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Queering Feminist Approaches to Gender-based Violence in the Anglophone Caribbean

Tonya Haynes and Halimah A. F. DeShong

ABSTRACT

Feminist scholarship on gender-based violence in the Caribbean has examined how relations of power account for women's increased vulnerability. While such frameworks are useful, they run the risk of reproducing heteronormative theorising on gender-based violence, and fail to account for the multiple ways in which gender and sexuality are implicated in the violence experienced by diverse groups. This article examines the gendered and heterosexist production of violence in online Caribbean newspapers. Mobilizing insights from Caribbean gender and sexuality studies scholars, it takes as its archive a sample of images and articles on sexual violence, child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, and violence against transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming persons, exposing the heteronormative and gender normative framing of these accounts. The aim of this article is two-fold: to expose the heterosexist and gender normative assumptions in media reporting, and to make a case for the relevance of Caribbean feminist and queer theorising to understanding the gendered and heterosexist production of violence in the region.

Keywords: Caribbean; gender; gender based-violence; queer theory; feminist theory; media

Gender-based violence (GBV) is often taken to be synonymous with violence against women (VAW) given women's overrepresentation as victims of sexual violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Gill and Mason-Bish 2013). However, such an understanding may fail to demonstrate both the role gender relations play in VAW and IPV and the conceptual usefulness of gender as a feminist analytical category for explaining this type of violence. Discussions around VAW tend to be overdetermined by IPV and, therefore, often fail to capture GBV outside of the context of intimate heterosexual partnerships. The fact that the violence is committed against a (non-transgender) woman is taken as sufficient evidence that the

violence is gender-based, foreclosing on an examination of just *how* the violence is gendered (Jakobsen 2014). Further, it excludes the experiences of transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people as well as sexual minorities for whom gender is central to the violence they experience (West 2013).

Activism against VAW is the most consistent and visible form of Caribbean feminism (Robinson 2011). The struggle to end VAW unites Caribbean women across race, ethnicity, and class (Reddock 2008). Feminist scholarship on GBV in the region has examined how relations of power account for women's increased vulnerability. While such frameworks are useful, they run the risk of reproducing heteronormative theorising on GBV and fail to account for the multiple ways in which gender and sexuality are implicated in the violence experienced by diverse groups. Feminist approaches to GBV in the Caribbean typically assume a heterosexual, non-transgender, gender conforming subject. This is evidenced both in the scholarship and in the constituencies mobilized for popular activism (see DeShong 2011, 2014, 2015; Sukhu 2012; Danns and Parsad 1989; Gopaul and Cain 1996; Priestley 2014). Such conceptualizations normalise hetero/sexist and essentialist understandings of gender, and fail to account for and understand violence against transgender and gender non-conforming people as forms of GBV.

Scholars have called attention to the production of a working-class Afro-maternal subject in Caribbean feminist activism and Caribbean feminism's investment in 'heterosexual precepts' (Robinson 2007; Rowley 2010). These critical interventions challenge the reproduction of unequal relations of power within feminist organizing and unmask latent homophobia and transphobia within some forms of feminist organizing. For example, lesbian women's experiences are elided both by gay rights activism, which tends to focus on men's experiences (even though in the region there is significant leadership of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender organizations by young women), and feminist activism, which tends to think of its subjects as heterosexual (non-transgender) women (Crawford 2012). The growing body of scholarly work on queer/lesbian identity and the centrality of Caribbean women to LGBT organising notwithstanding, Crawford's argument about the elision of lesbian women's experiences has been articulated earlier by other Caribbean

feminists like Makeda Silvera (1992), Joan French and Michelle Cave (1995).

This article examines the gendered and heterosexual production of violence in online Caribbean newspapers. Mobilizing insights from Caribbean gender and sexuality studies scholars, it takes as its archive a sample of 108 articles on sexual violence, child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, and violence against transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming persons. It exposes the heteronormative and gender normative framing of these accounts, recognizing that ‘hegemonies based on sexism and patriarchy and hegemonies based on heterosexism are often intimately related’ (King 2014, 9). This offers a more expansive understanding of GBV. Further, how persons talk about GBV may also be understood as the reproduction of violence itself and may be observed in how media represent violence (DeShong 2015, 100).

