GENDERING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV): IMPLICATIONS FOR CARIBBEAN RESEARCH

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The 1970s can be described as a watershed in feminist scholarship and activism on violence against women in intimate relationships. Since then, intimate partner violence (IPV) has been constructed as a major social problem. This paper critically examines how knowledge about IPV has been produced since the 1970s. Here, I briefly consider the implications of these developments for researching IPV in the Caribbean. Among social scientists, there has been great variation in theorising, researching and responding to violence in intimate relationships. The epistemological approaches to IPV draw from a range of knowledge fields, including (but not limited to) Feminism, Positivism, Realism, and Poststructuralism. Although these are often presented as competing epistemologies, many studies have combined several of these approaches in theorising IPV. I examine those positivist based approaches to measurement which has created a split between family violence (FV) and violence against women (VAW) researchers. The former contend that there exists symmetry in the perpetration of violence in heterosexual relationships, while the latter argue the reverse. Missing from purview of FV researchers is a focus on the context in which IPV occurs. Also, there is no analysis of the interstices of gender and IPV in FV research. This paper calls for a focus on the meanings men and women attach to their experiences of violence in heterosexual relationships. By analysing these epistemologies and methodologies, this paper proposes a feminist-discursive approach to the study IPV in the Caribbean.

Keywords: intimate partner violence (IPV), epistemological, epistemologies, methodologies, feminist, feminist-discursive, Feminism, Positivism, Realism, Poststructuralism, family violence (FV), violence against women (VAW)

Introduction

The 1970s can be described as a watershed in feminist scholarship and activism on violence against women in intimate relationships. Since then, intimate partner violence (IPV) has been constructed as a major social problem. This paper critically examines how knowledge about IPV has been produced since the 1970s. Positivism has dominated much of the work on intimate partner violence and has, in some studies, led to very contradictory findings on the nature and prevalence of IPV. The study privileges those epistemologies that lead to focus on cultural specificities and gender relations in the study of IPV. Consequently, the paper speaks to the utility of qualitative research in the study

of IPV. Although qualitative methods are quite varied, this paper will limit its focus to in-depth interviews. Furthermore, the current work considers the implications of these developments for researching IPV in the Caribbean. To be more precise, the paper begins to explore the value of a 'feminist-discursive' approach to the study of the meanings Caribbean men and women produce about their experiences of violence within intimate relationships.

Among social scientists, there has been great variation in theorising, researching and responding to violence in intimate relationships. The epistemological approaches to IPV draw from a range of knowledge fields, including (but not limited to) Feminism, Positivism, Realism, and Poststructuralism. Although these are often presented as competing epistemologies, many studies have combined several of these approaches in theorising IPV. In addition, methodologies used in researching IPV have been quite diverse. Much of the qualitative research has relied on victims' accounts and, to a lesser extent, interviews with perpetrators, for understanding the problem of intimate partner violence. Very few studies have focused on the meanings that both partners attach to their experiences with violence in heterosexual relationships. Several quantitative studies have been done in North America and the United Kingdom using official statistics and victim surveys. These are usually characterised by positivism. Official statistics tend to significantly underestimate the incidence of IPV, and survey research results tend to vary significantly because they use different instruments to measure this phenomenon. Incongruence in the conceptualisation of violence in intimate relationships has resulted in

the development of two distinct views on the perpetration of violence in intimate relationships.

