they are grounded in normative whiteness (p. 122). Any deviation from this understood normative whiteness can index different meanings for the object, as a result of the influence of structural racism.

Additionally, Rosa and Díaz explore the role of institutions as actors in the reproduction of structural racism and white supremacy, rather than merely acting as site or vehicles for it (2020, p. 125). A pointed example used to illustrate this argument is the inclusion of the story of the death of paparazzo, Chris Guerra. Guerra pulled over to photograph what was thought to be Justin Bieber's Ferrari, which was pulled over for speeding and then questioned about the potential smell of marijuana in the vehicle. However, when the occupants of the stopped vehicle noticed Guerra videotaping the stop, they complained to the officer, who let them go and

subsequently began to harass Guerra. Though media outlets declared that Guerra's death was his own fault, the dashcam transcription from the altercation provided a different perspective. Guerra explained to the officer that he was a member of the press upon questioning, but the officer continuously became more aggressive in tone. He demanded that Guerra return to his car immediately, which was situated across four lanes of traffic (with no crosswalk nearby), and Guerra was then hit by two cars. After the officer stopped traffic and called for help, he did not attempt to revive Guerra, despite his training in CPR, and was recorded by the dashcam in which he called Guerra an idiot while speaking to his partner (Rosa and Díaz, 2020, p. 124).

The interesting thing about this specific incident was the response to it in the media. Following the incident, Miley Cyrus posted a statement online about how the paparazzi were "fools;" many people in the online community seemed to echo her sentiments, in which people insinuated that the lives of paparazzi did not matter or did not have value. It is important to note here that over the last two decades the primary demographic that constitutes the paparazzi has shifted from predominantly white men to Latino men, who are oftentimes negatively stereotyped as unskilled deviants. The irony in Miley Cyrus's comments on the incident is evident in the fact that her career and celebrity have benefited and been elevated through the circulation of paparazzi images taken of her. The paparazzi serve as the working class laborers who uphold the industry that gave Cyrus the platform to publicly ridicule and insult a working class person of color. Furthermore, the primary subjects the paparazzi photograph tend to be white women, which only perpetuates the systematic cycle of the erasure of people of color (Rosa and Díaz, 2020, p. 125).

Though racism on an individual level can exist within institutions, socio-political factors that exist on structural and institutional levels are the main contributing factor in upholding white

supremacy and racist ideologies. An April 2016 study found that 50% of white medical students and residents held false beliefs about biological differences between Black and white people, such as believing that Black people have thicker skin or blood that coagulates more quickly (Hardeman et al., 2016, p. 2). These false notions that half of future medical professionals hold can be detrimental to Black health, as well as perpetuating racial hierarchies. Furthermore, a large portion of medical schools do not have structured formal education and training on cultural awareness and diversity. For example, on average, Black Americans have a higher rate of diabetes complications, but anti-racism strategies are hardly recommended or implemented in practice, though treatments for chronic disease require a better understanding of social determinants of health (Hardeman et al., 2016, p. 3). Understanding how racism exists in and is perpetuated through institutions, such as hospitals, is integral to creating structural change that eliminates the role of the institution as an actor to maintain racial hegemonies.

Police Violence

For the purposes of this thesis, police violence will include “killing, physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment, psychological intimidation, emotional violence, false arrest, and racial profiling (Amuchie, 2016, p. 621). This broad definition will be employed, especially when analyzing the scope of police violence that Black women and girls face to further highlight violence against women in ways that are not purely physical and to further explore the intersectionality of the issue.

When thinking of the demographic most heavily affected by police brutality, young Black males living in metropolitan areas are typically thought to be heavily impacted. In a similar vein, the deaths of Black males at the hand of police violence garner the most mainstream and mass media attention. Though Black males face the highest risk of homicide, especially young men between

the ages of 15 and 34 (Rogers, 2015, p. 25), the deaths and assaults of Black women and girls as a product of police violence are often rendered invisible in the media and mainstream discourses.