Caribbean gender and sexuality studies scholars have destabilised many taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and sexuality, thus extending the critical vocabulary available to feminist scholars. The aim of this article is two-fold: to expose the heterosexual and gender normative assumptions in media reporting and to make a case for the relevance of Caribbean feminist and queer theorising to understanding the gendered and heterosexual production of violence in the region. As recent attempts at policy development and constitutional reform in the Caribbean have seen the interests of ‘women’ pitted against those of ‘gays and lesbians’, such an intervention is both timely and useful for policy makers and activists alike.¹

Caribbean Theorising on Gender and Sexuality

Queer theory has been described as ‘an elite academic movement centered at least initially in the most prestigious U.S. institutions’ (Stein and Plummer 1994, 181). Indeed, Greg Thomas has argued

1 For example, attempts in the Bahamas to add the category of “sex” to those on which basis discrimination is prohibited have been met with homophobic opposition by those who argue that the category of “sex” could be interpreted as referring to “sexual orientation”. To the extent that such opposition will successfully derail this constitutional change, “gay rights” are seen to have undermined “women’s rights”. See <https://globalvoices.org/2014/10/10/bahamas-constitutional-reform-to-address-citizenship-gender-equality/>

that ““Queer Theory” is not very “queer” at all,” citing “the mechanics of racist empire” which inhere in its foundational categories (Thomas 2003, 251). Can there then be any validity to our claim for the need to “queer” feminist approaches to GBV? If it is accurate to describe queer theory as ‘a plea for massive transgression of all conventional categorizations and analyses,’ then certainly it is fruitful to read (some) Caribbean theorising on gender and sexualities as serving to “queer” the field, even as some of this work may in fact pre-date the emergence of queer theory in the US (Stein and Plummer 1994, 182). This move transfigures the term queer, disrupting the problematic notions of whiteness, Northernness/Westerncentrism which it often signals, to center the creative and productive thought of Caribbean scholars working at the intersections of gender, sexuality and race *inter alia*. In this way, we may be said to be performing a kind of scholarly “disidentification” with the term, in order to mobilise it for our own analysis and categorization (Muñoz 1999). Our usage of the term queer here follows similar mobilisations by black and Caribbean scholars such as Nadia Ellis (2011), Cathy Cohen (1997), Ronald Cummings (2011), Omiseke Natasha Tinsley (2008) and Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999). In Mimi Sheller’s (2012) work on erotic agency, she notes the important contributions of Caribbean feminist scholarship on sexuality, but laments their lack of recognition as a significant body of work, given their diverse disciplinary and geographical fields. This article treats this body of work as a whole.

Caribbean gender and sexuality studies scholars challenge received knowledge about sexuality, gender, and gender identity (see Barriteau 2001; Mohammed 2002; Padilla 2008; Wekker 2006; Rodriguez 2003; Decena 2011). Their work reveals the gendered and hetero/sexist production of sexed bodies, gendered power relations and exclusionary sexual citizenship in Caribbean legal systems (see Alexander 1991; Robinson 2009). Attention to local interpretations and experiences are valorized, even as they understand the Caribbean as imbricated in global and transnational flows of media, migration and capital (See Brennan 2004; 2008; Cabezas 2009; Kempadoo 2004; King 2014). Alexander links processes of racialization, heterosexualization, and gendering, not just to political and economic interests and flows, but also to nationalism, imperialism, and criminalization of the spiritual, contributing to a

nuanced understanding of how power operates (see Alexander 2005).

Among Sylvia Wynter's early writing is a conference paper in which she points to the liberatory potential of 'lesbian sexuality', as she encourages feminists to go beyond liberal and Marxist feminisms, which she reviews as irrevocably bound up in sexist, racist, and classist notions of what it means to be human (Wynter 1982). Here, Wynter could be seen to be 'queering' feminism, or challenging its foundational categories, a similar analytical approach which will be taken up in this article. In a later interview she would name black and queer people as the only people taught not to trust their own consciousness, as she makes linkages between exclusionary processes of heterosexualization and racialization (Thomas 2006). This flips on its head conceptualizations of the racialised Global South, racialised communities in the North and the Caribbean, not just as more homophobic than a racialised-as-white North (Atluri 2001), but also the discursive rendering of queer Caribbean subjects as existing in a state of arrested development vis-à-vis their Western/Northern peers (Walcott 2009). Erotic subjectivity as Caribbean/ist thinkers imagine it, challenges Northern/Western understandings of queerness (Allen 2011; Gill 2012; Tinsley 2010). Caribbean queer subjectivity further troubles Western identities such as gay, lesbian, and transgender in the fluid, overlapping and exchangeability in the ways in which such terms of self-identification are used (Murray 2009, 2012). For example, among '*Bajan queens*' sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced as related, and even interchangeable (Murray 2009).

Further research from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean has demonstrated that identification as gay or homosexual depends not on the sex or gender identity of one's partner, but one's role (receptive or penetrative) in anal sex (Padilla 2008). Other local ascriptions such as *sanky panky* or *bugarrón* should not be understood as public identities, but flexible and situational nomenclature that simultaneously connotes particular sexual-economic practices and performances (of gender and of tourists' fantasies), forms of embodiment, and aesthetics as well as spaces of work (Padilla 2008).

