ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

"I'm here for abusing my wife": South African men constructing intersectional subjectivities through narratives of their violence

Floretta A. Boonzaier[1]
Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town

Taryn J. van Niekerk
Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to explore the subjectivities men construct in their talk about their own violence toward women partners and the meaning these understandings of their violence have for the intervention programmes they attend. We take an intersectional reading of marginalised men's narratives of their perpetration of violence against intimate women partners. Drawing on interviews with 26 participants who had been mandated into criminal justice intervention programmes in Cape Town, we attend to how their race, class, gender and location intersect to shape their understanding of their violence. We also analyse the implications that this wide-angle reading of men and their violence has for intervention programmes that mostly have been imported from Euro-American contexts. The paper offers a critique of current intervention practices with domestically violent men that focuses too heavily on gendered power alone. Furthermore, it suggests that an intersectional reading of the multiple realities of men's lives is important for interventions that aim to end their violence against women, particularly for marginalised men who have little stake in the 'patriarchal 'dividend'.

Keywords: batterer interventions, intersectionality, intimate partner violence, narrative, domestic violence

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (2013) estimates that almost a third of women worldwide have been victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) while the prevalence rates in Africa bypass the global average by reaching 36.6 percent. In South Africa, 25 to 35 percent of pregnant women have been exposed to physical or sexual violence from a partner within the past 12 months (Groves, Kagee, Maman, Moodley, & Rouse, 2012; Hoque, Hoque & Kader, 2009) and IPV has been found to be the most common form of violence experienced by women (Kaminer, Grimsrud, Myer, Stein, & Williams, 2008). IPV also accounts for a majority of the homicides of women in South Africa (Abrahams, Mathews, Martin, Lombard, & Jewkes, 2013).

South African men who perpetrate IPV are more likely to have multiple, concurrent female partners; use condoms inconsistently; have sexually transmitted infections (STI) symptoms; and engage in transactional sex (Pitpitan et al., 2012; Townsend et al., 2011). The results from a study with men in Cape Town found that IPV perpetration was significantly linked to having a casual sexual partner as well as to alcohol dependence (Mthembu, Khan, Mabaso, & Simbayi, 2016). It has also been found that, as alcohol abuse decreases, partner violent behaviour appears to decline (Hatcher, Colvin, Ndlovu & Dworkin, 2014). Recent research has also explored associations

1 Please direct all correspondence to: Floretta Boonzaier, Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701; E-mail: Floretta.Boonzaier@uct.ac.za

between childhood trauma and abuse and men's perpetration of IPV and found that there was a strong link between a history of childhood trauma and IPV perpetration and that this relationship was mediated by mental health problems (Machisa, Christofides, & Jewkes, 2017). Likewise, Gupta, Reed, Kelly, Stein and Williams (2012) identified a significant association between men who had experienced abuse in the form of human rights violations or witnessed severe victimisation of friends and/or family during apartheid and the perpetration of IPV. Recent research commissioned by UNICEF cite the risk factors for IPV perpetration and non-partner sexual violence as individual and household poverty, low educational attainment, abuse suffered as a child, higher traumatic experiences, greater control in relationships, personal beliefs about inequitable gender relationships, personal views on rape, alcohol abuse and having multiple concurrent sexual partners (Mathews et al., 2016).

As research suggests that the majority of perpetrators of violence in the context of intimate relationships are men (Abrahams, Jewkes, Laubscher, & Hoffman, 2006), prevention and intervention programmes for men who perpetrate this violence are essential for ending violence against women. Intervention programmes currently used in South Africa, however, draw heavily on 'northern' models and may have a limited applicability in a southern context. The South African situation is complicated by its long history of colonisation and state oppression, which created distinct gendered and racialised particularities in communities, and these histories manifest in the present (Salo, 2003). In contexts such as South Africa, there should be an opportunity for new and innovative methods of intervention which take into account the multi-faceted realities of men, and for working with them to end their violence against women partners. It is in the context of this developing area of work on intervention programmes for IPV that we explore South African men's narratives of violence against intimate women partners, and the meaning these understandings of their violence have for the intervention programmes they attend. This paper emphasises the importance of understanding the cultural background and contextual influences of men involved in domestic violence programmes in order to improve the effectiveness of those interventions.

