

Motivations and Justifications of Intimate Partner Violence among Young Black Women Attending HBCUs

Naomi M. Hall*

Department of Psychological Sciences, Winston-Salem State University

Jason M. Jones

Department of Psychological Sciences, Winston-Salem State University

Danielle D. Dickens

Department of Psychology, Spelman College

This study examined the motivations and justifications of IPV engagement among 125 Black women ($M_{age} = 20.32$, $SD = 1.68$) attending Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs). Two research aims were assessed: 1) perceived motivations and acceptable justifications for IPV; and 2) relationships between the frequency of violence and contextual variables. We hypothesized that more IPV experiences would result in more behavior justification and increased sexual risk behavior. Additionally, we expected more IPV experiences would correlate with more psychological violence and constrained mate availability. Findings indicate significant relationships between increased IPV and justification of violence in relationships and increased sexual risk behavior. Furthermore, more IPV experiences resulted in increased psychological violence and less perceived mate availability. The Discussion and Implications sections emphasize the need to focus on motivations, justifications, and context of IPV involvement as a way to design culturally responsive prevention and intervention programming for Black women on HBCU campuses.

Keywords: Black women, IPV, HBCU, motivation, justifications

Within intimate partnerships, physical and sexual violence, psychological aggression, stalking, intimidation, and control are all considered intimate partner violence (IPV) (Al'Uqdah et al., 2016; Breiding et al., 2015). IPV, a public health issue in the United States, is often accompanied by adverse physical, psychological, or sexual behaviors and results in mental and physical health challenges for perpetrators and victims (Barrick et al., 2013; Center for Disease

Control and Prevention [CDC], 2018; Spencer et al., 2024; White & Satyen, 2015). In addition, women experiencing IPV often engage in risky sexual behaviors such as unprotected intercourse/inconsistent condom use, having multiple sexual partners, and have an increased vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections and/or unplanned pregnancies (Casey et al., 2016). Although most research on IPV focuses on risk factors, there is a growing recognition of the importance of identifying and understanding the underlying motivations for IPV (Kelley et al., 2015).

The Need to Understand Motivations and Justifications

Fiske (2004) defined motives as the “*underlying psychological processes that impel people’s thinking, feeling, and behaving*” (p. 14). Motives for engaging in aggressive behavior, generally, are categorized as *reactive* (e.g., self-defense) or *proactive* (e.g., controlling) (Caldwell et al., 2009). In college, IPV is a common occurrence and is often bidirectional (both partners exhibit violent behaviors) (Kaukinen et al., 2012; Littleton, 2014). There are several pathways that can contribute to IPV perpetration and victimization. Among women aged 18-25 at a large Southeastern U.S. state-funded university ($n = 3,699$), motivations behind IPV included losing their temper, making partners listen, making partners do as they wanted, and punishing partners (Whitaker, 2014). Walley-Jean and Sean (2009) found that Black women in college ($n = 82$, 74% from a historically Black women’s college) reported showing anger as a motive for IPV. In addition, self-protection, attention-seeking, emotional retaliation, and challenges with communication were also motives. These findings align with the literature on college students and IPV resulting from undeveloped negotiation and conflict resolution skills (Littleton, 2014).

People are motivated to justify their beliefs and feelings. When they engage in IPV, they will often try to convince themselves and others that it is the ‘right’ thing to do. This is especially true if an individual is experiencing cognitive dissonance about their conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. A review of literature by Zark and Satyen (2022) highlighted how students in the United States had less accepting views of IPV over those in other countries and emphasized the necessity to examine justifications among various cultural groups and norms to provide further context. For example, Crittenden et al. (2017) provided additional context on the complexities behind the justification of IPV behaviors. Among college students ($n = 1,645$, 9.1% Black), they found violence in relationships to be justified more by women than men, with Black participants being more likely to justify said behaviors. However, justification of IPV was more likely to occur in younger students. Although a single study, the authors demonstrate the importance of how belief systems can be associated with the acceptance of IPV, making further exploration of the motivational and justifying factors essential. IPV occurs because of a variety of circumstances, emotions, and culturally relevant and acceptable behaviors that may promote or inhibit violence. There is a need to explore sociocultural elements of the campuses, motives, and justifications, and students experiencing IPV to better inform violence prevention and intervention efforts (Al’Uqdah et al., 2016; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012). This study includes Black women college

students to provide further context and add to the literature on the motivations and justifications of IPV on campuses, particularly Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs).