Research on the trans identities of Caribbean persons, who were designated as male at birth, reveal fluid, flexible, and complex modes of self-identification in terms of both gender and sexuality

(Attai 2013). Caribbean sexual nomenclature and grammar—*mati*, *zami*, *buller-man*, *man-royal*, *macocotte*—and even specifically Caribbean usages of terms such as *gay*, *lesbian*, and *transgender* draw attention to the simultaneity of local and transnational frames of reference in understanding sexual subjectivity and the importance of studying ‘local’ and ‘Caribglobal’ practices (Gosine and Wekker 2009; King 2011; MacDonald-Smythe 2011; Silvera 1992). Ethnographies by Wekker, who examines *mati* in Suriname, and Rodríguez who recounts her own practices as a ‘cyberslut’, confound usual understandings of sexual identity, practices, and homo-, hetero- and bisexual categorizations (Rodríguez 2003; Wekker 2006). This work extends our understanding of gender and sexuality to encompass not only relations of power, but performative, citational, and contextual elements (Barriteau 2001; Butler 1990). These insights are used to extend our understanding of just what *gender* has to do with gender-based violence.

Sylvia Wynter is attentive to how dominant modes of thought re-constitute themselves, even through discourses and practices that may appear to be, and be experienced as, liberatory or progressive (for some). She draws attention to the potential for the subversive to be itself subverted, particularly at those moments where it appears most successful (Wynter in Thomas 2006). Feminist theorists have drawn attention to the implication of anti-VAW activism and legislative reform meant to protect children from sexual abuse in the criminalization of the same sex practices of women and girls (Alexander 1991; Hosein 2013). Thus, progressive legislation meant to redress unequal relations of gendered power must be implicitly understood as constructing the beneficiaries of such legislative protection as heterosexual and gender conforming. Jasbir Puar revises Jacqui Alexander’s understanding of the hetero-nationalist post-colonial Caribbean state’s exclusionary practices of citizenship, to demonstrate how state inclusion of racialised-as-white sexual minorities in the post-9/11 era is concomitant with an imperialist and militaristic nationalism (Alexander 1991, 1994; Puar 2007).

While Jacqui Alexander may be most noted for demonstrating the role sexuality plays in nationalism and citizenship, and for insisting that processes of heterosexualization be scrutinised for their linkages to national and transnational political and economic interests, her approach to theory is also one in which the political,

spiritual and sexual-sensual are interlinked (Alexander 2005). Likewise Gloria Wekker's ethnographic work on women's same-sex relationships and the institution of *mati* reflect this inter-linkage among the spiritual, sensual, and political as a means of 'experiencing and interpreting the world' as part of what Lyndon Gill calls erotic subjectivity (Gill 2012; Wekker 1997, 2006). This work challenges the understanding of sexuality and gender as stable, public identities. It also emphasises the imbrications of sexuality and gendered power relations in transnational, geopolitical, and economic arrangements and relations of power. This analytical process of following connections that may not immediately appear obvious is mobilised in our analysis of the empirical data.

Like Tracy Robinson (2004) we define GBV as:

forms of violence, in which gender significantly explains the use or performance of violence and the experience of violence. In other words, gender tells us something about who does it and why, and who experiences and why.

Specifically, we extend the understanding of *gender* used in the context of GBV to mean:

- Relations of power which have ideological and material dimensions (Barriteau 2001)
- Gender and sexuality as fundamentally imbricated
- Gender as identity, embodiment, and performance
- Gender as intersecting with, and giving meaning to, other relations of power

Deploying gender in these multiple ways, we seek to expose the essentialist, hetero/sexist, classist production of sexed and gendered bodies and asymmetrical relations of gender in media accounts in order to expand how GBV is understood. We argue that, since gender and sexuality are key to the experiences of violence by transgender and non-transgender women, intersex persons, girls, sexual minorities and gender non-conforming persons, the literature on GBV should reflect this reality.

METHODOLOGY

We examined 108 stories of GBV published by Caribbean online newspapers. Thirty-one percent of the articles come from media houses in Guyana (n = 33), 26% from Trinidad and Tobago (n = 28),

13% from Jamaica (n=14) and 10% from Belize (n= 11) with the remaining 20% coming from seven diverse national (Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, St. Lucia, Virgin Islands) and one regional news source (n = 22). The majority of online papers examined were published over a period of six months in 2014 (January to July). However, two stories involving transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming persons were published in 2013. Any story containing references to GBV was downloaded and housed within a database using the software package Dedoose. We also used Dedoose to facilitate the organisation and coding of the data. Once the data was coded, the excerpts were extracted under the codes to which they corresponded. This allowed for several readings of the excerpted material and the creation of appropriate themes and more detailed analysis. Even though we use published sources, we have omitted personal and place names, as well as publication information as we found gendered, hetero/sexist, and institutional biases in many of the reports and do not wish to do further harm to the persons whose lives are storied there.