CURRENT INTERVENTION MODELS

Individual treatment approaches to IPV that target men who are mandated to treatment by the courts are not the predominant modes of intervention in the African context (they primarily emerge from North America) (McCloskey, Boonzaier, Steinbrenner & Hunter, 2016). In the South African context, however, as a result of the need for programmes to work with men who have come to the attention of the criminal justice system and been found to have violated a protection order[1] granted to an abused partner, we saw the development of perpetrator programmes along the lines of those in North America and other 'western' contexts. These programmes focus on individual change and primarily employ individual and/or group therapy (McCloskey et al., 2016) and incorporate educational and cognitive behavioural approaches into the work. The central areas addressed in these interventions as they currently operate in the South African context include patriarchy, masculinity, gender roles, socialisation, power and control, and conflict and anger management (Padayachee, 2011). As yet, there are no published evaluations of these interventions.

In the extensive but inconclusive body of literature evaluating programmes in the North American context, factors that have been found to interfere with programme success include untreated substance abuse, mental disorders, cultural mismatch, and poverty (Bennett, Stoops, Call, & Flett, 2007). Initial research shows that the lack of attention to cultural sensitivity in the delivery of abuser programmes may contribute to high attrition rates (Buttell & Carney, 2002), which is likely to contribute to increased recidivism. Men who are likely to feel excluded and alienated by the programme content and approach, and by the programme staff are unlikely to receive any benefits from participating in it. Research indicates that different types of criminal justice interventions may have differential effects depending on 'men's social positioning – e.g. men who are already socially marginalised are less likely to be deterred by arrest than are men who have a more significant stake in conformity (Babcock & Steiner, 1999). Socially marginalised men have also been found to be less likely, than socially bonded men to complete domestic violence programmes (Babcock & Steiner, 1999) and men who are more likely to drop out are

likely to be younger, less educated and unemployed than those who complete (Edleson & Grusznski, 1989). It is therefore essential to recognise that certain approaches to intervention may further alienate men who are already marginalised and who may be deeply distrusting of the criminal justice system and of those assumed to be in positions of authority. The complex issue of attending to the social identifications of men who are mandated into IPV programmes and whether they might derive benefit from such programmes remains important (see Boonzaier & Gordon, 2015).

Furthermore, current criminal justice intervention models that dominate the field are still heavily influenced by radical feminist approaches that primarily centre an analysis of gender. It seems that while theorising about gender oppression and violence has shifted, intervention models have not followed the same trend and rely heavily on a one-dimensional feminist approach. In relation to 'men's violence, such an approach argues that aggression is primarily linked to the maintenance of gendered power and control (O'Leary, Heyman, & Neidig, 1999), with little acknowledgement of the intersection of other factors. Overall, the results from programme evaluations of all types of interventions with violent men, including the feminist model, are mixed (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Dutton & Corvo, 2007; Gondolf, 2007). It is also unclear whether there are any models of intervention that are essentially superior to others.

In many ways, intervention programmes designed for violent men adopt an approach that largely views men through their subjectivities as perpetrators and pays insufficient attention to other elements of their identities especially where men may also have been victims of violence. This one-dimensional construction of 'men's violence mirrors black 'feminists' critiques of 'western/'white' feminism as well as 'Connell's (2005) critique of the concept of ''masculinity'. A western or radical feminist understanding of 'men's violence has become almost normalised in both lay as well as professional discourse. Broadly speaking, westernised forms of radical feminism assume that *all* men benefit equally from a patriarchal system in which *all* women are equally subjugated. These approaches, however, have been criticised for silencing the experiences of many other victims of violence. It has been argued that a focus on gender or patriarchy alone does not acknowledge the intersections of multiple aspects of identity, such as race, class, sexuality, or ability status, which, if not given recognition, would result in certain groups of women being silenced (Bograd, 1999). Black feminists have, for example, called attention to how the effects of racism systematically disadvantage black women and men and how their experiences are compounded by poverty, marginalisation, and a lack of access to resources (Crenshaw, 1994; Gonzales de Olarte & Gavilano Llosa, 1999). Consequently, it becomes important to explore violence against women as a problem embedded in relations of gender and power but simultaneously influenced by a multitude of systems of domination and inequity; principles that are foregrounded by the intersectional approach.