Per Crenshaw and Ritchie in the #SayHerName report:

Black women have consistently played a leadership role in struggles against state violence—from the Underground Railroad to the anti-lynching movement to the current Black Lives Matter campaign—yet the forms of victimization they face at the hands of police are consistently left out of social movement demands (Jones, 2016, p. 25).

Another invisible way in which Black communities are harmed through systematic police violence is through the significant harm that mothers experience when their children are brutalized. Mothers whose children have been brutalized often become key leaders or activists in movements against police violence, such as Black Lives Matter. However, these movements can be linked to movements for reproductive justice, as Black mothers' reproductive autonomy is harmed when their children are brutalized or murdered (Rogers, 2015, p. 226). These mothers live in fear that their children may be brutalized. These feelings can additionally stem from the presence of police in the community. Typically, the police are not viewed as community members, but rather outsiders who have a negative relationship with the community. Moreover, Black mothers, whose children are murdered due to police violence, are put in the unique position of having to grieve their children at the same time as attempting to “maintain the integrity of their slain child’s legacy.” The way that the victims of police violence, specifically young Black men, are portrayed in the media are often as “thugs or otherwise unworthy of the nation’s sympathy” (Rogers, 2015, p. 213).

Analyzing the context and history of the specific experience of Black women is critical to understanding how Black women become “forgotten victims” and the ways in which racialized gender stereotypes lead to police violence against Black women and girls. In general, feminist theory, anti-discrimination laws, and anti-racism activism tend to marginalize Black women as the experiences specific to Black women are lumped in with the experiences of white women or Black men (Amuchie, 2016, p. 624). The concept of intersectionality is heavily employed within Black feminist theory to examine the multi-faceted daily experiences of Black women. The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989; it “recognizes that people live multi-dimensional identities—specifically race, class, and gender—due to interlocking systems of oppression” (Amuchie, 2016, p. 622). Accordingly, Crenshaw argues that when Black women of other women of color experience overlapping discrimination, laws regarding discrimination look at race and gender separately, leaving these women with no legal remedies.

Stereotypes

Furthermore, Amuchie argues that the racialized gender stereotypes of Black women lead to police violence against them. Portraying Black women as “mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas” normalizes racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of injustice (Amuchie, 2016, p. 635). These stereotypes are further broken down into specific images of Black women that persist in American society: the “Mammy”, the “Jezebel”, and the “Sapphire.” All three stereotypes are rooted in their emergence in the 18th century, but continue to prevail in public discourses today.

The Mammy stereotype originated during slavery and describes a nurturing, matriarchal Black woman. This stereotype tends to be paradoxical in nature, as “Mammies” were well-loved in their white “families,” but at the same time played a very subservient, obedient role, with a

higher obligation to the children of the slaveholder rather than being able to spend time with her own. These associations of the nurturing, motherly Black woman continue to prevail today, as society views Black women as resilient and able to withstand violence (Amuchie, 2016, p. 638). The Mammy is typically thought of as a “larger” woman and is seen as asexual. At the same time, historians have tried to paint a more positive image of the Mammy stereotype, as she is seen as subordinate and self-sacrificing, but in reality, enslaved women were often beaten, overworked, or raped. Historians essentially re-wrote this part of history to create the image of the happy Mammy to deal with its uncomfortable reality, though her life was far from that (Amuchie, 2016, p. 649).

In order to justify the rape of and sexual violence towards Black women, slaveholders created the image of the Jezebel, which portrayed Black women as sexually promiscuous, hypersexualized, and highly fertile. This hypersexual image created by this stereotype is heavily juxtaposed with the asexual Mammy stereotype. This characterization made it so that Black women could not be seen as victims of rape, and their rapists faced few, if any, legal consequences. Similarly, the Jezebel stereotype maintained the slave economy through the children women bore as a result of rape. The persistence of this stereotype now translates to “a large number of Black women experience[ing] rape and sexual assault by police officers and prison guards with impunity” (Amuchie, 2016, p. 640). In the modern day United States, Black women constitute around 13% of the female population, but approximately 60% of Black women report that they have been raped. These extreme rates of sexual violence against Black women are highly correlated with accounts of slaveholder rape (Amuchie, 2016, p. 638). A United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination report found that a Chicago police officer kidnapped and raped a 19-year-old Black woman but never faced prosecution.