Newspapers present the ‘institution’s version of what is important to communicate . . . cumulatively, though, individual news text constitute the ongoing dialogue between the newspaper and the audience’ (Knox 2007, 20-21). We analyse online newspapers as an important site in the production of commonsense knowledge about gender, sexuality and violence (Stephenson and Jamieson 2009). The articles function as an archive for analysing how particular articulations of gender as power, as performance, as citational, and as contextual, are (re)produced in everyday understandings of GBV. We also consider multiple representations of gender and sexuality in these reports (by persons cited in the stories and by journalists), and the ways in which gender and sexuality are imbricated in stories about GBV.

Analysing Media Reports of GBV

GBV against Transgender, Intersex and Gender Non-conforming Persons
In stories about violence against transgender, gender non-conforming and intersex persons details about the person’s physicality, sexed body and gender identity overshadow reporting on the violence:

Police took the body to the morgue as a female, but didn't know the true sex of the victim until they found his phone and traced the number, it led them back to [name removed], an 18 year old who was openly transgender.

The imperative to police the boundaries of both sexed bodies and gender results in the absurd report, 'Police took the body to the morgue as a female.' It is unclear just what difference it would have made in the transportation of the body if the police officer were aware of the sex designation at birth of the person they were transporting. Such essentialisms invite readers to view transgender persons as aberrations, to objectify and dehumanise them through an oppressive, voyeuristic gaze on their sexed bodies.

In the lone story in the sample, which reported the fatal shooting of an intersex man, the writer dedicates an entire article to describing the genitalia and internal reproductive organs of the man and detailing his intersex condition. The news report quoted extensively from the medical doctor who performed the autopsy.

This medical professional not only disclosed private medical information to the media, he also described the man's genitalia and the extent to which he felt the man was capable of phallic, penetrative sex:

The pathologist said based on the look of [name removed]'s deformed genitals, persons—even [name removed] himself — may have been confused with his gender. He said on first glance, [name removed]'s genitals resemble that of a female with a large clitoris, but in reality it is a small penis with a small 'vaginal pit'—so small that it would have been impossible to insert a small penis in it.

'It looks like a small penis and a very normal type of vagina but actually he did not have a fully formed vagina. There is no upper vagina, there is just a lower 'vagina' so it's almost like a blank pit with no cervix and uterus thereafter . . .' he explained.

Dr. [name removed] said [name removed] may have been able to have a 'certain amount of sex' with his penis. He said 'biologically and physiologically' it is possible.

This narrative reveals the medical disciplining of bodies to sexual dimorphism even as a diversity of physical bodies are a biological, material reality (Fausto-Sterling 2000). It refracts the kinds of medical, administrative, and gender-based violence which intersex people face as their bodies are disciplined within binary gender and

a heterosexual matrix, where specific kinds of embodiment are expected to align with one's gender identity and sexual orientation toward the opposite sex (Butler 1990; Germon 2009; Karkazis 2008). Concerns about the extent to which one's genitals are capable of phallogentric, insertive penis-in-vagina sex, in which female passivity and male sexual dominance are taken as given, reveal the recourse to hetero/sexist and gendered norms to discipline the transgressive bodies, sexualities, and gender identities of intersex persons. It should not go unnoticed that the intersex man's body is dissected in the media precisely because he was a victim of fatal violence. In this way, he is twice victimised—objectified, dehumanised, and reduced to his genitalia. The man died as a result of multiple gunshot wounds and such detailed descriptions of his external genitalia and internal sexual organs are inconsequential to the autopsy. They serve instead to mark his body as grotesque, monstrous, and 'deformed' (to use the pathologist's term). They reinforce public stigmatizing of intersex persons, who are excluded from national belonging and citizenship. Other reports indicated that the intersex man had attempted to apply for a passport but was unable to do so:

[name removed] has tried to obtain a passport to leave [name of country removed] for a better life. Their response in the Passport Office was, I quote: 'You doe [don't] know what your sex is, so is not us that going to know for you.'

The media must also be understood as complicit in this 'exclusionary politics of belonging' which marks intersex persons as gender and sexual Others (Crawford 2014). Media emphasis on unmasking the 'true sex' and gender of transgender and gender non-conforming persons results in often elaborate descriptions of the dress and bodies of transgender persons who make the news because of violence against them:

When police found the body on the sidewalk of [name removed] at 1:50 am, they thought it was a female, because the victim wore a white sleeveless vest, a short green and black skirt, with women's underwear and matching physique, and wearing a woman's hair style, makeup and jewelry. But [name removed], who called himself [name removed] was known to dress in drag, and wore a weave.

