CHAPTER 15

'Deepening the Dialogue—Strengthening Domestic Violence Policy and Charting a Way Forward'

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Introduction

Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon, but a sociocultural issue that has affected individuals across ethic divides, socioeconomic groups, and cultural beliefs systems. Within recent times, this phenomenon has caused an increase in awareness among policy makers as well as social activist groups as a result of the increasing incidence of homicide among women in intimate partner relationships. With the increased level of homicide, domestic violence has taken on a worldwide emphasis bearing in mind the sociocultural nuances associated with the problem.

For the most part, authors, activists, and policy makers have focused on the issue of domestic violence as a behavioural action targeted against

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females by men. There is a tacit, as well as, an overt sociocultural discourse that expects and facilitates the dialogue that is stereotypical in nature. Such a dialogue facilitates the discourse that males are perpetrators while women are the victims of the most heinous acts associated with domestic violence. However, this dialogue fails to take into consideration the multifaceted nature of domestic violence. While domestic violence extends beyond the physical abuse, it is the experience of physical assault that is perpetrated by the male towards the female that allows the issue to take on such a potent reaction.

This perspective continues to position the argument from a very simplistic perspective as it is focused on the epidemiology of domestic violence and not the antecedent factors that contribute to the phenomenon. The focus on the antecedent factors could unearth perspectives that may be uncomfortable to deal with from a socialization perspective. This argument is posited within the context that domestic violence is not as dichotomous as the average person would like to believe but a real and nuanced sociocultural phenomenon. As a consequence, consideration should be given to the multifaceted nature of domestic violence since both men and women are victims as well as perpetrators.

Gender Based Violence Affects Males and Females

From a global perspective, domestic violence is a phenomenon that affects women more than men (World Health Organization 2013; Stöckl et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2017). The World Health Organization (2013) in its global estimates of domestic violence against women indicate at least one third of women who are in intimate partner relationships have experienced domestic violence that is either physical or sexual in nature. The report suggests that the problem of violence against women is a globally pervasive and requires decided action among all stakeholders since a violence free environment is a fundamental right for all genders.

It has been normative to accept that gender based violence or intimate partner violence is usually synonymous with violence against women with little consideration or thought being given to violence against men. Considerable data are available that shows that 33% of women experience domestic violence at some time during their lifetime (WHO 2013). By extension, there has been little acknowledgement of the existence of gender based or intimate partner violence that is perpetrated by women. This may be as a result of the sociocultural nuances that makes it easier

to identify with the existence of such a problem from the perspective of females as victims rather than perpetrators. Intimate partner homicide is more likely to be perpetrated by men although it is perpetrated by women less frequently (Stöckl et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2017). This phenomenon is not associated with any specific country since it is a global epidemic that is evident across continents with the statistics showing similar incidence among women and men with women more likely to be killed by an intimate partner (Stöckl et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2011, 2017; Abrahams et al. 2013).

A National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey Report from the United States showed that women are more than twice likely to experience sexual violence than men, in that 1:3 women and 1:6 men experience intimate partner violence (Smith et al. 2017). The report stated further that approximately 6 in 10 females and 4 in 10 males were stalked by a current or former intimate partner or 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime and reported an IPV-related impact. An important observation from the national report was that most cases of rape among men were perpetrated by another male however, those who reported being coerced to perform sexual penetration was facilitated by females. In a systematic review on intimate partner homicide, Stöckl et al. (2013) concluded that women are six times more likely than men to be victims of homicide and this is more evident among high income countries and Southeast Asia.

Data from the Caribbean, as well as Trinidad and Tobago, support the evidence that intimate partner violence is generally perpetrated by males on females (Pembreton and Joseph 2018). While the evidence supports physical violence and homicide as the major facets of domestic and intimate partner violence, men also suffer violence from women, albeit differently, in that it is usually emotional. When one considers the homicide statistics in Trinidad and Tobago for 2018, women represented 47/516 or 9% of the homicides yet the response from the women's groups was centred on women being murdered with little to no consideration that men are dying violently, albeit under the hands of other men.