Black Women College Students and IPV

IPV is highest among young adults aged 18-24, with the first occurrence affecting millions before the age of 25. Further, increased rates (ranging from 10%-50%) of IPV occur on college campuses, where the majority of students fall within this age group (Amar & Gennaro, 2005; Barrick et al., 2013; Daigle et al., 2019; Kaukinen, 2014). Black women attending college experience IPV more frequently with greater severity, are prone to more adverse outcomes than their non-Black counterparts and remain at heightened risk (Field et al., 2015; Walley-Jean, 2019; Whitfield et al., 2021). Empirical research, albeit limited, provides a scope into the thoughts and feelings (or the lack thereof) that Black women in college have towards IPV as one study examining IPV in a small group of Black college students ($n = 149$, 76 women) found that women were less likely to engage in IPV if they recognized dating violence behaviors or disapproved of violence (Bremond et al., 2014). Similarly, Walley-Jean (2019) found that Black women attending a minority-serving institution (MSI) perceived IPV to be more extreme when the violence was physical rather than verbal or psychological. Despite the more significant risks and experiences with IPV among Black women in college, existing literature only provides a small scope on the underlying processes and adverse outcomes that accompany said aggressive behaviors. Further, there is a lack of consideration of campuses where Black women are the majority.

Black Women at HBCUs and IPV

The research on Black women attending HBCUs is minimal; however, a few studies have focused on factors associated with aggression and violence. For example, Barrick et al. (2013) examined the experiences and prevalence of IPV among undergraduate women attending HBCUs and found that nearly two-thirds (64.7%) of the Black women surveyed reported having experienced IPV. These experiences were described as physical, sexual, and verbally controlling and demonstrated a significant degree of victimization among Black women. Further, several factors were associated with IPV victimization, such as alcohol, drug use, and mental health (Barrick et al., 2013). Similarly, sexual assault, a type of IPV, was reported with alcohol as a significant precursor by 264 undergraduate students (71% African American women) from an HBCU when Collington et al. (2019) examined its prevalence, correlates, and outcomes. They additionally found that Black women were more likely to experience adverse outcomes such as anxiety, symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, or flashbacks. Paat et al. (2021) also examined factors associated with IPV perpetration and victimization of Black women attending HBCUs. Those who reported more significant depressive symptomology experienced increased IPV victimization or perpetration. In addition, Black women were more likely to use illicit substances before sex, engaged in high-risk behavior (were less likely to use condoms), and

had adverse sexual experiences before or since enrolling in college than their non-Black counterparts. These studies, although limited, shed light on Black women's experiences with IPV at HBCUs. However, additional consideration is necessary to determine what precedes these IPV behaviors and leads to adverse outcomes (Barrick et al., 2013).

Examining IPV on HBCU campuses can provide the necessary starting point in the context of motivations and justifications for the target group. HBCUs are an essential landscape for exploring Black college students as campuses comprise nearly one-quarter of Black college graduates, surpassing the national average (Asher BlackDeer et al., 2022; Hall & Applewhite, 2013). HBCUs are unique in that they foster community, a sense of belonging, and a culture of traditions (Freeman et al., 2021).

HBCU campuses are enriched with cultural and social contexts that shed light on their impact on behavioral health (Asher BlackDeer et al., 2022). HBCU campuses are often geographically located in a close-knit Black community, where IPV is prevalent and complicated by many factors (Al'Uqdah et al., 2016). On most co-ed HBCU campuses, Black women outnumber Black men, and perceived mate availability (an individual's perceptions of the availability of mates with whom to engage on campus) is often limited (Hall et al., 2014). Although the gender-ratio imbalance (GRI) in the Black community is a concern that has been documented, the imbalance appears to be more pronounced in college settings (Longmire-Avital & Reavis, 2017; Stackman et al., 2016; Younge et al., 2013). With the disproportionate gender dynamics on most HBCU campuses, the GRI and perceived mate availability among women (especially those interested in Black men as mates) can present challenging cultural and environmental concerns as it relates to the decision-making and subsequent behavior of students (Johnson, 2017).

This study includes Black women college students to provide further context and add to the literature on the motivations and justifications of IPV on HBCU campuses. Further, this study aims to answer the following research questions: 1) Are the perceptions of IPV of Black women attending HBCUs based on the motivation(s) and acceptable justifications for IPV, and violence used by their partners? 2) Are there significant relationships between the occurrence of violent experiences with perceived mate availability and sexually risky behaviors?

Theoretical Foundation

To improve our knowledge about the IPV experiences of Black college women, we integrated concepts from the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and social justification model (Waltermaurer, 2012) into the comprehensive framework for understanding the influence of psychosocial and sociocultural factors related to IPV. The social cognitive theory (SCT), an expansion of the social learning theory, focuses on how cognitive appraisal processes interact with environmental challenges to facilitate behavior. Self-determination theory (SDT) is a theoretical framework for understanding human motivation and personality. SDT focuses on how social and cultural factors facilitate or undermine people's sense of volition, and how motivational orientation can influence behavior. According to SDT,

need fulfillment is an important driving force to engage in IPV (Neighbors et al., 2013; Patrick et al., 2007). The social justification model (SJM) posits that in cultural contexts where a higher proportion of the general population feels that IPV is justifiable, potential perpetrators will be more likely to feel they have the right. This may result in a higher incidence and prevalence of IPV. After an incident, in the cultural context that feels that IPV is justifiable, the victim is likely to agree that the abuse was justifiable, and as a result, less likely to report the abuse to a third party or allow a third party to intervene. Additionally, a victim may feel the abuse was justified if he/she is a part of the same community.