INTERSECTIONALITY, MASCULINITIES AND MARGINALISATION

A body of scholarship, as well as popular discourse on men and masculinities, has illustrated a growing interest in difference, diversity and intersectionality (Hearn, 2007). Intersectionality refers to a concept developed by second wave black feminists who posit that social identities and oppressions related to sexuality, ethnicity, gender, class, race, disability and so forth, intersect and are "interdependent and mutually constitutive" (Bowleg, 2008, p. 312; Collins, 2010; Crenshaw, 1994). Intersectionality has been at the core of theorising in critical race studies, black studies, and postcolonial studies (Morrell & Swart, 2005), and critical work on men and masculinities follows a similar theoretical trajectory. As Hearn (2007) noted, critical work on men and masculinity is in the process of moving away from a focus on Western contexts, turning the lens towards the global south.

Intersectional investigations into male 'perpetrators[2]' of violence in the South African context is an emerging area of work, with some significant insights into the subject matter offered by scholars such as, Lau and Stevens (2012), Moolman (2013), Morrell and Ouzgane (2005), and Ratele (2013). This paper builds upon this evolving scholarship and explores South African 'men's narratives of violence against intimate women partners, with the

understanding that gendered power shapes this violence in addition to the particular subordinated positions of these men as well as by the contexts in which their talk and their violences occur. Importantly, our application of intersectionality involves the exploration of how men's race, gender and locations intersect to shape their understanding of their violence and what this means for the programme they attend. Relatedly, we examine how the South African context, characterised by a history of violence, high levels of poverty and unemployment, as well as violence and deprivation, shape 'men's understandings of their own perpetration of violence against intimate women partners. We conclude the paper by assessing the implications of these findings for perpetrator intervention programmes and provide recommendations for more culturally and contextually appropriate ways of intervening to end men's violence against women partners.

METHOD

SAMPLE AND CONTEXT

This paper draws from qualitative interviews generated from two studies that received ethical clearance through the University of Cape Town. The interviews were conducted with 26 men who had attended intervention programmes in the Western Cape Province in South Africa. All participants were black[3] and working-class. While 19 participants were either in formal employment or described themselves as self-employed, many of these jobs involved low-paying, unskilled, and part-time labour. Only five (19%) participants had completed their high school education, and one had a post-matric (grade 12) qualification. All but one of the participants lived in historically marginalised suburbs of Cape Town. These areas, collectively known as the Cape Flats, were created as a result of the apartheid policies of 'separate development', namely the Group Areas Act of 1950, and were areas to which black people were forcibly removed. The legacy of apartheid continues to be felt in these areas as they continue to be stricken by dire poverty and deprivation, a lack of resources, and high rates of gang violence, crime and unemployment. South Africa currently has an unemployment rate of 26,7% (Statistics South Africa, 2018) – this rate, however, is skewed, reflecting our racialised past. The unemployment rate for formerly categorised 'Black African' and 'Coloured' people is 30,1% and 22,7% respectively, whereas the unemployment rate for white people, who represent a minority of the population, is 6.9%. High rates of unemployment and lack of economic opportunities are therefore key features of communities that have historically been marginalised and continue to be so.

Men who participated in the interviews were court-mandated to attend weekly, psycho-educational sessions aimed at ending their abuse towards women partners. The Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 stipulates that individuals can apply for a Protection Order to protect themselves from violence by intimate partners. An abusive partner, who violates such an order, depending on the severity of the violation, may be granted a suspended sentence and be mandated to attend a domestic violence programme. The programmes from which these men were drawn were influenced by a mixture of feminist understandings of IPV and cognitive behavioural principles. The weekly sessions that the men were mandated to attend spanned 16 to 22 weeks.