Positivist Dilemmas in the Study of IPV

From the 1970s onwards, much of the research on IPV has been dominated by positivist based epistemologies. Highlighting the widespread nature of violence against women in intimate relationships, some positivist based studies offer support for activists and researchers alike in their attempt to provide facilities for victims and reformative programmes for perpetrators. However, Positivism seeks to determine the "truth value" of statements (Thompson et al. 1989). This becomes important to note especially when we begin to analyse how knowledge about IPV has been contradictorily produced. The meta-assumptions that underlie positivist methods can be traced back to "the global philosophical rubric of 'Cartesian' or 'rationalism'" (Thompson et al. 1989, 134). In this schema, the central purview is that 'reality' can be deduced and mathematically presented (Thompson et al. 1989). Several studies of IPV rely on positivist approaches in their attempt to quantify and define violence in intimate relationships (Hampton and Gelles 1994; Wilt and Olson 1996; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000; Rand and Saltzman 2003; Xu 2005). Knowledge production of this orientation also focuses on the aetiology of IPV by analysing how a series of variables might be related to this phenomenon (Kesner et al 1997; Mauricio and Gormley 2001; Brownridge 2003; Caetano et al 2003; Whitfield et al 2003; Holtzworth-Munroe and Meehan 2004; Schafer et al 2004; Skuja and Halford 2004; Xu 2005). Dobash and Dobash (1981, 184) note that

> most efforts have used a logical positivist methodology . . .
> oriented to the construction of abstracted concepts, theories and

> conceptual schemes . . . The empiricists' and reductionists' research in this area has focused on the distribution of the problem in society and sought to establish the distinct psychological or social characteristics of the offenders and/or victims.

As Dobash and Dobash (1981) explain, some positivist approaches to the study of IPV set out to establish causation. An example of this approach is Schaefer et al. (2004) work on the impact of drinking problems, impulsivity[1], and a history of childhood physical abuse on both male-to-female (MFIPV) and female-to-male intimate partner violence (FMIPV) in the United. They found that higher levels of childhood physical abuse were associated with higher levels of impulsivity, greater probability of alcohol problems, and higher levels of IPV reports. Studies have also been done on establishing typologies of men who are violent in marital relationships. Holtzworth-Munroe and Meehan (2004) for example, offered three categories for situating the level of violence these men engage in: family-only (FO); dysphoric or borderline (DB); and generally violent and anti-social (GVO). However, they admitted that typologies could be abused in the law, as they can place victims at further risks (for example, by suggesting that a woman can return home because her husband falls into the category of FO). As they would caution, "the majority of men fall along dimensions of theoretical importance rather than forming distinctly identifiable groups" (Holtzworth-Munroe and Meehan 2004, 1378).

Like in the case of the above examples, several quantitative studies set out to test the relationship of an independent variable or variables to the occurrence of IPV (defined as the dependent variable). It is difficult, if not impossible, to investigate all of the factors that might be related to the occurrence of IPV in any single study. For instance, when the

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[1] Impulsivity, in this study, is defined as an inability to regulate certain behaviours, such as aggression.

correlation between impulsivity, drinking problems and childhood physical abuse, and IPV is tested it excludes about the other factors, such as socio-economic status and education. Another researcher may argue that socio-economic status and education are salient variables in the occurrence of IPV. This is not to suggest that researcher should abandon their pursuits to understand the nature of IPV. Instead researchers ought to engage in a debate about the different ways of knowing and their implications for the kinds of findings produced.

One of the most contentious debates to emerge from the study of IPV is whether or not there exists symmetry in the perpetration of violence in intimate heterosexual relationships. Dobash and Dobash (326) identify two distinct approaches to the study of IPV: (1) the 'family violence' (FV) approach, and (2) the 'violence against women' (VAW) approach. While several studies report that men are the main perpetrators of IPV in heterosexual relationships, there are over 100 empirical studies suggesting that IPV rates for men and women are equivalent (Kimmel 2002). FV researchers contend that there is symmetry in the perpetration of violence in heterosexual relationships, whereas VAW researchers argue that men are the main perpetrators of IPV. This debate has dominated much of the scholarship on violence in intimate relationships. Disagreement among researchers about how violence between intimate partners should be defined and measured has led to differences in the findings on the prevalence and nature of IPV. What is rather striking about these variations in findings is that, in many cases, they are underpinned by an epistemology that purports to capture the reality of human experiences, through the use of large scale surveys.