Complexity of Domestic Violence

The World Health Organization (2013) also argues that some of the factors that contribute to the continuation of violence against women

relate to sociocultural, as well as, economic factors. These include low academic achievement among males and females, unequal gender status, and lower socioeconomic status. While these may be so from a global perspective, oftentimes analysis fails to take into consideration the unique sociocultural nuances associated with socialization and relationships. This chapter is not advocating the excusing of male domestic violence on women but is posited within a context that challenges the stereotypical norms and narratives that continue to inform the dialogue on domestic violence as a phenomenon.

Societies, including the Caribbean, use stereotypical and dichotomous language for domestic violence which makes this a simplistic social dialogue. In the absence of a commensurate appreciation and acknowledgement of the complexities associated with such a phenomenon, the arguments may continue to be one sided. In such contexts, the arguments are presented as if there is a battle of the sexes from the 'us vs. them', and 'male vs. female' divide. In such circumstances, it is easy to see men as perpetrators and women as victims which does not allow for greater levels of interrogation of sociocultural complexities associated with the phenomenon.

Cook (2009) offers insightful perspectives on the epidemiology of domestic violence that is not rooted in mainstream literature from a sociological perspective. His book is centred on the experiences of both men and women who have been affected by domestic violence. However, there is a deliberate attempt to broaden the dialogue by arguing the domestic violence against men is a silent epidemic. Such a discourse is not only welcomed but a needed response to deliberately change the narrative in an attempt to examine the sociocultural imperatives that affect the continuation of this phenomenon. In doing so, it does not negate the reality that women are more likely to be affected by domestic violence but offers a pragmatic attempt to broaden the dialogue in examining this phenomenon from a holistic perspective.

From a global perspective when the reporting of domestic violence experiences are considered, women are by far more likely to report having experienced intimate partner violence than men. On an average, women are more than ten times more likely to report their experiences than men (Cook 2009). This may be associated with the availability of social and legal supportive frameworks and services that are sensitive to women. By extension, men may be more unlikely to report having been a 'victim' of domestic violence since they are not expected to be a 'victim' or allow

themselves to be victims of such abuse. While domestic violence is not the major factor that contributes to male admissions in the emergency room, Cook (2009) contends, an average of one-fifth of male admissions is as a result of having experienced a domestic violence episode. However, this is more likely to occur in a heterosexual than same gender relationship.

Sociocultural Construction of Masculinity

How men project themselves within a society has its roots and identity in slavery. Some Caribbean researchers are of the view that Caribbean masculinity has its antecedents in slavery and colonization since pleasure, power, economic, and domestic domination are core elements in the development of masculine identity (Lewis 2003, 2004; Beckles 1996). Men are expected to be powerful and in control of their environment, which includes their relationships. Any shift in this level of control could be the basis of how the notion of masculine identity is questioned. Masculine identity assumes centrality in this discourse since it is the meanings that are associated with 'being a man' rather than just 'being male' that acts as the pendulum upon which men negotiate their notions of manhood and masculinity.

Lewis (2003, p. 103) argues that the 'European male domination of the social relations within Caribbean society laid the foundation for institutionalization of gender inequality in the region' thus allowing the privileging of masculinity. He further propositioned that the institutionalization of patriarchy, as an extension of slavery, not only allows for the domination of women but the domination of men who are considered as representing masculine identities that are inconsistent with hegemony. In this regard, there is little acceptance for any representation of masculinity that is inconsistent with 'ideal' masculine behaviour. Beckles (1996, p. 3) contends that Caribbean masculinity developed consistent with "(P)olitical authority, economic power, and domestic dominance held together the values of white elite masculinity that was culturally familiar to black men". He also argues that Caribbean men 'were relegated and negated to otherness'; however they understood that '(T)he possession of power, profits, glory and pleasure was specified as a core element in the articulation of masculine ideologies' (p. 3).