Such descriptions are dehumanizing and objectifying (*women's underwear and matching physique*). As in the earlier example, they invite public voyeurism on the bodies of transgender people and trivialise the violence committed against them. They are also a form of GBV as this is a specific kind of violence directed at transgender persons because of their gender identity and expression.

The media not only use sensationalist language to describe acts of violence against transgender and gender non-conforming persons, but also language which trivialises the violence which they are reporting. In the excerpt below, violence against a transgender woman is compared to the hunting of a crocodile:

And while that killer croc is being hunted—yesterday in a disturbing episode a transgender person was pursued and harassed in a similar fashion on the [name of place removed] streets. It happened in broad daylight at around 5:00 pm.

In some stories about violence against transgender women, they were also asked to account for and explain being transgender:

You've heard her story of extreme street harassment and humiliation—but who is [named removed]? Well she's a [nationality re-moved] born as a male but says she has always felt herself to be a female.

"I feel like a female because the way I walk, the way I dress. I choose to—I just feel feminine."

This demand for an ontological account of who one *is* folds into victim-blaming of transgender persons for the violence against them. One news report quoted an executive member of an LGBT rights group as describing the murder of a transgender woman as 'random', alleging that the murder followed an attempt to rape the woman and then expressing surprise that the attackers believed the victim they killed to have been a woman:

Executive director of [name removed], the gay rights advocacy group, believes it was a random attack, which was escalated because of the way he was dressed.

"Based on our chat across the community that he was presumed to be a woman and when it was found that he was not a woman, he was stabbed in the chest.

"Our surprise is that he was presumed to be a woman, and the intention was to rape. When they couldn't rape, they decided to take his life," he added.

In the narrative above, the respondent understands rape of non-transgender women to be ‘random’ and not an act of GBV. Such a characterization, ironically serves to normalise rape of non-transgender women, locating such rape within natural heterosexual sex—illegal yes, but outside of the criminalised ‘crimes against nature’ (Alexander 1991). It is only with such a conceptualisation of rape in mind that the targeting of women for sexual violence may be understood as random. Here, womanhood is constructed as pathology and vulnerability (Robinson 2009). For the activist cited in the newspaper then, the attempted rape and murder is illegible within the rubric of homophobic and transphobic violence against which his organization advocates. He expresses ‘surprise’ at the transgender woman’s ability to be read as non-transgender which then makes her vulnerable to misogynist violence. Ultimately, the LGBT activist argues that the woman in question was the victim of a ‘random attack’ which escalated to murder ‘because of the way he was dressed [sic].’ In other words, the woman is to be blamed for the violence committed against her. The narrative is saturated with gendered and sexed bodies, essentialist understandings of what kinds of bodies are rapable and the kinds of ‘cultural genitals’ that particular sexed bodies are supposed to wear in order to avoid violence, discipline, and policing. It calls on transgender women to engage in self-discipline and self-erasure. Given that traditional women’s organisations often do not see transgender women as their constituency, and LGBT rights groups themselves may also subscribe to essentialist understandings of sexed bodies and gender identity, these hetero/sexist and gender normative essentialisms may undercut attempts at an otherwise progressive politics.

Reporting Rape as Sex

Cases of rape involving minor girls are often reported as ‘sex with minors’, thus minimising the sexual violence and violations experienced by young girls. On the surface, it would appear that reporters are merely adopting the legalese of these offences as defined by law. However, such representations of violence have the effect of occluding how the intersections of gender, sexuality, and age function to make women and children vulnerable to sexual violence. In the following example, the journalist reports on the

high number of sexual offences cases brought before the High Court in a single sitting:

Sexual assault matters are once again a significant part of the case list for the High Court of [Name of country]. Out of the 80 matters on the docket on Thursday, January 16, 2014, more than 30 were sexually related cases. Offences range from attempted buggery to unlawful carnal knowledge and rape. Among the most notable cases was a matter involving a man who faces nine charges of sexual misconduct against boys. In that matter, three virtual complainants were aged nine at the time of the incident . . . Another matter listed was a case against an adult male of [name removed] who pleaded guilty to sexual intercourse with a minor . . . Two other men who appeared charged for rape and sexual intercourse with a 14-year-old, respectively, (in relation to two separate incidents), pleaded not guilty . . . Another man is accused of indecent assault, while another was charged for allegedly having sex with an eight-year-old girl. They both pleaded not guilty. An adult male from the north of the island also pleaded not guilty to two counts of incest. It is alleged that he engaged in sexual relations with his daughter over a period of time. One man appeared charged for sexual crimes against a 15-year-old.