The schism is partly a result of two different approaches to measuring IPV through the use of large-scale surveys: (1) crime victimisation surveys, and (2) family conflict survey based on the conflict tactics scales (CTS) and the revised conflict tactics scales (CTS2) (Kimmel 2002). Using victim surveys, Rand and Saltzman (2003) analysed data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted by the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics to examine the nature and extent of recurring IPV. For their study, they identified and counted all incidents of IPV sustained by each female respondent within each six month reference period. They found that for the period of 1992-99 there were 7,266,460 intimate partner victimisations against women or an average of 908 000 per year. For this period, women were victims of IPV at an average annual rate of 8.1 violent victimisations per 1000 women age 12 or older. The study goes on to identify the number of times that women were victimised and the nature of women's victimisation. For the full reference period, 91% of all victims reported they had been victimised 5 or fewer times and about 2% of all victims said they had been victimised more than 20 times during the previous six months. In terms of the nature of IPV, about 68% of all incidents were classified as simple assaults and about 16% were aggravated assaults. They concluded that the NCVS data demonstrate that recurring IPV is a significant component of IPV in the United States. A quarter of the victims in this survey were victimised at least two times during the period. The findings this particular survey suggest that women tend to suffer significantly more than men as a result of IPV.

The problem with victim surveys is that they only ask about the violence that individuals experience and/or report to the authorities that they consider to be a crime; missing, of

course, a range of acts that are not perceived or reported as crimes (Kimmel 2002). However, based on the reports from these surveys, and as exemplified in the study by Rand and Saltzman (2003), men perpetrate the vast majority of violence in intimate heterosexual unions. FV researchers on the other hand point to symmetry in the perpetration of violence in intimate heterosexual relationships.

In 1979 Murray Straus published a paper entitled "Measuring Intrafamily Conflict and Violence: The Conflict Tactics (CT) Scales," in which he describes the purpose of the CTS and the concepts which underpin this measurement instrument (Straus 1979). Straus (1979) explains that the CTS as a measure of violence is based on three modes of dealing with conflict. The first is the use of rational discussion and this is measured by the "Reasoning" scale. Secondly, the use of verbal and nonverbal acts with the intent to hurt someone is measured by the "Verbal Aggression Scale." Finally, he explains that the "Violence" scale measures the use of physical force against another person as a means of resolving conflicts. The CTS measures both the behaviour of the respondent and the behaviour of their partner. It attempts to show "the extent to which specific acts of physical violence, have been used. The CTS is not intended to measure attitudes about conflict or consequences of using violent tactics" (Straus et al.1996, 284). In the revised version of the CTS (the CTS2) they increased the number of questions in each scale to enhance content validity, and they added a sexual coercion scale and an injury scale (Straus et al. 1996). In spite of these revisions, the CTS has been criticised, mainly for its inability to contextualise violence occurring in intimate relationships (Dobash et al. 1992; Nazroo 1995; Dobash et al 1998; Kimmel 2002; Dobash and Dobash 2004).

Research generated from CTS-based measures has attracted a great deal of attention both in academic circles and the media (Dobash et al. 1992). Such research has been to substantiate the claim that there exists symmetry in the perpetration of violence by men and women in intimate heterosexual relationships. Dobash and Dobash describes (2004, 327) the CTS as an 'act-based' approach which assumes an individual will "provide unbiased, reliable accounts of their own violent behaviour and that of their partner." These responses are treated as unproblematic and are used to estimate the prevalence of IPV and to develop explanatory frameworks (Dobash et al. 1992; Dobash et al. 1998; Dobash and Dobash 2004).

It is also important to note that the CTS, in all of its manifestations, only counts violent acts, and fails to address the context in which violence occurred (Dobash et al. 1992; Nazroo 1995; Dobash et al 1998; Kimmel 2002; Dobash and Dobash 2004). The motivations for and the consequences of violence are left unaddressed. Nazroo (1995, 478) opines that "it [the CTS] obscures the context in which any violence occurs." It does not consider who initiates the violence, the nature of the relationship and the size and strength of those involved (Kimmel 2002). It is only in the area of physical injury that differences in male and female perpetrated violence have been revealed. The 'act-based' approach has been unable to determine the reason for these differences, except to suggest that a strike by a male is more damaging than one by a female (Nazroo 1995). FV researchers admit that women are between six and ten times more likely than men to report physical injuries, as well as, emotional and psychological effects, as a consequences of their male partners' violence towards them (Dobash and Dobash 2004).