This complexity is further exacerbated by Barriteau (2000) who postulated that masculinity is easy to define but difficult to achieve. This is intensified by the notion of masculinity as a fluid concept supported

by the seminal work by Connell (2005) when he posited the concept of masculinities. However, within recent times, this representation of masculinity as a fluid concept has been challenged from a practical perspective (Jewkes et al. 2015). The concept of masculinity in the Caribbean may be similar to other societies, in that it is not a fluid but more of a static concept. Nevertheless; there may be some unique characteristics of masculinity in the Caribbean which is facilitated and nuanced by socialization.

Lewis (2003) noted that masculinity has had a limited focus by social scientists in the Caribbean region since gender issues have been synonymous with women's issues. He contends that, in the Caribbean, hegemonic masculinity is predominant and provided with higher social acceptability which contributes to the high level of homophobia experienced by men who do not subscribe to the notion of a hegemonic sexual identity. It could be argued that the small population sizes of the Caribbean islands place psychological pressure on men to conform to the hegemonic construct of masculinity since they all function in social environments that do not allow for anonymity. Lewis (2004, p. 262) also argues that masculinity 'is not merely about how men relate to women, but about how men relate to other men, how they seek approval, honor and respect of other men, and how they weigh and ponder the sanctions of other men'.

Other Caribbean social scientists argue that masculinity is a multilayered phenomenon (Lewis 2003), practiced differently by different men (Lewis 2006), is rarely static or unchanging (Parker 2003) and not a homogenous construct (Lewis 2004). The heterogeneous construct of Caribbean masculinity is a source of ideological contention since masculinity is viewed as a privileged ideology over femininity (Lewis 2003). Beckles (2004) argues that not all men espouse hegemonic masculinity hence this ideological position is contested across ethnic, cultural, and social classes. Lewis (2003, p. 122) also notes that the 'multilayered phenomenon' of Caribbean masculinity transcends sociocultural boundaries. While this 'multilayered phenomenon' may be explained from a theoretical perspective, in real life experiences it presents challenges for men in the Caribbean since hegemonic masculinity is considered the culturally 'ideal' representation of masculinity.

One of the contentious factors that exacerbates the tension associated with masculinity as fluid as opposed to fixed relates to the policing of masculine behaviour. In this regard, men who do not subscribe to

an identity that is associated with hegemony are often ridiculed and called 'disparaging names' in an attempt to register their disaffection and demand for compliance with the masculine 'ideal'. In exploring the social construction of masculinity from a Trinidad and Tobago perspective, findings showed that masculinity was not a fluid but more of a static and illusionary concept among men (Ocho unpublished).

According to Lewis (2003, p. 107), unique characteristics of Caribbean males including being 'powerful, exceeding promiscuous, derelict in his parental duties, often absent from the household and, if present, unwilling to undertake his share of domestic responsibilities … possessing a propensity for female battering and a demonstrated valorization of alcohol consumption'. They are also expected to provide physical protection for their families, be fearless, the breadwinner of the family as well as sexually virile and competent (Lewis 2006). 'Trinbagonian' calypsonians also encourage men who are not as sexually virile or do not have the economic wherewithal ascribed to the hegemonic form of masculinity to avail themselves of aphrodisiacs to ensure optimal sexual functioning with their female partners (Lewis 2006). Lewis (2003, p. 95) also observes that '(F)ew acts are more threatening to men than a public interrogation or ridicule of their masculinity by a woman'. To be sexually virile is an important part of the social construction of Caribbean masculine identity since it assists in defining masculine behaviour.

Nevertheless, there are tensions about masculinity as a construct as opposed to what is experienced. Barriteau (2000, p. 24) highlights this tension by stating that '(M)anhood is clearly defined but increasingly difficult to achieve and comprised almost exclusively on three elements sexuality/sexual identity, man's primary role as economic provider and scriptural authority for man as family head'. The perpetuation of negative stereotypes about Caribbean men as being sexually irresponsible may be more perception than reality. Chevannes (2001) studied male socialization in five Caribbean communities and reported Caribbean males were assuming responsibility in nurturing their children as well as their commitment to their families. This suggests that Caribbean men may be more proactive in redefining masculine identity based on performance than is readily admitted. However, men may find it difficult to break commonly held negative characterizations in the absence of a supportive environment that challenges stereotypes as normative.