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

Unstructured, narrative interviews were used to explore men's heterosexual relationships and the violence by which these had been characterised. Men were asked open-ended questions about their relationships, their violence, and their participation in the programmes. The interviews were taped, transcribed and analysed. A thematic narrative analysis was conducted in which prior theoretical insights guided the interpretation of the data while also attending to novel insights that emerged inductively. Our analysis was guided by Riessman's (2008) stipulation of thematic narrative analysis where a focus is placed on 'what' is said by participants, rather than 'how' narratives are relayed. After the coding process and the identification and refinement of themes were complete, we undertook further analyses that attended to the centrality of language, subject positions,

knowledge and power in shaping men's understandings of IPV. The tensions, complexities and resistances in the narratives were additionally explored.

Given the centrality of power to the analysis, we offer a reading into the intersections of race, gender, class, heterosexuality, location and other axes of power and inequality to amplify how understandings of IPV are forged. We attend to the issue of how men's experiences of gender may be shaped by a range of intersecting identities and oppressions, and through their positioning as 'marginalised men'. As the men told stories about their relationships and their lives, the broader contexts of their lives and the violence were made visible, which is unpacked in this paper.

'PERPETRATORS' IN CONTEXT: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the interviews, which were conducted by us as women interviewers[4], men recounted their experiences of participating in a programme for 'perpetrators' and attempted to make sense of this experience in various ways. Furthermore, in their talk about their relationships and violence, the men drew on a dualistic construction of power and powerlessness to frame their experiences and identities. On the one hand, they positioned themselves as active and empowered agents who were willing to change by attending the intervention programme.

>> The reason why I came is just to work on myself and I took it upon myself, I'm alone, I'm not with her at the present moment. We are still seeing each other but I took it upon myself, I'm alone and I need to sort myself out. (*Rashaad*)

It could be argued that participants were speaking against a discourse of stigmatisation in their narratives. Describing themselves as committed and empowered agents (incidentally drawing on hegemonic masculinity discourse, see also van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2016), they were attempting to challenge the stigma associated with being identified as a perpetrator of IPV. In addition to being interviewed by women interviewers – the participants had been approached *because* they were participants in a program for 'perpetrators' and thus were compelled to find ways to narrate their experiences to counter this stigma.

On the other hand, men also drew on victim identities and positioned themselves as powerless and stigmatised. The men, as in previous research positioned themselves as being emasculated by controlling and domineering partners (Boonzaier, 2008) attempting to find ways to justify their violence. A second way in which men positioned themselves as victims was by describing their experiences as stigmatising and the intervention process as one that shamed them.

>> … it wasn't a nice place to be, it wasn't a nice programme to be in … this kind of thing is stigmatised in a big way … you have to search yourself in some way and know that you are now labelled and you are branded. (*Zane*)

In the context of hegemonic masculine norms in which men are seen to be superior, in control, active agents, empowered, and courageous (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010) – it is not difficult to see why some depicted intervention processes as emasculating and an attack on their identities as men. Importantly, in their narratives, a binary position was set up between women and men, with the paradox that the intervention process is targeted at men, but it was seen to be *'for women'*.

>> The guys that (were) long in the programme, sort of like they with the women all the time … they didn't see the man's point of view at all. (*Clint*)

On the whole, intervention programs were constructed as biased against men and *'for'* women. What implications might this have for men who are expected to be 'educated' or 'transformed' by these programmes? If men's experiences in such programmes are experienced as shameful, how does this intersect with their experiences of marginalisation within the broader social sphere?