Used alone, the 'act-based' approach is too narrow to address the problem of IPV. It does not consider the context, consequences and intensions associated with violent acts. Also, left uncovered are the meanings and consequences of violence for victims and perpetrators (Dobash and Dobash 2004).

In addition, the CTS has been critiqued for conflating violent physical and sexual acts with non-violent acts of abuse, such as shouting; the effect of which is to refer to these acts collectively as either 'violence' or 'abuse' (Dobash and Dobash 2004). The conflation occurs when defining the problem to be studied, when measuring 'acts' and when reporting findings (Dobash and Dobash 2004). A respondent only has to admit to committing one of these 'acts' in a given year to be considered violent. They explain that it is a matter of how these terms are defined and what actually counts as violence. Dobash and Dobash (2004) differentiate between violence and abuse by suggesting that violence refers to malevolent physical and sexual acts used to inflict physical or psychological harm, whereas abuse includes, but is not limited to violent acts. Abuse entails non-physical acts, used with the intent of frightening, intimidating and coercing the victim (Dobash and Dobash 2004).

Apart from the apparent lack of any contextual analysis of violence and a failure to adequately define concepts, studies that find symmetry in the perpetration of violence between intimate partners fail to analyse gendered negotiations in these relationships. Straus (1979, 85) himself argues that "the importance of the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) stems from the assumption that conflict is an inevitable part of all human

association, including that of the family." However, CTS or 'act-based' studies avoid any analysis of these "human associations."

VAW researchers argue that in order to understand violence it ought to be studied in the context of intimate relationships (Dobash and Dobash 1984; Dobash et al. 1992; Nazroo 1995; Dobash et al 1998; Kimmel 2002; Dobash and Dobash 2004). In fact, Dobash and Dobash (1984 and 2004) advocate a focus on the wider context of actual violent events occurring in these relationships. In their own work they found that "men's physical and sexual violence against women is often associated with a 'constellation of abuse' that includes a variety of additional intimidating, aggressive and controlling acts" (Dobash and Dobash 2004, 328). On the other hand, women's violence is often associated with self-defence and retaliation against years of physical abuse from male partners (Dobash et al. 1992; Nazroo 1995; Dobash et al 1998; Kimmel 2002; Dobash and Dobash 2004). The 'act-based' approach to researching IPV "assumes that gender is not related to the perpetration of violence nor to accounts provided about such events" (Dobash et al. 1998, 384). Whereas FV researchers find sexual symmetry in the occurrence of IPV, VAW researchers have found that men are the main perpetrators of violence, in terms of the nature and extent this phenomenon. Research using this approach usually includes an analysis of gender within relationships. Like Dobash et al (1998), Kimmel's argues that

> what is missing, oddly from these claims of gender symmetry is
> an analysis of gender. By this I mean more than simply a tallying
> up of which biological sex is more likely to be a perpetrator or
> victim. I mean an analysis that explicitly underscores the ways in
> which gender identities and gender ideologies are embodied and
> enacted by women and men. Examining domestic violence
> through a gender lens helps to clarify several issues (1344).

Studies that depend solely on survey data are intended to provide insight into the magnitude of the problem of IPV. However, many of these studies fail to address the issue of power in relationships where IPV is used to resolve disputes. Although surveys provide a useful means of data gathering, they also miss nuances that exist in individual experiences. In short, while these studies are useful in pointing out the magnitude of the problem, we learn much less about an individuals' involvement in IPV. The qualitative research in the field often allows individuals to speak to their immediate experience with IPV. The focus here is less about the accuracy of the accounts and more about what we can learn about how victims and perpetrators construct and presents themselves. This way we are afforded a window into discourses and ideologies that inform the practice of IPV.