From a theoretical perspective, masculinity in the Caribbean has been identified as a plural concept; in reality, it has been described as

almost 'fixed'. The almost 'fixed' notion of masculinity contributes to the negative response to subordinated forms of masculinity throughout the Caribbean. While some islands including Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados have been identified as less homophobic than Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Guyana (Lewis 2003, 2006), cultural art forms have been used to express homophobic sanctions against individuals who adopt subordinated masculinity. This includes overt calls among Jamaican reggae artists to coalesce and express the wrath of men from the hegemonic masculine community to physically destroy and annihilate homosexuals (Lewis 2003). By extension, the policing of masculine behaviours also acts as a sociocultural buffer in having men redirect and renegotiate notions of masculine identity (Ocho unpublished).

One of the critical observations associated with males as perpetrators of intimate partner homicide relate to the sociocultural nuances including lower literacy and income as well as multiple relationships and the level of discord within the primary relationship (Abrahams et al. 2013). This argument resonates with individuals at all levels of society since there is an attempt to not only continue the projection of the stereotype of men as perpetrators but to rationalize the antecedents to male abusive behaviours. However, a similar level of emphasis on profiling or conducting similar socio-demographic analyses on women who are perpetrators of intimate partner violence and homicide could not be found. There is general consensus that intimate partner violence is rooted in gender inequity especially in situations where male domination over women is the dominant narrative (Abrahams et al. 2013). By extension, women who subscribe to the sociocultural narrative that justifies female subservience and males who accept their hierarchical position of superiority over females act as a framework for the perpetuation of domestic violence.

From a Caribbean perspective, intimate partner violence is almost always expected to be exclusively male perpetrated since this is the projection that resonates more readily from a sociocultural context. However, it does not negate the fact that men also experience intimate partner violence that is perpetrated by females.

Erikson et al. (2017) argues that while men experience violence that is perpetrated by women, this is generally not treated with the same level of disaffection as if it was perpetrated by other men. In fact, such an experience can be construed as being justified since it may have been facilitated as a response to some kind of emotional or physical pressure. This may be exacerbated by a perception that women are not as strong

as men and it may not be possible for them to have the same effect on men should they perpetrate any act of violence. This may be attributed to the position that it is more likely to excuse the behaviour of women since men may have been more likely to have behaved in such a way that justifies their behaviour (Erikson et al. 2017).

The '#Me Too' movement has done much to reposition the argument that women are the victims of domestic and intimate partner violence. It has empowered women to assume a position of resilience in getting their message of abuse in the forefront so that they could receive the necessary social, political, and legal support in confronting this socially unacceptable practice. Little attention has been given to addressing this challenge from a gender neutral perspective since the underlying assumption is that it is not perpetrated by women against men. While there is sensitivity of the need to involve men and boys in the movement, the focus remains more on their resocialization about being better able to respect women without a commensurate level of sensitivity that such a level of respect should be mutual.

When consideration is given to a woman who murders a man, there is some sociological explanation or justification she may have been a victim of 'battered wife syndrome' or may have suffered 'temporary insanity'. However, there is no such support for men in similar situations although they may have been victims of gender based violence, albeit emotional/psychological. Such violence acts may not leave any physical marks but the psychological wounds may have left indelible marks that may be extremely difficult to erase. While such behaviours should never be excused, a need exists to dissect the social construction of masculinity from a Caribbean perspective to develop an appreciation and understanding of how gender based violence is constructed and portrayed.

Complexity of Men as Victims

While women clamour for equal rights and equity, the social structures are geared towards women and their needs. For a man to reach out for help is to be considered less than manly. Inherent in this analysis is the power differential which is consistent with Barriteau's (2000) contention about masculinity as defined may be different from masculinity as experienced. This is a complex perspective since men are not defined based on their biological but the sociological imperatives that are evident by

their behaviours or their alignment to sociocultural norms. Since men are expected to demonstrate control and dominance in matters related to sexual roles which exacerbates the notion that women are subservient, any indication that men are victims of gender based violence is diametrically opposed to such a notion.