ACKNOWLEDGING DIFFERENCE

Although not the majority, seven of the 26 men attended the programmes voluntarily. Attending a psycho-educational batterer program of their own accord, afforded men the opportunity to construct differences between themselves and the other men who had been mandated by the court to attend. This strategy of othering, which was not exclusively used by men who came to the programmes voluntarily but also by men who felt they did not belong there, allowed men to construct different levels of abusive behaviour (and types of abusers). On the one hand, the 'average guy' was the one who entered the programme in order to understand his behaviour and in order to effect positive behavioural change. In men's depictions, the 'abuser' on the other hand, had entered the group because he had been mandated by the court to do so. In addition, he was usually found to have perpetrated 'serious' violence against his partner.

> But the thing that struck me most was, the very first night when I was introduced and I heard what other guys in the group was there for. I thought, "Hell I don't belong here." Because, I was the only volunteer and the rest was there via the court. Although all of us was classified as domestic violence. (*Denver*)

There are important positive esteem implications for men who see themselves as 'volunteers'. By creating a category of 'real abusers' as those men who had contact with the criminal justice system, and who had perpetrated serious violence, men were able to derive a favourable comparison for themselves as men who had not perpetrated violence serious enough to get them into trouble with the law.

> "I'm mister so and so, I'm here for abusing my wife." And then I said to myself: "Geez, but I'm not an abuser, why must I come and confess that I'm an abuser?" No it doesn't work, it doesn't work. (*Mark*)

Constructing differences between themselves and 'other' men may be a way in which particular groups of men (those who joined the groups voluntarily or felt they had been wronged) are able to deny their own use of violence and thereby derive positive self-esteem implications. While it is current practice to see domestically violent men as 'all the same', consideration should be given to the fact that men themselves construct differences. These differences have implications for whether they feel they belong in the groups and of course, it would also have implications for their openness to receiving programme messages and whether they feel they have derived any benefits from participation in the groups.

On the surface, there may be important differences between a man who enters a programme voluntarily and one who was referred there via the criminal justice system. In the first instance, they may have perpetrated different forms of violence (for example, verbal or emotional compared to physical assault; 'less severe' rather than 'more severe' physical abuse). The challenge for intervention efforts with men is to attempt to acknowledge the differences between men without suggesting that they are to be held any less accountable for their violent behaviour.

Intervention efforts dominated by singular, rather than multi-causal understandings of behaviour, likely make the following assumptions which have important implications for programme participants: (a) it is assumed that all abusive men are similar; (b) it is assumed that all forms of violence are the same (for example, pushing or shoving a partner once could be equated with repeated and severe acts of violence against a partner); and (c) it assumes that intimate partner violence against women always has the same contexts, patterns, and

consequences. Johnson and Leone's (2005) work on intimate terrorism contradicts the notion of singular-causal understandings of violence against women. Johnson and 'Leone's (2005) findings indicate that there is a major difference between what is referred to as situational violence between couples and a type of violence against women called intimate terrorism (where batterers are violent more frequently, the severity of violence is greater, and the men are less likely to stop battering). Relatedly, Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's (1994, p. 476) typology, which consists of the following three sub-types of abusers: 'family only, dysphoric/borderline, and generally violent/antisocial' also provides further evidence of important differences between domestically violent men. A key concern, both conceptually and practically is: How does one acknowledge the differences between men and the different forms of violence while simultaneously *and importantly* challenging their choice to use violence against an intimate woman partner?

However, beyond these constructions of agent and victim and diversity, the men also presented identities that emphasised the contexts of their experiences and the idea that they were *more than* their individual positionings as 'perpetrators', despite being in a programme for IPV. These men brought the contexts of their lives into the interviews by describing their histories of witnessing and/or experiencing violence in their families of origin; they described the violent neighbourhoods in which they have lived and continue to live; they spoke about their contact with the police and their encounters with the legal system; and finally, they narrated their experiences of the material inequalities which shape their lives – including problems of unemployment.