There are various other accounts of the sexual abuse and rape of Black women at the hand of police officers, but these officers never receive discipline or criminal prosecution (Amuchie, 2016, p. 641).

The third stereotype, namely, the Sapphire is the embodiment of the “angry Black woman” trope. This characterization depicts Black women as both strong and overbearing and serves to masculinize them; it assumes that Black women are full of rage and always ready and willing to fight (Amuchie, 2016, p. 644). This stereotype, similarly, dehumanizes and marginalizes Black women and serves as a vehicle for police to justify their violent actions, when they claim that they perceived the woman as a threat.

So how do these stereotypes translate into institutional effects on Black girls? The three discussed stereotypes create a dehumanizing view of Black girls, which can become the driving force behind higher levels of violence against them or excessive policing. The largest growing prison demographic in the United States is comprised of African American and Hispanic women; additionally, the number of women in prisons in the US has increased exponentially and is growing at a higher rate than that of the male incarceration rate. However, these stereotypes are reinforced from a young age. In schools, administrators often issue arrests to Black girls because they appear to be “irate”, “uncooperative”, or “disrespectful,” and suspensions for Black girls are enforced six times more than against white girls (whereas this is only three times more enforced for Black boys versus white boys) (Amuchie, 2016, p. 646).

Case Studies

I will recount five case studies of police violence against Black women and how each case represents some of the stereotypes Amuchie has detailed; the women in the five cases differ from each other in age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. The cases of police

violence against Black women specifically exhibit the intersectionality of the problem, as women experience it as both a “crime of police brutality and violence against women” (Crump, 2019).

Margaret Mitchell

Margaret Mitchell was a 54-year-old, mentally ill, homeless Black woman of small stature. Her death was a result of Los Angeles police officers harassing, following, and shooting her. Residents of her community reported that Mitchell often pushed around her belongings, including her signature red blanket, in a shopping cart, which is not an uncommon way for the homeless population to hold their belongings. She was described as “small, brittle, and soft spoken” by the members of her local community (Amuchie, 2016, p. 649). On May 21, 1999, two police officers approached Mitchell about her shopping cart, which was in violation of California’s Business and Professions Code. Witnesses recounted that Mitchell was harassed and followed; as a community member was driving by, they noticed the exchange and pulled over in an effort to stop the officers from harassing her, but they continued. Another witness saw Mitchell running down the street, pulling the shopping cart behind her; this witness’s initial assumption was that the officers were going to beat her as soon as they caught up to her. However, the officers shot her as she was running away, resulting in her death. Though Mitchell was not endangering anyone and was only in violation of a minor civic code, the police officers still resorted to using deadly force.

The Sapphire stereotypes could have been in play in this situation, as Mitchell was regarded as being able to withstand brute force and violence, like the Sapphire who refuses to stand down. In a similar vein, the aspects of the Sapphire stereotype that depict Black women as deviant and capable of criminality could have influenced how Mitchell was perceived by the officers. They claimed that she was holding a weapon and lunged at one of the officers in an

attempt to kill him, which starkly contrasts with the eye witnesses who saw Mitchell running away from the officers at the time she was shot. The officers were investigated, but the LAPD Police Chief found that they were justified in killing Mitchell because they faced safety concerns; ultimately, the officers were not held accountable in the death of Margaret Mitchell. This case additionally demonstrates the negative relationship between police officers and the community, as community members who witnessed the incident feared that Mitchell was in danger when they saw the officers harassing and chasing her. Incidents like this one only further alienate communities and promote general distrust of the police.