What is even more challenging that intensifies such a level of complexity is the notion that men should not acknowledge that women, who are supposed to be the weaker sex, do perpetrate gender based or intimate partner violence. To do so may be construed as an acknowledgement that as a man, he is the weaker sex and does not ascribe to the sociocultural expectation of masculinity. In an environment where masculinity is policed to ensure that men align to the sociocultural nuances associated with masculinity as performative, this further compounds the dilemma. In such circumstances, men may be forced to be constantly negotiating, renegotiating, and redefining notions of masculinity to determine some level of comfort with their masculine identity. In this regard, men may be more inclined to adopt behaviours that are socially acceptable by showing restraint and self-control since both are what is expected of him. In so doing, he may be able to demonstrate a position of feeling that he is in charge of his environment.

Demonstrating constraint or control, could be extremely challenging especially if, in his estimation, his manhood is not respected. This can be exacerbated by the expectation of his peers that any woman who is disrespectful of his masculine identity deserves to feel the extent of his ire. In such circumstances, he may experience some measure of cognitive dissonance in satisfying the expectation of his peers to demand that his female companion subjects herself to his authority or respect his partner as someone whom he loves.

Masculine identity is central to men's understanding of themselves in relation to other men as well as women. Within the Caribbean context, men's identity is also intricately linked to their sexual identity which supports the notion that men are not the weaker sex. To ignore emotional pressure is a complex issue since it is rooted in a level of cognitive dissonance that is supported, but not validated by his peers and the wider society. The very notion of walking away from conflicts could be construed as strength in one context and as weakness in another. This constant renegotiation of his masculine identity often forms the basis for his actions in an attempt to align him to masculine normative behaviours or demonstrating control.

The complexity of gender based violence must therefore be examined within the context of men's reaction to emotional pressure. For the most part, men perpetrate sexual and physical violence within intimate partner relationships; however, women are more likely to perpetrate emotional and verbal violence against men. Part of this reasoning may be attributed to the notion of women's understanding and acceptance of the notion that they are 'weaker' than men from a physiological perspective. Women may be more potent with the use of language. It is the potency of language that provides a basis for women to assume a position of power since words that are used at appropriate time could prove more debilitating to a man's ego than any act of physical violence. What is even more complex in this context is the difference in perspectives of men as opposed to women perpetrating violence on each other. In the case of women, evidence of the perpetration of abuse may not be as serious or warrant action if it was done from the other perspective.

Social Support Systems Female Rather Than Gender Sensitive

In reviewing the literature on women as perpetrators of intimate partner violence, Camey et al. (2007) argue that in spite of the evidence which shows that women perpetrate intimate partner violence there is not a commensurate level of seriousness with which men, as victims, is addressed. Part of the challenge with being able to develop an appreciation for the epidemiology of the problem from a male perspective relates to how data are collected and whether men are asked the appropriate questions during emergency room interventions (Camey et al. 2007). There is a likelihood that the way questions are framed creates opportunities to solicit information that could be considered as intrusive for identifying whether the woman's presentation was related to an intimate partner, violence related incident. On the contrary, even when there may be attempts to solicit information from men in this regard, it may be more likely to be skewed towards a non-intimate partner violent encounter. This, in and of itself, poses some measure of cognitive dissonance for men, especially if the predisposing encounter and evidence of trauma were perpetrated by a female partner. It is this apparent sensitivity to the needs of women that continues to facilitate the perpetuation of the social system being skewed towards female rather than gender neutral.