The perpetration and acceptance of IPV is a learned behavior; therefore, it is crucial to investigate factors that influence the progression of these behaviors. The authors maintain that certain environmental realities, such as perceived mate availability or the gender-ratio imbalance at HBCUs, play a significant role in decision-making, relationship maintenance and outcomes, and the interpersonal and social dynamics of Black women across the lifespan (Johnson, 2017). According to the SCT, reciprocal determinism is a dynamic, ongoing interaction between personal factors, behaviors, and the environment. Based on these tenets, the environment may help facilitate the development of beliefs and attitudes about IPV. Considering how gender ratio imbalances at HBCUs are related to high-risk behaviors, there is potential for those seeking a mate within a limited availability to undermine their sense of volition or compromise their acceptability of behaviors (Hall et al., 2014; Johnson, 2017) to fulfill perceived relationship needs.

Present Study

Despite the empirical recognition of the occurrence of IPV among women in college, an empirical gap remains considering different cultural groups and the precursors to these behaviors. It should be noted that IPV is known to occur at various ages, cultural backgrounds/diverse groups, geographic locations, and social strata, making specific examination essential despite the continued focus predominantly on White college students (Bagwell-Gray et al., 2015; Coulter et al., 2017; Wilson & Smirles, 2022). Using an intersectional approach to explore a deeper exploration of IPV in Black college women attending different types of institutions, such as HBCUs is essential.

This study aims to contribute to the literature on the experiences of IPV among Black college-aged women on HBCU campuses to provide an understanding of the sociocultural factors of IPV for evidence-based intervention while advancing equity, respect, and accountability (see Barrick et al., 2013; Hall et al., 2023; Russell et al., 2015). One of our primary research aims was to assess what participants perceived to be the motivation(s) and acceptable justifications for aggression and violence used by their partners. Additionally, we were interested in examining the significant relationships between the frequency of violent experiences and other relevant variables examined in the study. To complement these research aims, several hypotheses were also proposed:

1. Students with more experience of IPV would indicate a higher agreement for the justified use of force in relationships.
2. Students with more IPV experiences would also engage in more sexual risk behaviors.
3. Students with more constrained perceived mate availability will report more experiences with all forms of IPV (as measured by the five subscales of the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory [CADRI]).
4. Students with more constrained perceived mate availability would indicate experiencing more psychological violence, as measured by three subscales (threatening, relational, and emotional/verbal) of the CADRI, and the psychological subscale of the Abusive Behavior Index (ABI).

Method

Participants

The study included 125 Black college-aged women attending one of two co-educational HBCUs in the southeastern United States. One HBCU is a small, private HBCU and the other is a mid-sized, public HBCU. Originally, there were 140 participants who identified as a woman; however, 15 students were eliminated as they did not respond to questions inquiring about the incidence of IPV in the past 12 months or those about sexual risk behaviors. Student ages ranged from 18 to 24 ($M = 20.32$, $SD = 1.68$). Aggregated data from both campuses indicate most of the sample identified as heterosexual (79.8%), Christian (91.0%), and over half of the students (57.0%) lived on campus. Students reported experiencing an average of 2.05 ($SD = 1.87$) episodes of IPV victimization, with a range of 1-15 incidents, in the past 12 months. Almost half (47.5%) of the students experienced their first incident of IPV between the ages of 17-19. See Table 1 for sociodemographic information.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Information

Variable	<u>Entire Sample</u> (N = 125)
Mean Age (SD)	20.32 (1.68)
Range	18-24
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	79.8%
Lesbian/Bisexual/Questioning	20.2%
Educational Level	
Freshman/Sophomore	42.0%

Junior/Senior	57.0%
Current Relationship Status	
In a Committed Relationship	42.0%
In a Casual Relationship	15.0%
Not Currently Involved	40.0%
Age when first experienced violence within a romantic and/or sexual relationship	
I don't remember	11.1%
Less than 13	3.0%
Between 14-16	16.2%
Between 17-19	47.5%
Between 20-22	21.2%
Violent Experiences < 12 Months	
1 Incident	57.6%
2-4 Incidents	36.0%
5 or More Incidents	6.4%
Number of partners engaged in violence	
1	61.2%
2	25.5%
3 or more	7.1%

Note. All categories do not add up to 100% as some small categories were not included in the table.

Recruitment and Procedures

Students were eligible to participate in the study if they met the following inclusion criteria: 1) self-identified as Black and/or African American woman; 2) full-time college student at one of the participating co-ed HBCUs; 3) between the ages of 18-24; and 4) experienced at least one incident of violence involving a romantic or sexual partner in the past 12 months. Violence was defined on the recruitment material as follows: “*Violence includes physical violence (e.g., hitting, slapping, pushing), sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression (including coercive tactics, threatening).*” Students were recruited on campuses using methods (e.g., fliers) approved by both universities’ Institutional Review Board. Students who met the inclusion criteria were screened and given a survey code and the link to the online computerized quantitative assessment via SurveyMonkey. Once the survey code was entered, students were taken to the online consent form where they agreed to participate in the study and re-affirmed that they met the inclusion

criteria. The survey took participants between 15-25 minutes to complete. All students received a debriefing statement at the end of the survey. Additionally, they were given contact information in case of follow-up questions or concerns and provided with a gift card worth \$10 for their time and effort.