Jonie Pratt

Jonie Pratt, a middle-class professional, who was formerly employed as a school teacher in New Orleans, faced the use of excessive brute force and violence by policers, showing that the demographic that experiences police violence is not restricted by educational and socioeconomic status. On April 4, 2006, Pratt was approached by an officer while she was parked in the driveway of her house in a suburban neighborhood. The officer asked her to step out of her vehicle, and when she rightfully asked why, the officer became physically violent; he pulled her out of the car then pepper sprayed her, pulled her hair, and punched her in the face. He then called for backup, and two more officers arrived at the scene, only to shove Pratt to the ground and kick her in the head. During the altercation, Pratt's mother-in-law came out of the house yelling at the officers to stop and confirming that the house was indeed Pratt's place of residence. Pratt sustained a black eye, broken wrist, and a swollen forehead from the violent actions of the police; however, the officers were once again not held accountable, on the basis of insufficient evidence.

An important note to highlight in this specific case is the relationship between Black women's hair and police violence and how Black women face discrimination based on their hair texture. Amuchie claims that people often feel entitled to touch Black women's hair, like the officer in this case, because of its different texture and their perception of it as having less value. Amuchie (2016) argues:

Here, the officer pulled on Pratt's hair, which demonstrates a specific type of racialized gender violence that Black women face. Hair represents an intricate part of racial identity for Black women. Therefore, when targeted for their hair, Black women face a unique form of dehumanization and racial violence. (p. 658)

The specific instance of Officer Giroir pulling Pratt's hair served to reinforce the power dynamic between Black women and white men, and further highlighted the lack of autonomy Black women face in regard to having control over their hair, especially when others feel entitled to touch their hair.

Salencia Johnson

This next instance of police violence involves a five-year-old Salencia Johnson and illustrates how Black girls are perceived as violent and aggressive even at a young age. In 2012, Johnson threw a "tantrum" in a classroom at her school, in which she screamed and cried, as children of her age often do. In response, the school administrators called the local police station, instead of taking a more reasonable recourse of action, such as referring to the school psychologist to intervene (Amuchie, 2016, p. 659). When the police arrived, they placed Johnson in handcuffs, sending the message that this was an unsafe space and creating an environment in which she felt she did not belong. Per research conducted in school behavioral health, the findings tend to show that students of ethnic or racial minorities face more severe consequences

than their white counterparts, such as the number of students facing suspension or other forms of disciplinary action. These higher rates of suspension are associated with negative educational outcomes (McIntosh et al., 2018). Instances such as this one not only harm Black girls' concept of self-image and belonging, in addition to a violation of their humanity and personhood, but also continue to uphold an educational system in which they are disadvantaged and degraded.

Dajerria Becton

The physical and sexual assault of 15-year-old Dajerria Becton at the hands of a Texas police officer in June 2015 illustrates how necessary intersectionality is to analyzing occurrences of police violence against Black women. During a pool party that Becton was attending with her friends, a white woman called the police, claiming that group of kids were not part of the neighborhood. Becton stated that she may have said something that the officer perceived as rude, but the amount of force he used in tackling her, shoving her to the ground, and handcuffing her was an unnecessary, extreme in response. The officer pulled on Becton's braids and dug his knee into her back, as she screamed for her mom; Becton was a teenage girl who was barely 100 pounds and posed no physical threat to the officer. Additionally, Becton was wearing only a bathing suit, and Amuchie argues that Becton also faced sexual assault because of the level of her body's exposure along with the amount of brute force exerted over her by the officer when he sat on her. Predictably, the officer faced no criminal charges or expulsion from the police force; the officer eventually resigned but offered no apology upon doing so.

In Becton's story, we again see the incidence of racialized gender violence through the officer's violation of her hair. Becton was wearing braids, which is a prominent hairstyle within Black culture, and as Amuchie claims, does not fit within the confines of white beauty standards. Touching a Black woman's hair renders feelings of disrespect and notions of the historical

exploitation of their bodies and hair. The officer's additional forceful actions, especially regarding Becton's hair, further illustrate the necessity of intersectionality when looking at violence perpetrated against Black women.