In this regard, social support services available to men as separate and apart from women are not gender sensitive, especially in the way men are catered for whenever they encounter a violent experience. A case in point relates to the level of support that a man can expect to receive from the protective services if he chooses to make a formal report. There are countless stories that have been told anecdotally about men who felt emasculated and dehumanized whenever they presented themselves for protection and support after encountering a domestic or intimate partner violence experience. The central theme of their stories has been about how their masculine identity was perceived by those who should have been there to provide some level of protection and validation about their masculine identity. Further, there is a tacit view that to restrain oneself from being violent and abusive to one's partner could be construed as evidence of strength to be men with the capacity to control their responses to unwanted and unwarranted attacks by female partners. Rather than leaving with a sense of validation for their almost heroic efforts to confront the sociocultural imperatives of hegemonic masculinity, they are further emasculated for not living up to the norms that exacerbates the perpetuation of violence, as a response, as normative.

One of the greatest challenges experienced by some men within the context of the Caribbean is the perceived sensitivity of the legal system towards females rather than males. In many instances, it is much easier to receive protective orders against men than it is against women. Further, this often results in men having to either remove themselves or having to be forcibly removed from their homes in an attempt to provide some measure of physical and emotional protection for the women. This could be extremely challenging in situations where he may still be required to continue payments as a result of loan arrangements or may have lost his investment, especially in situations where he may have invested his earnings after retirement. The emotional trauma associated with this seemingly unfair treatment before the law can be viewed as a gender sensitive response rather than equity before the law.

Strengthening Domestic Violence Policy and Charting the Way Forward

It is clear that there are no easy answers as to the proactive response of national systems to address the issues associated with gender based or intimate partner violence from a gender neutral perspective. This is particularly challenging as a consequence of greater emphasis being placed on

protecting women as vulnerable species. Even the involvement of men in the lives and experiences of women that was conceptualized by the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) focused on greater responsibility among men while calling for greater empowerment of women (United Nations Population Fund 2014). This is of particular concern bearing in mind that from an international perspective, gender equity is almost always associated with women empowerment with little or no attention being placed on equity in relationships and reciprocity. In a global environment where women are being exposed to empowerment opportunities from an academic as well as socioeconomic perspective there could be greater levels of challenge in ensuring that there is common ground and respect in relationships.

This could be exacerbated by the global economic situation where women may be able to achieve greater economic viability which can act as a framework for repositioning them with the power differentials within relationships that hitherto was the domain of men. While this should not be construed as a negative social reality there are inherent challenges that, as a society, calls for policy action to address this reality from a policy perspective. As a consequence, there must be a redefinition of gender equity that is truly sensitive to the repositioning of gender relations that challenges social norms and prescriptions. In so doing, gender equity will not be addressed from the perspective of power differentials but complementarity and reciprocal responsibility. By extension, this may be one of the most challenging gender normative perspectives held by men within a sociocultural context that accentuates male domination over women.

Such a perspective will necessitate a change in the communication strategy where men continue to be portrayed as perpetrators of violence with little sense of sensitivity to the needs of women. This may result in greater levels of cognitive dissonance within communities as they grapple with changing stereotypical images of men within the context of family and social relationships. This will require more than the use of 'role models' to present social messages as a public relations strategy. It must encompass a deliberate attempt to change conversations and a resocialization of both men and women about the imperatives of gender based empowerment within relationships. There is a likelihood that can result in relationship building that will encompass validation of men and women without having to resort to determining the bases for power differentials.

Governments, as well as social organizations must play their part in changing the agenda with a view to developing more neutral and sensitive gender based policies. In an environment where there are strong social networks that facilitate interactions among women, there should be attempts to encourage greater levels of male engagement that is not construed as superficial but deliberate. By extension, international organizations must commit to a change in policy recommendations that goes beyond female empowerment at the expense of male involvement.

The socialization of males must also entail a deliberate attempt to re-socialize men that is inconsistent with gender norms and beliefs. No longer could societies be content to facilitate the dialogue of male power and domination over women but accentuate the importance of complementarity and functionality within social spheres. However, this will result in a renegotiation of perspectives that have been accepted as normative for generations. While there are no prescriptions that will satisfy all societies, there must be a commensurate level of sensitivity that it may take generations to recalibrate the imperative of gender normative relations. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to lose hope and succumb to the negative perceptions that continue to exacerbate the notion that through dialogue we can create a new normative perspective of gender equity in relationships. This is not the responsibility of an individual but the society as a collective.

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