In the cataloguing of the more than 30 sexual offences cases heard by the court a hierarchy of the severity of some forms of child sexual abuse vis-à-vis others is generated. Sexual violence perpetrated against boys is regarded as existing 'among the most notable cases.' The implication here is that the sexual violence against a child is compounded by the maleness of the perpetrator and victim. A study on child sexual abuse in the Eastern Caribbean indicates that institutional homophobia militates against the reporting of, and responses to, cases of sexual violence against boys (Jones and Jemmott 2010). The characterisation of 'sexual misconduct against boys' by male perpetrators as constituting the most serious of violations is a heteronormative framing of child sexual abuse. Not only does it normalise sexual violence against girls as heterosexual and non-criminal activity, but it also produces both heterosexism and homophobia.

The following examples illustrate both the heteronormative and euphemistic language used to define the rape of young girls:

Outgoing Minister of Local Government and Regional Development . . . has slammed suggestions in sections of the

media that he has quit the job over alleged sexual relations with a minor.

Among those arrested is a [place name] man who is to be charged for having sex with his seven-year-old daughter.

Another man is accused of indecent assault, while another was charged for allegedly having sex with an eight-year-old girl.

These examples are part of a kind of reporting in which the legal terminology for capturing acts of sexual violence, for example the charge of 'sex with a minor', goes unchallenged. Gender is both produced and effaced (Robinson 2000) in the use of the term 'sex with a minor', since girls feature as the ones most likely to experience sexual violence in official reports, and sexual violence against boys tend to be prosecuted under buggery laws. In other words, a failure to delineate the gendered relations of power within which such crimes occur, and to acknowledge that girls are made most vulnerable to these crimes, create a context in which asymmetrical gendered relations of power are simultaneously masked and perpetuated. Heterosexual sex, even violent and coercive heterosexual sex, as in rape in marriage, is understood as natural under the law, whereas "buggery", 'bestiality', and 'serious indecency' occupy contiguous spaces in the unnatural world of the legal text' (Alexander 1991, 141). This underscores how violence against girls by men is rationalised as men pursuing a 'natural' and often uncontrollable attraction, hence sex with a minor, as opposed to the 'more serious and deviant' sexual exploitation of boys by men.

There is also a tendency to reproduce accounts of sexual violence against girls as instances of shared responsibility, thus erasing asymmetrical relations of power. Girls are often depicted as autonomous agents participating in sexual encounters, rather than victims of rape. A strategy of merely engaging in reportage functions to minimise the severity of these violations, while at the same time reducing the effect of the actions of those who perpetrate rape against girls.

Gendered Narratives of Sexual Infidelity

One of the most often cited rationalisations of IPV (particularly in research completed among persons who identify as heterosexual) is suspected or actual sexual infidelity (DeShong and Haynes 2016;

Fehringer and Hinden 2014; Nemeth et al. 2012). A number of sensationalist headlines signaled both women's and men's sexual infidelity as the sources of men's violence in intimate relationships. This is consistent with the findings of a study on sexual infidelity and IPV in Malawi (Conroy 2014). Headlines which feature reference to sexual infidelity include, 'Man beats lover after she catches him with another woman,' and 'Man chokes woman over alleged lesbian affair.' Violence is presented as a consequence of both the perpetrator and the complainants' infidelity. More noticeable however, is the easy naming of the alleged infidelity as a 'lesbian affair' which sensationalises, sexualises, and trivialises the event and invites readers to consume it as a form of gossip as opposed to attending to the seriousness of the violence. This easy naming in no way complicates the rather messy ways in which these sexualised, gendered, raced, and classed identity relations and practices are understood.

VAW in intimate relationships is often explained as a consequence of men's jealousy with no attempts to disturb these normative gendered and heterosexist narratives which produce violence. In instances where heteronormative narratives on sexuality are disturbed in reports, the actors therein tend to fixate on the particular non-normative gendered and sexualised scripting of violence. This is demonstrated in the following example:

A second man was also brought before the court for attacking his woman and choking her after he accused her of having a lesbian affair . . . On Tuesday when he appeared in court, the complainant said that [Name of perpetrator] attacked her after accusing her of cheating on him with the woman. 'He accused me, saying I was along with a lady and she and I was having relationship, and then attack me,' she told the court . . . 'She fascinated with my baby mother,' [Name of perpetrator] said, while disclosing that the woman had tattooed his 'babymother's' name on the back of her neck. 'Turn around mek me see,' [said the] Senior Magistrate.

The text of this story follows the headline 'Rastaman, pregnant woman, fuss over female' and a cartoon in which a pregnant woman (to be read as the woman violently victimised) is positioned between the image of a man with dreadlocks shouting 'is my baby mother' on one side and the image of a woman shouting 'is my ooman [woman]' on the other side. A judge with the gavel is sitting

on the bench observing the scene and seeking to re-establish order. The headline, cartoon and text, collectively function in ways that trivialise the seriousness of the violence experienced by the complainant. In the image itself, the complainant is the only one rendered voiceless. The woman identified as the source of the violence, is made visible only in relation to a lesbian identity, and she is presented as essentially fixated on the complainant. Apart from being 'fascinated with her,' she tattoos her name on her body where it will be visible, an act which, though immaterial to the charge of assault, amuses the Senior Magistrate all the same. Collectively, these actions are used to construct a deviant, obsessive lesbian subjectivity in need of discipline, while at the same time rationalising the man's use of violence.