VIOLENT MEN: VIOLENT FAMILIES

Witnessing or experiencing violence in childhood emerges as a consistent risk factor in research on violence perpetration (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2005; Machisa et al., 2017). In perpetrator groups, men are also asked to link their current behaviours and what they may have witnessed or experienced in their families of origin. Not surprisingly then, many men reflect on their past experiences of witnessing their fathers' violence against their mothers or of being victims of abuse themselves:

> I think my father was the same, the way I am like that. You know put me in his shoes now. That time when he took us out, say okay we [going][5] to his mother's now for the weekend. And then I know already when we gonna come home tonight is going to be an argument, fighting and that time it wasn't like [protection orders]. Cause I told my wife last night if there [were protection orders] that time […][6] then my mother would have taken out [one] a long time already because, seeing her today, she's got a leg, she's got a plate inside that's how he fought with her when he's drunk and all that – he was like physically abusing her. And I saw all this, meaning I grew up with this. […] (*Lance*)

Above, Lance makes the purpose of his narration of childhood experiences of witnessing violence clear to the interviewee when he says: *" … I saw all this, meaning I grew up with this."* He is asking the interviewee to understand the link between his current behaviour and his past experiences. The narrative of the social learning/ witnessing of violence is a pervasive one. It is one that is used in the programmatic work with domestically violent men where men are encouraged to link their current violence and their histories of witnessing or experiencing violence. The narrative, as can be seen above, is also a narrative men can draw on to 'explain' their own violence and one that potentially, in interpersonal interaction, could provide some way of accounting for their violence.

In some cases, the men drew on a cultural narrative of discipline to explain the context of their childhood upbringings and the form of physical discipline that was often adopted and seen to be permissible:

> My mother had this friend. That lady didn't need a reason because she could just hit you, just like that. Like, when we're going to school, um, I think I was in grade four at the time […] Like, when my mother wasn't there, she used to like, "do this". If you don't do it properly, it's just, it's a beating. Just like that, no

> questions asked. But you can't talk back. Like when she used to hit us, even in the morning you are leaving. You did polish your shoes, but you just didn't shine it and you walking out the door -- my mother's already left in the morning. Then "why didn't you do this" and what and what and what (*clicks fingers*)[7], she hit […] I'm crying, my cousin's crying but we used to go to school. We were just beaten up for nothing […] that's the kind of violence that I encountered in my growing up. (*John*)

As with Lance above, the purpose of John's narration is made explicit at the end of the abstract when he says: *"… that's the kind of violence that I encountered in my growing up."* However, the extent of the violence in men's families of origin, whether witnessed or received as a victim, is overwhelming. It was not unusual for men to talk about their unhappy and sometimes chaotic childhoods, being under the care of various caregivers, some of whom were not necessarily familial relatives but rather fellow occupants in their homes. The race and class position of the men and their families (growing up during apartheid) meant that as parents were working, they frequently had to rely on others (friends, neighbours or extended family) for unpaid childcare, sometimes placing children in positions of vulnerability. In addition, for struggling working-class black families, a tenant in the home (usually renting a room) provided an additional source of much-needed income but may also have made children in the home more vulnerable.

Men's reflections on their own violence against women partners involved narrations of disbelief and confusion as to how this transition from being 'the abused' to becoming 'the abuser' occurred:

> Because now […] I'm doing it. I always think back to, I used to see [violence] happen. Because even my mother hears now I did this to my partner, she always say, "This happen to me and you doing it to this person" […] So that's why I never forget – even if he's [step-father] not doing it, it's still happening now […] because I'm doing it now. (*John*)

Recent studies have similarly found that some 'violent' men experienced abusive, broken childhoods involving parental deaths, harsh discipline by caregivers, emotionally-distant parenting, and absent fathers – complex histories that might have produced a particular sense of self (Mathews, Jewkes, & Abrahams, 2011). Taking a psychosocial perspective, it has been argued that emotional insecurities emerging from childhood experiences may propel men into abusive behaviours in adulthood as their anxieties are transformed into rage (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007). Emotional vulnerabilities might involve the construction of 'tough' masculinities as some men consider emotional expression to signal weakness (Seidler, 2007). It is worth stating however that the link between a history of witnessing or experiencing abuse in childhood and the later perpetration of violence against a partner is adulthood is not automatic and would be shaped by a range of intersecting, mediating factors.