Gendering IPV

Most qualitative studies adopt the VAW approach to the study of IPV, in their attempt to contextualise this phenomenon. Qualitative research facilitates a focus on cultural specificities in people's experiences of IPV. The purpose of most of these studies is not to generalise about populations, but rather, to extend theoretical perspectives on IPV. Nash (2005) is especially suspicious of universalising women's experiences of IPV. In fact, she argues that "social hierarchies, community mores, and race/gender development [are] key agents in the organization of abuse" (Nash 2005, 1423). Qualitative studies on IPV are underpinned by a variety of epistemologies, and they provide deeper understandings of the problem. Rather than reducing the study of IPV to finding causal

links or counting incidents, these approaches are more concerned about the meanings of violence in intimate relationships.

It is difficult to ignore the notions of gender which feature in the explanations individuals offer for the violence they commit and/or experience. The use of the sign 'gender' has become so commonplace that it is worth spending some time clarifying how it should be understood in the context of IPV research. Barriteau (2001, 25) speaks to the confusion which arises when the term gender is used in both popular and academic discourses

> at the one level gender has come to stand for erroneously as a trendier synonym for the biological differences and signifiers implied by the word 'sex'. Now, on almost all questionnaires there is the mandatory category 'gender' in which one is supposed to reply male or female.

She is careful to note that the sign 'gender' has been used historically in the grammatical sense (masculine gender, feminine gender and neuter gender), deriving its identity in the disciplines of biology, linguistics and psychology. However, feminist scholarship reconceptualised the term to signify the complex social relations between men and women that is historically characterised by a disproportionate distribution of power (Barriteau 2001). She defines gender as

> complex systems of personal and social relations through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to, or are allocated status, power and material resources within society (Barriteau 2001, 26)..

These power relations feature within intimate unions. Dobash and Dobash (1997, 268) point to four main sources of conflict leading to attacks by men against their female partners: "men's possessiveness and jealously, men's expectations concerning women's

domestic work, men's sense of the right to punish 'their' women for perceived wrongdoing, and the importance to men of maintaining or exercising their position of authority." A recurring motif in several qualitative investigations of IPV is the issue of power. Many of these themes mentioned by Dobash and Dobash (1997) repeat themselves in studies done on individuals' accounts of violence (Dobash and Dobash 1979, 1998 and 2004; Eisikovits and Buchbinder 1999; Gilgun and McLeod 1999; Anderson and Umberson 2001, Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004; Hadeed and El-Bassel 2006).

Victim accounts have been the main focus of IPV research. It is argued that this has the effect of deflecting attention away from men who are the most frequent perpetrators of violence in intimate relationships (Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004). Anderson and Umberson used a theoretical framework which characterises gender as performance. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler (1999) they found that the men in their study "attempted to construct masculine identities through the practice of violence and the discourse about their violence that they provide" (Anderson and Umberson 2001; 359). They contend that the subjective accounts provided by men about their violence against their female partners reveal the ongoing gender practices of men in general. Similarly, a study conducted by Gilgun and McLeod (1999, 2) reveals that men's accounts of their violence contain "numerous illustrations of the intersection of culture and individual agency." They note the importance of identifying the particularisations of culture in men's discourse of the violence they perpetrate (Gilgun and McLeod 1999). This is imperative in determining the different cultural practices and social languages men draw

on in the construction of their gendered identities and how this might be linked to their perpetration of violence in relationships. These studies privilege men's narratives, highlighting the importance of men's discourses in the study of the violence they commit against their female partners.