Measures

Sociodemographic information collected from participants included age, sexual orientation, religion, educational status, and current relationship status.

Violent Experiences

The completion of the open-ended question, “*How many different violent experiences have you had in the past 12 months?*” was required of all participants.

Sexual Risk Experiences

There were three dichotomous (yes/no) questions which included: 1) *Have you ever felt obligated to have sex with your partner?* 2) *Have you ever had sex with a partner you thought was having sex with someone else?* and 3) *Have you ever had a one-night stand with someone you didn't know very well?*

Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001)

The CADRI is a 35-item scale that asked participants how often they experienced each item in five different categories of abuse: *physical* ($\alpha = .84$), *threatening behavior* ($\alpha = .81$), *sexual* ($\alpha = .77$), *relational* ($\alpha = .79$), and *emotional/verbal* ($\alpha = .85$). Participants read statements that addressed experiences that may have taken place between their boyfriend or girlfriend (current or ex-) during an argument, and then indicated the response item that best estimated how often these things happened in the past year. An example of a threatening statement was “*He/she destroyed or threatened to destroy something I valued.*” The response items were: **Never** (this never happened in the relationship); **Seldom** (this only happened 1-2 times in the relationship); **Sometimes** (this has happened 3-5 times in the relationship); and **Often** (this has happened 6 times or more in the relationship). Higher scores indicate more experience with each category of abuse.

Motivation and Effects Questionnaire (MEQ; Follingstad et al., 1991)

The MEQ is a 13-item checklist (yes or no) assessing motives for and effects of physical force in romantic and/or sexual relationships. Participants were instructed to “*read the following list of possible motivations you believe were present for person who used force against you. Please*

check all that apply. If you were not the victim of violence, please skip this question.” Examples of motivations include “to show anger” and “retaliation for being hit first.”

Justification for Physical Aggression Scale (JPA; Follingstad et al., 1988)

The JPA is a 24-item scale ($\alpha = .97$) that asks participants to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement based on whether they believe each one would be justification for the use of force on a four-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Sample justifications include “need for control” and “in response for being hit first.” Higher scores indicate more agreement (i.e., justification) with using force.

Abusive Behavior Inventory (ABI; Shepard & Campbell, 1992)

The ABI is a 30-item inventory that measures the frequency of abusive behaviors. Participants indicated how often their partner committed the listed item over the past 12 months. For the purpose of this study, the period was modified from six months (original scale) to 12 months. The response options for each item were 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently) on two subscales: *physical abuse* ($\alpha = .92$) and *psychological abuse* ($\alpha = .89$). Higher scores indicate more frequent abuse in each category.

Perceived Mate Availability (PMA; Hall et al., 2014)

A 3-item scale ($\alpha = .86$) was developed to assess respondents’ perceptions of the availability of mates with whom to engage in a relationship on campus or in their community. A sample statement is, “*My opportunity for a romantic relationship with a man/woman is limited.*” Response options included 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicated less perceived availability of mates.

Data Analysis Plan

The researchers used IBM SPSS, version 28, for all analyses. The analyses took place in a multi-stage process, which included: 1) data cleaning, 2) descriptive analyses, 3) evaluating the psychometrics of the composite scales, and finally, 4) testing multivariate relationships. Per calculations provided by G*Power (Faul et al., 2009), our sample size ($N = 125$) had adequate power to detect a medium effect ($f^2 = .15$, $\alpha = .05$) with a model using two predictors (IPV experiences and perceived mate availability). The skewness and kurtosis for the scale scores did not depart from normality as the absolute skew value was less than 2 (ranged from .090 to 1.893) and the absolute kurtosis value was less than 7 (ranged from -.470 to 4.081). These are both acceptable values for medium-sized samples ($50 < n < 300$) (Kim, 2013). The percentage of missing data ranged from 2% to 8% on the variable scales and subscales, although data were more likely to be missing towards the end of the survey. Missing data were handled by listwise deletion.

Bivariate correlation analyses were run to identify the relationships between all variables of interest (see Table 2). Additionally, t-tests and regression analyses were used to test all relevant hypotheses. Differences based on sexual orientation were not projected initially nor included in the hypotheses; however, any significant post hoc t-test analyses are presented and discussed.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to testing our hypotheses, sociodemographic variables were analyzed for any significant relationships with selected measures and between the measures. Two predictors, age and sexual orientation, were found to have significant relationships with our measures. Age was positively and significantly related to two subscales on the CADRI: 1) Physical, $r(123) = .215$, 95% CI [.041, .377], $p = .016$; and 2) Threatening, $r(123) = .183$, 95% CI [.008, .348], $p = .041$. As age increased so did the likelihood of experiencing physical and/or threatening violence.