In the programmes, men are asked to reflect on this association between having been victims of abuse as children and perpetrators of violence against women as adults. However, the extent to which these reflections might be the catalyst for changing their own behaviour is questionable, although it is the intention of the programme to effect such change.

There are a number of points to be made about the narration of past histories of violence located within families whose lives were fundamentally shaped by apartheid. Firstly, in the immediate context of the interview and the intervention programme such narration, for men, may serve the purpose of providing a rationale for their current violence. Our purpose here is not to reiterate the work on how men's accounts of violence aim to provide justification for their behaviour but to locate such narratives within the broader contexts of their lives and histories. How are we to give recognition to these histories and contexts while at the same time acknowledging the function of the narration in the interpersonal context of the interview? Men's reflections on their histories of violence and the possibility of this being a catalyst for change, cannot be singled out from their rest of the lives in which they may continue to be surrounded by different forms of violence, particularly the normalized use of violence as a means of 'protection' and conflict resolution in their homes, families, and communities.

VIOLENT MEN: VIOLENT NEIGHBOURHOODS

Violence has pervaded the lives of many men who find themselves on the margins of South African society. Growing up in violent neighbourhoods are everyday experiences for most of the men we interviewed. As already mentioned, most of the men grew up and lived in the sub-standard areas created for black people by the apartheid government. The collective dehumanising and traumatic experiences of forced removals and a lack of employment and social opportunities provided fertile grounds for gang activity, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence –which have amplified and continue to the present day (Wood, 2005). As noted earlier, men's narratives of violence perpetration included themes of childhood hardships and at times, broken homes and absent caregivers. This illustrates how these experiences may have led boys to seek a sense of community, occasionally, in the unsafe space of gangs:

>> I grew up in an area where there was just violence where I also picked up that negative way, "I can also be like that, I also wanna be like them. And I also wanna join that crowd". That crowd messed up my whole life […] The one say, "We gonna rob this lady now", then who am I to say no 'cause everyone is going to help and everybody wanna get away so who am I to say no […] The person that didn't do anything then we beat him […] and I went through it once and I thought to myself and I'm not going through this again. (*Steve*)

Another man described his experiences of being surrounded by violence through racial and cultural narratives, and as a 'reality' largely faced by those residing in marginalised communities:

>> The school I went to – it was, it was a good school, you see. It was a multi-racial school; it was Indians and black people you see. So, like, various things like, we were taught many things, but I don't think 'abuse' was that much of a word, but stuff like that. So, my mind was like, growing up I was very clever from like a young age, so seeing things like that I noticed, and it stayed with me, you see. (*John*)

Growing up in neighbourhoods beset by violence required the participants to be particular kinds of men and to 'appropriately' display violent masculinity. It has been established that apartheid capitalism and the longer history of colonisation and slavery in South Africa resulted in the profound breakdown of family and cultural systems, education and employment opportunities, including a range of other countless effects (Segal & Labe, 1990). Scholars like Wood (2005), for example argued that gang sub-cultures emerged as a result of overwhelming marginalisation to counter the effects of generations of epistemic and material violence emerging from colonisation, slavery, apartheid and industrial capitalism.

For some of the men in this research, these ways of performing masculinity were argued to occur from a very young age, and many described it as entrenched in adulthood:

>> … you can't stand [and] there is someone [that] just attack[s] you and you do nothing about it. Um, you know, probably, living in Manenberg[8] of all places, there you've gotta be *street-smart*[9]. There you can't just walk and people want to interfere and rob you and you just let them, I would never allow that. And everybody knows me in that neighbourhood, I say to them straight, "You touch my family you *dead* I promise you. Even if I had to go to jail there's no way you gonna get away with it". (*Shane*)

>> … basically, the thought that I grew up with was that violence solves anger. Violence solves anger. Something like that. I grew up with that terminology. And when I was at school, I was like that as well, where, if you look at me, if you do - just don't cause I'm gonna hit you. (*Emile*)