Within recent times more studies have emerged that consider both men's and women's accounts of violence (Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004; Dobash and Dobash 2004; Dobash et al. 1998; Nazroo 1995). Dobash et al (1998) conducted work on violence against women in intimate relationships by examining the accounts of men and women. Using a context specific approach, they found that there was significant discordance between male and female respondents in the reporting of this violence. The differences were even more pronounced when they compared men's and women's reports of frequent violence acts. Men tended to minimise the violence they perpetrated against their partners. In a subsequent study, Dobash and Dobash (2004) they applied the context specific approach to study both men's and women's use of violence intimate relationships. Rather than limiting the focus to 'acts' (as is the case when using the CTS), they focused on violent events. In the interviews done with 95 women and 95 men "the overall pattern [was] one in which men and women generally agree that *men's violence* is 'serious' or 'very serious' and that *women's violence* is 'not serious' or 'slightly serious'" (Dobash and Dobash 2004, 340). Women tended to be fearful of men's violence, whereas men often defined women's violence towards them as insignificant (Dobash and Dobash 2004; Anderson Umberson 2001). Women also spoke of acting in self-defence when they used violence in their relationship. This is important to note as these contextual insights are

not addressed in CTS-based studies of IPV. Studies by Dobash et al (1998) and Dobash and Dobash (2004) emphasise the need to study violence in the context of the intimate relationships. They also begin the process of exploring the ways in which gender and IPV intersect.

Other studies have focused more specifically on the interstices of gender and IPV. Eisikovits and Buchbinder (1999) examined the accounts of female victims of IPV and found that in the interviews women offered a range of responses to men's violence. By focusing on metaphors presented in these accounts they demonstrate that women's responses range from rationalising men's violence, self blame, to rejection of excuses offer by men. In short, women's responses were multiple,. However, they submit that "a key motif in women's linguistic construction of reality is related to the concept of control" (Eisikovits and Buchbinder 1999, 848). To this end they choose to focus on control and self-control in the relationships. Using an approach that borrows from phenomenology and constructivism, they adopt a theoretical framework that conceptualises language and linguistic symbols as a medium for constructing social reality (Eisikovits and Buchbinder 1999). They focus on the meanings these metaphors give to violent events and the associated context in which violence occurs. Language structures and organises our experience of reality by creating a sense of continuity and coherence (Eisikovits and Buchbinder 1999). They believe that "the use of metaphors is not random, but rather, it reflects the deeper existential and social meanings of the user that cannot be understood in any alternative thinking mode" (Eisikovits and Buchbinder 1999, 846).

According to Eisikovits and Buchbinder (1999) representativeness and generalisability are of lesser concern than the depth that can be gleaned from these accounts along with the opportunity to capture a wide variety of life experiences. The latter is informed by the phenomenological orientation of the study of IPV. They noted that women perceived their male partners as being in a constant struggle for self-control and they rationalise their partners' violence as a result of a failure in the struggle for control. To this end, the women tended to use metaphors of explosion to show men's "emotional states are translated into physical effects" (Eisikovits and Buchbinder 1999, 854). Some women explained that the person who attacked was someone different from the person the lived with. The metaphor of a stranger allowed women to rationalise men's violence as the result of a split personality makes it easier for them to live with it.

Using a combination narrative and discourse analytical techniques to examine the accounts of men and women, Boonzaier and de la Rey found that participants construct particular gender identities that are sometimes contradictory and ambiguous. They contend that respondents tend to perform gender and enact hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity in their talk about violence. These findings are supported by Anderson and Umberson (2001) who analysed men's accounts of IPV and found that their narratives contained discourses of masculinity and femininity and, in their accounts, these are relationally defined. These accounts also point to broader socio-cultural mechanisms that construct violence against women in intimate relationships as a serious social problem. They argue that men's use of violence serves to reinforce hegemonic masculinities (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004). "Women

typically described the violence in terms of consequences (such as fear and injury), whereas men most often described the functions of violence" (Boonzaier and de le Rey 2004, 446).