Charnesia Corley

In August 2015 Charnesia Corley, a 21-year-old, was pulled over in a public parking lot because police officers claimed that her car smelled like marijuana. Corley was put in handcuffs and forced to sit in the back of the police vehicle while her car was searched. When the officers did not find anything in her car, they subjected her to a cavity search, in which they forced her to pull down her pants and allow them to put their hands inside her genitals. Corley stated that the officers used violent threats to get her to agree to the search; she later said that she felt violated, humiliated, and that she was sexually assaulted. Despite the horrific actions these officers took, this case, like other cases involving Black women, did not gain national attention. Amuchie (2016) connects the police violence in this case to the Jezebel type, which enforces the view of Black women as sexually deviant, and therefore, allows for them to be sexually exploited. Likewise, bell hooks wrote:

A primary reason the rape of black women has never received what little attention rape of white women receives is because black women have always been seen by the white public as sexually permissive, as available and eager for the sexual assaults of any man, black or white. The designation of all black women as sexually depraved, immoral, and loose had its roots in the slave system (Amuchie, 2016, p. 664).

As hooks explains, the Jezebel view is entrenched in its historical roots, in which Black women were abused and exploited.

Case Study Takeaway

Each of these case studies highlight the way in which Black women experience overlapping forms of discrimination, when the violence they face is both racialized and gendered. Racial hierarchies are maintained and upheld by the negative stereotypes about Black women that are perpetuated in social discourses. Another key point to note is that as Black women deviate more and more from what is the “societally accepted norm,” the more their visibility decreases. For example, for Black gay, non-binary, trans, or gender non-conforming individuals, their risk of marginalization and dehumanization increases (Amuchie, 2016), as these groups face even more complex discrimination, and their experiences lie at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. Though exploring the intersection of sexuality with race and gender falls out of the scope of this thesis, this topic would present another pertinent layer to analyzing the intersectionality and the experiences that are unique to these specific communities.

To address the issues highlighted in these cases, Amuchie (2016) recommends a list of initiatives that can be taken. These recommendations include the creation of a national database that documents police violence against Black women, creating safe environments for victims and survivors to share their stories, allocate funding to grassroots organizations that are already working towards community-based initiatives, and adopting intersectional approaches to legal remedies for Black women (2016, p. 668).

Broader Implications of Police Violence

Black people often carry the burden of having to explain to others the ways in which a recent police violence related death and structural racism are linked. Incidents that may cause stress include public reactions in which the victims of police violence are somehow blamed for their murders. Similarly, the prevailing mainstream underreaction to occurrences of police

brutality can be stressful for Black Americans who are expected to go about their daily lives, despite the possible trauma incurred from exposure to such news reports and videos (Alang et al., 2017, p. 663). Additionally, overall economic productivity in Black communities is decreased because of police violence. Loved ones have to take time away from work to grieve, attend funerals, and plan and organize protests. These events are directly related to police brutality and further take away from the limited resources Black communities have (because of structural racism). Financial strain in communities can be linked to incidents of police violence; this exhibits the ways in which police violence has social and economic effects.

Police brutality has a scope of impact that is much wider than the individuals who experience it firsthand. The unjust legal outcomes of incidents of police violence further advance the systematic disempowerment of Black communities. Excessive policing and impunity for the officers that perpetrate violence and brutality can elevate feelings of powerlessness in Black communities; these violent events also serve to send the message that there is little hope for justice (Alang et al., 2017, p. 663). Police violence has an impact on health through not only the individual actions of police officers, but also through the system of structural racism that exists to uphold white supremacy and continue cycles of oppression.

Power

Power structures are also very clearly at play in cases of police violence against minorities. In “The Gender of Police Violence,” Jones discusses a group meeting of Black boys from the community in which they talk about police aggression. She asks the boys if they feel that the police are there to protect them after witnessing an arrest; they respond with no and add that the police do not care if someone gets shot. When questioned about their feelings on power, one of the boys responds that he does not feel like he has any power. This sense of powerlessness

can stem from the “all-controlling” actions of police in the neighborhood, as well as the boy’s own sense of marginalization (2016, p. 26). Black women face the threat of street harassment, in addition to the threat of police violence; Patricia Hill equates this threat of violence to “an invisible cage of control (Jones, 2017, p. 27). When communities see officers, who perpetuated violence against members of the community, receive no legal consequences or disciplinary action, these power imbalances are further reinforced. The oftentimes legally inconsequential outcomes of cases of police violence create a view that enforces the control that police officers and the larger institution exercise over Black communities, continuing to foster senses of powerlessness.