Our sample included a small number of students who identified as either lesbian, bisexual, or questioning. We combined those participants into one group (LBQ), along with all who identified as heterosexual in another group and ran an independent samples t-test. Results indicated that sexual orientation was significantly related to three subscales: 1) ABI Psychological; 2) CADRI Physical; and 3) CADRI Threatening. Students who identified as LBQ ($M = 47.40$, $SD = 16.45$, $n = 20$) reported significantly higher scores on the ABI Psychological subscale than those who identified as heterosexual ($M = 40.30$, $SD = 13.11$, $n = 79$), $t(97) = -2.050$, $p = .022$. The effect size, as measured by Cohen's $d = -0.51$, indicating a medium effect. The self-identified LBQ students ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 3.46$) also scored significantly higher on the CADRI Physical subscale than heterosexual students ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 3.14$), $t(97) = -2.233$, $p = .014$. Cohen's $d = -0.56$, also indicating a medium effect. Additionally, LBQ students ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 3.63$) scored higher on the CADRI Threatening subscale ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 3.43$), $t(97) = -1.582$, $p = .058$. Cohen's $d = 0.39$, indicating a medium, yet smaller effect than the two previous subscales. Taken together, this indicates that young women who identified as a sexual minority reported more experiences of psychological abuse, physical violence, and threatening behavior than those who identified as heterosexual.

Research Aims

Our first research aim was to assess what participants perceived to be the motivation(s), and acceptable justifications behind the aggression and violence used by their partners. Table 2 indicates the rankings of the motivations from the MEQ index. Participants endorsed an average of 7.41 ($SD = 2.68$) motives of violence utilized towards them in the past 12 months, with 3.3% of the participants endorsing all 13 motives (range 1-13). The top five motives identified by participants were (in rank order): 1) To show anger (84.3%); 2) To get control over partner (76.9%); 3) To feel more powerful (73.6%), 4) Retaliation for emotional hurt (73.6%) [tied], and

5) Displaced anger (71.9%). As we examined the data, we noted that three motives (inability to express self verbally, because of jealousy, and to punish a person for wrongdoing) co-varied with the top five motives.

We were interested in exploring the relationship between the MEQ index and acceptable justifications (as selected by participants) for the use of force in relationships. There are five justifications that at least one in five participants ‘*strongly agreed*’ were acceptable for the use of force: 1) intoxication (23.2%); 2) need for control (22.3%); 3) insecurity (22.3%); 4) in response to being hit first (21.4%); and 5) immaturity (20.5%). We also found the MEQ index and the JPA scale were significantly related to each other, $r(112) = .190$, 95% *CI* [-.363, -.005], $p = .045$. Additionally, significant relationships were identified between the MEQ index and the other measures of physical aggression and/or violence (i.e., ABI Physical, and CADRI Physical) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptives and Correlations for Motivations and Effects

Variable	%	<i>M (SD)</i>	JPA	ABI Physical	CADRI Physical
<u>Ranking</u>					
To show anger	81.6				
To get control over the other person	76.9				
In retaliation for emotional hurt	73.6				
To feel more powerful	73.6				
Anger displaced onto partner	71.9				
Due to an inability to express self verbally	67.8				
Because of jealousy	62.0				
To get attention	50.4				
To punish a person for wrong behavior	47.1				
To prove love	38.8				
To protect self (i.e., self-defense)	38.0				
In retaliation for being hit first	35.5				

Because it was sexually arousing	21.5			
MEQ Total Index	7.41(2.68)	.19*	.34***	.29**

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. JPA = Justification for Physical Aggression; ABI = Abusive Behavior Inventory; CADRI = Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationship Inventory.

Our second research aim was to examine the significant relationships between the frequency of violent experiences and other relevant variables examined in the study. Table 3 indicates the bivariate correlations between the scales of interest. Results indicate significant positive relationships between the number of times experiencing violence in the past 12 months with greater experiences of physical violence (as measured by both the ABI Physical and CADRI Physical subscales), psychological violence, threatening behavior, and emotional/verbal violence (all measured by the CADRI instrument).

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations among Study Variables.

Variable	M/SD (Range)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. IPV Experiences	2.05/1.87 (1-14)	-	.40**	.35**	.007	.06	.32**	.26**	.20*	.27*	.21*
2. CADRI Physical	3.74/3.40 (0-12)		-	.75**	.39**	.43**	.52**	.25**	.67**	.62**	.02
3. CADRI Threatening	4.18/3.48 (0-12)			-	.37**	.44**	.58**	.22*	.60*	.71**	.04
4. CADRI Sexual	2.74/2.84 (0-12)				-	.36**	.35**	.14	.63**	.49**	.04
5. CADRI Relational	1.96/2.52 (0-9)					-	.44**	.02	.49**	.59**	.35*
6. CADRI Emotional/Verbal	16.71/6.94 (0-30)						-	.29	.36**	.53**	.22*
7. JPA	53.33/20.21 (24-96)							-	.23*	.22*	.11

8. ABI Physical	15.38/7.12 (9-45)	-	.77**	.007
9. ABI Psychological	41.92/15.52 (20-100)	-		.11
10. PMA	9.80/4.50 (3-18)			-