It is also important to read the ways in which these media focus on particular markers of difference that inhere relations of power in their reductionist application. Terms like *Rastaman*, *lesbian* and *babymother* bear particular socio-politico-cultural-historico-economic resonances and should not be read as mere descriptors. Rather, these terms have the effect of pointing to particular racialised, gendered, sexualised, and class context reproduced at the levels of the state, society, and the individual. As such, the media is complicit in reinscribing those relations of power in which GBV occurs. We should also question the ease with which media personnel use the term 'lesbian' given what Caribbean theorists tell us about the fluidity of sexual identity and practices (Gosine and Wekker 2009; Kempadoo 2009; Wekker 2006).

Women as Mothers

The mothering role of women dominated much of the accounts of violence in which women were killed. Elsewhere, we have argued that whereas men in these stories tend to be identified in relation to their employment status, women are often depicted in their mothering roles (DeShong and Haynes 2016). Stories reproduce dominant heteronormative and gender normative narratives in which women's primary and most valued role is deemed to be that of mother, and the murder of women by their intimate partners is bemoaned particularly in this regard. In these examples the incredulity of the crimes is cited in direct relation to the victims' mothering role:

Opposition spokeswoman . . . says that the 34-year-old mother of six beheaded in area on Sunday morning, was pregnant at the time of her death.

the police are now on the hunt for the babyfather accused of chopping and beheading the mother of six children in the community . . . The woman . . . was attacked around 2.30 this morning. Four of her six children also belonged to the father. The circumstances surrounding the incident are not clear. However, it is understood that [the victim] and her babyfather were no longer in a relationship.

[The victim] was allegedly strangled by the man for whom she produced and mothered three children

Man remanded for beating pregnant wife

Whether the voice portrayed is that of a reporter or representative of the state, stories include details like number of children produced in the union, the number of children mothered by the victim, fact of pregnancy, and the nature of the violence perpetrated against the victim. The attempt here is not to minimise the importance of mothering, but to understand the function served by the inclusion of this information in the storying of violence. It would appear that the presence of children delegitimises the violence meted out to these women, especially in comparison to the kinds of reporting on violence against transgender women. There is an implicit and differential valuing of the lives of women who experience violence and death in the context of GBV, in which the violence against married women with children tend to attract greater censure than women whose actions are coded as disrupting the script of good femininity. On the other hand, transgender women, gay men, and gender-non conforming men are frequently referred to as 'sex workers' or 'commercial sex workers' even in reports which have nothing to do with sex work.

Gendered Narratives of Men's Sexual Proprietariness

Previous research show that men who perpetrate GBV engage in a number of autonomy-limiting behaviours which function to police women's actions (DeShong 2015; Cavanagh et al. 2001; Wilson and Daly 1996). Women's self-regulation can be regarded as part of the panoptican effect (Foucault 1977) produced by men's sexual proprietariness and its related gendered violence. The languaging of

GBV in these electronic media reinscribe, in many ways, the discourses on men's sexual proprietary attitudes that can be found in qualitative research on GBV. This is evident in both the accounts of sexual violence and IPV against women in the sample of electronic newspapers analysed. In instances of IPV, women are essentially named as objects for men's possession—'But interestingly, both claimed the woman as their own,' and 'The relative said the man had recently threatened to kill her because she had told him that she had ended the relationship.' Studies have shown that threats and the use of violence tend to escalate with women's decision to end the relationship (Burnham and Chantler 2005). Jealousy, a function of men's sexual proprietariness in the context of intimate hetero-sexual relationships, and women's decision to leave are often cited as a rationalisation of men's violence. Even in the context of non-normative socio-sexual unions similar explanations for men's violence are offered:

[Name removed] killed the friends of his ex-male lover, 20-year-old [name-removed], known as [name removed] after he found out they encouraged him to engage in commercial sexual activities. The two were reportedly sharing a relationship for five years but [name removed] ended it citing physical abuse.