The Role of Social Media

Movements like #SayHerName play an important role in bringing attention to incidents of police violence against Black Women; these movements also highlight the significant role that social media plays in circulating messages and bringing attention to issues. The #SayHerName movement took off following the death of Sandra Bland in 2015, in which she was pulled over for a traffic violation in Texas. She was taken to jail, and three days later, she was found hanging in her cell (Crump, 2019). Additionally, Crump highlights the differences in levels of public attention paid to the deaths of Black women compared to Black men because of police violence. Crump compares the story of Charleena Lyles to that of Philando Castile, in which Castile’s death was tweeted nearly seven times more than Lyles, though their deaths occurred less than a year apart. Several prominent public figures, including Bernie Sanders and Lin-Manuel Miranda, tweeted about Castile’s death, whereas Lyles’s case received no attention from prominent figures. Black women have experienced police violence in their homes, their cars, at popular eating establishments, and at their most vulnerable moments (Crump, 2019). With each added

intersection, Black women's marginalization increases, and it is as crucial as ever to bring light to the invisible victims of police brutality.

Circulation of viral videos of police violence towards both Black women and men presents an interesting paradox, in which it can maintain both racist and anti-racist ideologies. The mass circulation of these videos can help draw attention to the systematic violence that Black women face and bring more light to the issue in national discourses. However, the mass circulation of these images and videos can also lead to desensitization to the issue. The prevalence of violent videos can perhaps normalize these instances of dehumanization, which could potentially exacerbate the problem and further dull mainstream responses to issues of police violence and structural racism.

Conclusion

Exploring the unique position that Black mothers are put in when their children are brutalized or murdered at the hands of police demonstrates the intersectionality of the issue. Incidents involving the murder of Black men or boys often gain national attention, though this is not necessarily a positive attribute, as Black men and boys are often portrayed negatively in the media, even posthumously. I chose to explore how Black women, more specifically, are affected by police violence as they face erasure on the national scale and in mainstream discourses even when horrific events of brutalization and murder transpire. When accounting for racial justice and gender equality, Black women face the struggle of being marginalized by movements for both causes. Analyzing and understanding the structural factors behind police violence, especially against people of color and more specifically women, is key to understanding how cycles of systemic violence continue to be maintained and reinforced.

This paper draws on the analysis of five case studies to connect the occurrences of police violence and the negative stereotypes about Black women that were used to explain the occurrences. The Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes work to dehumanize and marginalize Black girls and women, further drowning out their voices and visibility. Each of the five cases illustrate different forms of violence that police employed against them, and each case represents the unique experience of a woman (or girl) of different age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location from the case before. Some of the cases demonstrated features of racialized gender violence, as the women's hair was turned into a site of violence. These cases further illustrated the intersectionality of the issue of violence against Black women and highlighted the need to work towards greater community-based interventions and legal solutions for Black women.

The final points of this paper address the broader implications of police violence that disenfranchise Black American communities, power structures, and the role of social media. This disenfranchisement stems from the forms of structural racism (with the institutions as actors) that are driving factors behind the incidents of police violence discussed, along with issues of power and control that the police hold. Aside from physical injuries and death, police violence can cause racist public reactions, financial and economic stress, and systematic disempowerment in Black communities. These far-reaching implications showcase how police violence affects the broader community and extends far beyond being an individual issue. Young Black Americans report feeling powerless when confronted with policing in their neighborhoods. The role of social media has been important in orchestrating movements like #SayHerName and #YouOkSis that bring attention to Black women who are affected by police violence. Creating national

discourses to address Black women's experiences is key in beginning to deconstruct the institutions and power structures that marginalize them.

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