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. CADRI = Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationship Inventory; JPA = Justification for Physical Aggression; ABI = Abusive Behavior Inventory; PMA = Perceived Mate Availability.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1: IPV Experiences and Justifications

Our first hypothesis was that students with more experiences of IPV would indicate a higher agreement for the justified use of force in relationships. To test this relationship, we ran a correlation between the predictor variable (IPV experiences) and the JPA scale. Our hypothesis was supported as there was a significant, positive relationship, $r(110) = .256$, 95% CI [.074, .421], $p = .007$. A linear regression model showed that the number of IPV experiences is a significant predictor of justification of the use of force in relationships, $F(1, 110) = 7.690$ $p = .007$, but the contribution of variance in the scores is small ($R^2 = .065$ and $R^2_{adj} = .057$).

Hypotheses 2: IPV Experiences and Sexual Risk Behaviors

Our second hypothesis was that students with more IPV experiences would also indicate more sexual risk behaviors. Our hypothesis was partially supported as IPV experiences were only significantly related to the question, *have you ever had sex with a partner you thought was having sex with someone else?* An independent samples t-test was conducted and those students who indicated they have felt obligated ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 2.21$) had significantly more IPV experiences than those who have not had sex with a partner who they thought was having sex with someone ($M = 1.54$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(92) = 2.741$, $p = .004$. The Cohen's $d = 0.48$, indicating a medium sized effect.

Hypotheses 3: Perceived Mate Availability and IPV Experiences

Our third hypothesis was that students with more constrained PMA (higher scores) would report more experiences with IPV. To test this relationship, we ran a correlation between PMA and IPV experiences. Our hypothesis was supported as there was a significant, positive relationship between the two variables, $r(102) = .215$, 95% CI [.021, .393], $p = .030$. A linear regression revealed that PMA was a significant predictor of the number of IPV experiences, $F(1,100) = 4.83$,

$p = .030$, but like hypotheses #1, the contribution of variance in the scores was small, $R^2 = .046$ and $R^2_{\text{adj}} = .037$.

Hypotheses 4: Perceived Mate Availability and Psychological Violence

Our fourth hypothesis was that students with higher scores on the PMA scale (more constrained availability) would indicate experiencing more psychological violence, as measured by three subscales of the CADRI (threatening, relational, and emotional/verbal) and the psychological subscale of the ABI. Our hypothesis was partially supported as more constrained mate availability was significantly related to the relational, $r(102) = .249$, 95% CI [.057, .423], $p = .012$, and emotional/verbal subscales, $r(102) = .221$, 95% CI [.028, .399], $p = .025$, but not the threatening subscale, $r(102) = .040$, 95% CI [-.156, .233], $p = .689$. The PMA scale was not related to the psychological subscale of the ABI, $r(102) = .106$, 95% CI [-.091, .294], $p = .290$. A linear regression revealed that perceptions of constrained mate availability were significant predictors of relational violence, $F(1,100) = 6.612$, $p = .012$ and emotional/verbal violence, $F(1,100) = 5.157$, $p = .025$. PMA contributed small amounts of variance in both relational violence, $R^2 = .062$ and $R^2_{\text{adj}} = .053$ and $R^2 = .049$ and $R^2_{\text{adj}} = .040$ for emotional/verbal violence.

Discussion

The current study extends the literature to quantitatively explore the motivations and justifications of IPV experienced by Black college women at HBCUs. In addition, we explored the relationship between the frequency of IPV and sexual risk behaviors, perceived male availability, and psychological violence. The findings from this research suggest the role of cultural and social factors situated within an HBCU context in the rate of IPV victimization among Black college women at an HBCU.

By extension of the social justification model (Waltermaurer, 2012) and with our hypotheses, an important finding was that there was a significant positive relationship between IPV experiences and more agreement with justifying the use of force within relationships. Accordingly, traditional gender roles within the Black community can place a burden on Black college women to be resilient and self-sacrificing (Green et al., 2024). Attitudes toward abuse aggression and violence in dating relationships are influenced by a multitude of factors such as childhood exposure to violence, cultural norms, and gender roles. Given the cultural norms around dating and relationships in the HBCU context (e.g., familial community), some Black college women may feel that their partner's actions are justifiable (Walley-Jean & Swan, 2014) and may be afraid to seek the appropriate help. Hall et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study with Black men and women at an HBCU about factors influencing dating experiences. Students noted that the gender ratio imbalance contributes to the high prevalence of casual relationships and lowered expectations for commitment within relationships. Previous studies with Black women at HBCUs suggest that some (when faced with low mate availability) may settle for less desirable partners,

yield relationship and sexual power, and tolerate disrespectful behavior and/or aggression to maintain the relationship (Alleyne & Gaston, 2010; Arnocky et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2014). This is particularly critical for co-ed HBCU environments where there is a disproportionate number of women. Additionally, this gives theoretical validity to the underpinnings of self-determination theory. Potential settling due to limited mate/dating options may provide arguable companionship but depleted psychological needs and increase the likelihood to, in turn, become a perpetrator (El-Bassel et al., 1998; Neighbors et al., 2013).