By performing masculinity through violence men also encourage performance of femininity by their partners (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004). However, these are also differentially defined in men's speech: masculinity as authority and femininity as subordination (Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004). Issues of power arise as seen when men suggest that women usurp their positions by disrupting the binary opposition of masculinity as authority and femininity as submission (Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004). Disruptions to these traditional relations of gender are used, in many instances, to justify violence against women in intimate relationships. Their analysis also reveals that "men used particular strategies to characterise their partners as 'masculinised' . . . controlling domineering and demanding" (Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004, 455-456). On the other hand, women spoke of the strategies employed by men to maintain power in their unions. In a few instances, respondents subverted the gender role stereotyping that was common in most speech. Some men supported changes to the traditional gender order and the women sometimes challenged "traditional constructions of passive femininity and authored new discourses, which offered positions of empowerment" (Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004, 4559).

The discourse analytical approach to analysing peoples narratives provides a means by which researchers could study the different social languages at work in the individual's attempt to attach meanings to their experiences. Speech is heterogeneous. Though

traditional notions of masculinity and femininity appear to dominate these accounts, the presence of subversive speech offers the possibility for change in the unequal relations of power that often results in violence against women.

CONCLUSION: A Feminist/Discursive Approach to Reasearch on IPV

This paper addressed two broad approaches to research on IPV. On the one hand, there is the family violence (FV) approach which depends on data collected using the CTS. FV researchers have found symmetry in the perpetration of violence by men and women in heterosexual relationships. These findings have been critiqued for their inability to examine the context in which violence occurs. On the other hand, the violence against women (VAW) researchers argue that men are the main perpetrators of violence in intimate relationships. It is my view that the latter approach provides greater scope for the production of knowledge on IPV in the Caribbean. VAW researchers consider cultural specificities in their investigation. Researchers of this ilk also point to the value of socio-historical explorations into the meanings of violence in intimate relationships (Dobash and Dobash 1981; Nash 2005). Recognising that men's use of violence tend to differ significantly from the women's violence, they engage in feminist analyses of the problem of IPV.

Conceptualising IPV in the Caribbean: A Feminist-Discursive Approach to Research

Feminisms (Liberal, Marxist/socialist, Psychoanalytical, Postmodern and soon) have focused on how meanings of gender emerge and are perpetuated within different aspects of society, and how these meanings contribute to women's oppression. A range of

feminist standpoints have conceptualised the source of women's oppression in different ways. The remit of this paper does not allow any thorough review of feminist epistemologies, suffice it to say, what unites Feminist scholarship and activism is the challenge it poses to the historical and contemporary subordination of women. I suggest that the analysis of women's oppression can be enhanced by examining the discourses that individuals produce about their experiences with violence. More precisely research on IPV should consider the culturally specific explanatory frameworks that individuals draw on in the construction of their experiences in relationships.

Thus, allied to the feminist commitment is a discursive/poststructuralist orientation. Poststructuralist ideas stress the discursive and textual nature of social life (Cameron 1998). In this schema, the focus is on how language helps to constitute reality, and thus offers a different view of science (Agger 1991). This view undermines the positivist mimetic position that texts mirror the world. Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004, 449) suggests that as "discursive researchers, we are less concerned about the 'truth value' of participants' stories and more concerned with subjectivity, language and meaning." Knowledge constructed in this way, necessitates an understanding of Caribbean cultural specificities. In particular, it focuses on how people's discourses are shaped by broader, socio-historic, socio-cultural, and socio-economic conditions specific to the Caribbean. Poststructuralist thinkers examine the importance of discourse in maintaining relations of power and in constructing people's versions of the world. However, Wieringa (2002, 11) suggests that "that which is historically constructed can be politically deconstructed." Ideologies that support men's will to hegemony place women at a significant

disadvantage, and underlie the violent victimisation of women in heterosexual relationships. Wieringa's postulation beckons us to challenge these historically produced meanings about gender, in the context of the Caribbean, by unravelling the social languages which support the perpetuation of masculinist ideologies. Knowledge constructed using these frameworks allow us to address the following questions: To what extent does an individual's speech legitimatise and/or subvert unequal relations of power between men and women? How are accounts of violence sites in which gender is performed and negotiated? What the broader cultural values and belief systems informing these articulations? It is with these questions in mind that I intend to explore the problem of IPV in the context of the Caribbean.

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