Coverage on the rape and attempted rape of women and girls is saturated with reference to men's sexual proprietariness. In these accounts, the sexed bodies of women and girls become objects to be accessed by men for their own personal gratification:

She said no, pointing out several other shaded areas, but [Name of perpetrator] instead sat a few feet away and began asking her for her phone number and a date, which she also refused stating that she was in a relationship . . . The victim left the beach, walking towards the parking lot [Name of area where the incident occurred] when she heard [Name of perpetrator] shout at her and then grab her buttocks . . . She yelled at him not to touch her and, now frightened, continued to her car. She got into the vehicle, shut the door and started the engine but [Name of perpetrator] opened the passenger door and sat next to her . . . The victim told him to get out of her car, but [Name of perpetrator] produced a knife and there was a brief struggle with the victim shouting for help and honking her horn, but [Name of perpetrator] insisted that she start

driving saying: "I could cut open your vein and kill you. You would be dead." . . . [Name of perpetrator] told the victim: "Do you realise what you have just done? You f***ing idiot. You just sent me to [Name of prison]. I just wanted some p***y. I haven't had sex in a year."

The perpetuation of 'pro-rape' heteronormative narratives in which rape is culturally and globally construed as an expression of men's uncontrolled sexuality, and in which women's sexed bodies become a site of release, obfuscates a focus on the gendered and sexualised relations of power within which such violence is produced. In the above narrative, the perpetrator engages in a range of sexually harassing behaviours, and when neither of these tactics results in his desired response, he proceeds to engage in overt acts of violence. As part of both a masculinist and heteronormative scripting of gender and sexuality, his violent sexual access to just any (female) sexed body is rationalised as a consequence of his irrepressible desire to satisfy a year-long hiatus in his ability to engage in sexual intercourse. Shifting blame on to the woman victimised serves as a means through which he distances himself from the violence he perpetrates by assigning her responsibility for satisfying his sexual desire. As object for his sexual desire, she is reduced to her genitalia. The intersections of gender and sexuality in rape narratives can be observed in how both heterosexism and gender conformity inheres in these accounts. Women provide sexual services ('I just wanted some p***y') to be consumed by men. Nicola Gavey reminds us that 'these everyday taken-for-granted normative forms of heterosexuality work as the cultural scaffolding of rape' (Gavey 2013, 2).

'Sex Monsters on the Loose': Extreme Rhetorical Strategies in Media Accounts of GBV

Sensationalist headlines and reporting dominated much of the articles reviewed. These extreme rhetorical strategies appeal both to commonsense understandings of violence and responses to violence, while at the same time obscuring the underlying ideas and practices which support violence. Such portrayals in no way undermine dominant assumptions about gender and sexuality that buttress GBV. Perpetrators were sometimes depicted in ways to suggest that they operated outside of the realm of what it means to

be human, as in 'sex monsters on the loose.' In other words, men who commit these crimes become something other than themselves; something other than human. Headlines also treat to violence as spectacle: 'Alleged 'penis dangler' gets two years for assaulting mother.' This headline introduces a story in which a woman accuses her son of sexual assault. Rather than record these acts as violence, descriptors are used to 'spectacularise' the events. Similarly, court accounts of violence are often framed as spectacle, as can be observed in the following examples

LAST week, it was non-stop drama inside the Corporate Area Resident Magistrate's Court, which saw cases involving men who got physical and assaulted their women, following relationship problems. Even teenagers were involved in the drama.

Woman faints after . . . Husband, matie drama in court (headline)

The saga surrounding the tragic death of two-year-old [name removed] took its most interesting twist yesterday when her 15-year-old uncle appeared before [the] Magistrate . . . charged with murder

The above reporting strategies treat to these stories with intrigue. Some of the very same strategies used in the writing of crime fictions are employed above. References to court proceedings as 'drama' and the 'saga' point to the ways in which the storying of violence becomes a spectacular event. Information is included for its purported entertainment value which effectively trivialises the violence. The idea of the court descending into chaos and comedy runs counter to what Mindie Lazarus-Black defines as 'the structures of domination that characterise the wider social context of which these courts are a part' (Lazarus-Black 2007, 91-92). The woman's body becomes a site of contestation for these two men and this is construed as providing great entertainment value to onlookers, including the media. However, Lazarus-Black's (2007, 92) observation that courts, through a set of rites, function as sites in which 'class and gender hierarchies are accomplished,' can be observed in the above examples.

CONCLUSION

Rethinking GBV in the Caribbean involves a closer and more nuanced understanding of how gender is, and ought to be, mobilised in an analysis of specific forms of violence to which women, boys, girls and LGBT persons are made most vulnerable. Analysis of media reporting of GBV reveal that gender as relations of power, gender as performative, gender as identity and expression are all implicated in the misogynist, homophobic, and transphobic violence faced by diverse groups and just how this violence is reported. Media reports script these violences using sensationalist, trivializing, and victim-blaming language which reinforces essentialisms about gender, sexuality and sexed bodies as well as hierarchies of gender, race and class. These serve to mark some bodies as monstrous, pathological, or inherently violable, justifying the acts of violence committed against them and reinscribing gendered and sexual asymmetries.

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