Consistent with our hypothesis, the results of the study also indicate that perceived mate availability significantly and positively predicted the number of IPV experiences. This finding aligns with previous studies that found that greater constrained perceived mate availability was positively associated with increased relational and emotional/verbal victimization among Black college women (Hall & Jones, 2022). With the greater female-to-male ratio at most HBCUs and due to the perceptions of availability of mates on a historically Black college campus, this may lead to feelings of being in competition with other Black women and less power in negotiating and maintaining relationships (Newsome & Airhihenbuwa, 2013). This finding extends the social determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) by illustrating that in this case, Black women at HBCUs women may feel like they have a lack of autonomy (or control), a basic psychological need. Thus, it can lead to engaging in unwarranted sexual behaviors to gain a sense of control. Additionally, studies show that those who perceive that they do not have many options for a mate may make more concessions to appease their partners (Arnocky et al., 2014) which is consistent with self-silencing (Jack & Dill, 1992). Based on the theory of silencing the self, an individual may engage in silencing behaviors, such as suppressing their feelings or putting the needs of others before their own, to maintain relationships and circumvent conflict in a relationship (Jack & Ali, 2010). With societal expectations for Black women to be in romantic relationships and given the low perceived mate availability, Black college women may self-silence by letting their partner get away with certain behaviors and/or suppressing their concerns in fear of losing the relationship, which could be related to the justification of experiences of IPV from their partners.

Our hypothesis that students with more constrained perceived male availability would indicate experiencing more psychological violence, was partially supported in that constrained availability was significantly related to the relational and emotional/verbal forms of violence but not the threatening behaviors. It is possible that more Black college students perceive dating violence to be more physical than psychological (Bremond et al., 2013). In line with the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), people learn through observing the actions of others. Perhaps, it is much easier to observe physical abuse than psychological abuse, and therefore, physical abuse may be more prominent among this sample of Black college women. With the tight-knit communities at HBCUs, some Black college women may be ashamed to discuss their experiences of different forms of violence, with the fear that their peers will find out.

Additionally, given that many of the participants indicated that their partners were motivated to engage in IPV behaviors to express anger, to get control over their partner, and to retaliate due to emotional hurt, it speaks to the various forms of physical and psychological

violence experienced by Black college women at HBCUs. Despite research indicating that psychological abuse is less identifiable than physical violence (McHugh et al., 2013), our participants identified the various motivations of IPV by their partners. Relatedly, our study was one of few studies that examined IPV among Black women LBQ identified students attending a HBCU. Same sex violence among college students, particularly among Black college women, is understudied; however the present study aimed to fill that gap. Consistent with previous research (Breiding et al., 2013), the findings showed that Black women students who identified as LBQ reported greater experiences of psychological and physical abuses, than students who identified as heterosexual. Due to the ways in which racism, patriarchy, and heterosexism positions Black women who identify as LBQ, it can further impact their experiences of IPV and them seeking IPV services and support (Brooks et al., 2021). When Black LBQ college women attend a HBCU, they may enter a college environment that is supportive of their race but may not be supportive of all their intersectional identities, such as their sexual minority status (Lewis & Eriksen, 2016). Further research should be explored to examine IPV experiences among Black sexual minority women and ways to enhance institutional support and resources among this group. These findings illustrate the importance of using an intersectionality approach to interrogate how HBCU Black college women's intersectional identities, across sexual orientations, influence identifying, preventing, and treating physical and psychological violence among this group (Crenshaw, 1989; Mills et al., 2018).

Lastly, we found partial support for Black college women in the sample who felt obligated to have sex with their partner had more IPV experiences. These findings are consistent with previous findings where Black college women who reported more acceptability of abuse, experienced more sexual abuse. (Hall & Jones, 2022). Overall, the present results are aligned with previous studies examining the role of cultural and social factors on Black college women's experiences of IPV (Barrick et al., 2013; Hall et al., 2023; Seth et al., 2010). Most importantly the current study provides a unique addition to the literature by focusing on the IPV experiences of Black college women in the HBCU context.

Limitation and Future Directions

Though this research yielded significant findings in its examination of motivation and justification of Black college women's experiences with IPV, there are a few limitations to the current study. This study is cross-sectional, and we are unable to determine causality, behavior over time, or direction of the relationship between IPV experiences, sexual risk behaviors, perceived male availability, and psychological violence among Black college women at HBCUs. Thus, researchers should conduct longitudinal studies exploring physical and/or sexual intimate partners or dating violence and psychological violence overtime in college. Also, there may be potential biases in self-reporting. Due to social desirability, participants may have given answers that they perceived to be more socially acceptable, given the nature of the questions of IPV experiences. Another limitation is that the justification and motivation measures, while valid and

reliable, may not have addressed all the dating cultural norms for Black college women at HBCUs. Future researchers should develop and validate culturally relevant measurements around motives and justification for the use of force for Black college women at HBCUs. Given the significance of intersectional identities, there may be other variables not measured, that researchers should explore, that could help us better understand Black college women's IPV experiences at HBCUs, such as self-objectification and body shame, which has been found to be positively associated to IPV among women broadly (Davidson & Gervais, 2015). We were unable to stratify and analyze our results by campus. Almost 85% of our participants came from one campus, thus we present aggregated data. Future studies will seek to obtain more balanced samples so that cultural and contextual factors related to campus environments can be adequately discussed. Lastly, it would be important for future research to include more diverse forms of methodology such as qualitative methods (e.g., interviews) and daily diary methodologies (studying individual's experiences and behaviors in real time over a set period of time). It is essential to explore and measure different definitions of violence experienced by Black college women who have experienced IPV.

In this study, the Black women sampled attended one of two HBCUs, and thus the generalizability to Black women attending other HBCUs may be limited because of potential variance in institutional and location differences (e.g., co-ed vs. single sex, private vs. public, HBCU consortium, rural vs. urban). Moreover, researchers should also investigate the IPV experiences and perceived male availability among Black college women attending women's HBCUs or how being situated near several other HBCUs may impact their experiences. As such, within a HBCU consortium, though the schools may have shared classes, their Title IX policies are different, further complicating IPV experiences and reporting. Consequently, it will be important to understand how HBCU Black college women's perceived male availability, past relationship experiences, and views on dating scripts around aggression and violence might impact their experiences and perceptions of IPV at their respective institutions. However, we believe that the strengths, significance, and novelty of the findings presented here outweigh these weaknesses.

Implications for Higher Education

In contributing to the current dialogue around Black college women's IPV experiences at HBCUs, this research highlights some factors that may predict the prevalence of IPV among Black college women. Understanding the unique experiences of IPV among Black college women is crucial. Past research suggests that Black college women have reported a range of IPV experiences, such as physical, sexual, and verbal abuse (Barrick et al., 2013), which is associated with adverse health outcomes, such as anxiety and depressive symptoms (Lindquist et al., 2016). Additionally, Black college women who are victimized due to IPV experiences may report lower levels of self-esteem and greater symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Mills et al., 2018). Especially, when IPV experiences of Black college women are silenced, going unnoticed or unaddressed, it can further lead to greater psychological damage (West, 2002). It is critical for all institutions, including HBCUs, to develop prevention programming educating Black college students and the

entire campus community, including faculty and staff, about the seriousness of physical, psychological, and verbal forms of violence experienced by Black college students.

Advocating for Culturally Responsive HBCU Campuses

Culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs addressing basic knowledge, types of IPV, dating cultural norms at HBCUs around mate availability, acceptance of violence, and communication and conflict resolution skill-building are critical (Hall et al., 2023). Building on the variables examined in this study regarding IPV, gender-ratio imbalances and sexually risky behaviors are empirically recognized to have adverse outcomes for Black women at HBCU campuses (Johnson, 2017). Further, despite its limited standing, previous literature on Black women at HBCUs documents the complexity of contextual factors associated with IPV (Barrick et al., 2013; Lindquist et al., 2016; Paat et al., 2021) that are not reported and/or result in poor/or lack of interpersonal communication (Collington et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2023). It is essential to provide mandated programs for faculty, staff, and incoming and continuing students, granting clarity and understanding of motivations, justifications, and risk factors for IPV on HBCU campuses. Recommendations for prevention and intervention programs at HBCUs include, but are not limited to, annual mandated violence prevention training for faculty, staff, and students, invited Title IX prevention and intervention programming in college courses, development of a course on Violence against Women, and faculty and staff interview questions around gender-based discrimination.

Programs that consider Black college women's understanding and asserting their rights are also essential. Due to Black college women being at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, they are more susceptible to experiencing misogyny, violence, and prejudice (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). Further, when experiencing IPV, Black women often face barriers in their pursuit of help (Lacey et al., 2021) and describe minimization and silencing on HBCU campuses (Hall et al., 2023). HBCUs must create a culture and space where Black college women and other students feel safe to come forward about any experiences of violence and get the necessary resources they need without judgment or fear of retaliation. Increased attention must be paid to an unspoken 'culture of silence' in some spaces. The silencing of Black women is sometimes steeped in stereotypes such as being a 'Strong Black Woman' or a desire to not get anyone in trouble and 'put them in the system.' More research regarding the IPV experiences of Black college women at HBCUs and their attitudes and perceptions around violence and support offered on campus (e.g., Title IX Office) are needed to protect and respond better to young Black women. For some HBCUs, there is pressure to protect the reputations of their institutions, which further impacts how they might address and handle cases of racialized gender-based violence and harassment (Njoku & Patton, 2017). HBCUs must critically assess how they support Black women on (and off) campus and strategies to address this growing concern.

Authors Note

Naomi M. Hall <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6009-0050>
Jason M. Jones <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2166-1812>
Danielle D. Dickens <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8756-4532>

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Dr. Naomi M. Hall-Byers at drhallbyers@gmail.com

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