For Shane, violence is described as a survival technique, in a context that requires it. Gangsterism on the Cape Flats has been understood as a means through which some men gain status, allowing them to be seen as a 'man' by other men and to counter the effects of extreme marginalisation. This has led some to argue that men's

vulnerability may very well be hidden behind a façade of a fearless and unwavering bravado (Salo, 2007). As illustrated by Langa and Kiguwa (2013), for young black men who find themselves on the peripheries of matrices of oppression, the friction between the ideal and the real is heightened. Black impoverished men have been argued to experience extreme pressures to enact a thriving masculinity (Rich & Grey, 2005); while having limited opportunities to perform this masculinity in the context of "racism on the streets and racism within institutions" (Whitehead, 2005, p. 418). Violence is a way through which men can gain and maintain respect, and it is used as an appropriate means of protection to avoid being victimised – a view shared by Emile above. He describes how the perpetration of violence provides an outlet through which to deal with uncomfortable emotions, and possible unspoken vulnerabilities.

There is a dearth of popular language on men's vulnerability (Hooks, 2004) and representations that equate masculinity only with domination allow little space for what men do, say and feel. The battle to ensure that fear and anxiety never surface may motivate young men to condone the idea that masculinity is defined by "playing it cool, ignoring pain, and never walking away from a fight" (Ratele, 2010, p. 20; Shefer, Ratele, Strebel, Shabalala, & Buikema, 2007).

The community setting and social climate in which men's violence occurs is of vital importance for not only men's decision to end their violence, but for their prolonged change towards non-violence. In recent work, van Niekerk and Boonzaier (2016) illustrated that South African men's change towards non-violence faltered once the support structures offered through the perpetrator programme were no longer present. The current paper similarly highlights how intervention programmes may target men in isolation of their communities, and because men's environments outside of the programme may not have changed, they may struggle to maintain a commitment to non-violence in the context of communities and relationships where violence may be deemed acceptable and even necessary.

VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS

The pervasiveness of violence in the lives of the men we interviewed also emerged in some of their descriptions of their encounters with the legal system; either through the experience of police brutality or the experience of dehumanising conditions in the prison system. Some of the participants who have been reported for violence against a partner described the police response as violent and encompassing unnecessary force:

> That's a person [police] that's supposed to protect you, but they do such things. Not right. This police system is really fucked up, it's fucked up man. They kicked me, whatever. My chest was sore. When I demand to go to hospital to go have it checked out, they say, "hey, go fuck yourself, go!" Cause there was pain in my chest, you know. No, this story is not right. (*Abe*)

The South African media has reported on frequent incidents of police brutality. One example is an incident in which a Mozambican taxi driver was tied to the back of a police vehicle and dragged for some distance (Saville, 2013). He was later found dead in a police cell with nine police officers implicated in his murder. The abuse of state power is especially prevalent when it comes to police responses to individuals in marginalised communities – trends that have been found elsewhere too (e.g. Bruce, 2002; Glaser, 2005; Smith & Holmes, 2003). As part of a series of reports commissioned by the Southern African Human Rights NGO Network (SAHRINGON), research was carried out across 11 South African Development Community (SADC) countries to understand the nature and extent of police brutality (Bruce, 2002). It was found that police brutality manifested within a variety of forms, including execution-type killings in custody. Assaults in and outside of custody were also commonly found, which included reckless or accidental shootings and killings in situations of domestic disputes, and off-duty killings of criminal suspects involved in petty offences. Cases of rape and other assaults on persons in custody, as well as attacks on individuals reporting cases to the police, were also found (Bruce, 2002).

In addition to the police response to enforcing domestic violence laws, men also speak about the harsh and dehumanising conditions in the prison system:

>> Well, I must tell you, I was at the police station [jail] for the Easter weekend and it was not nice. I mean, I was sleeping on a mattress, the blankets were stinking, and I don't smoke, the people were smoking. They were spitting, just like that, although there's a toilet. The toilet … don't mention the toilet … (*Jack*)

A man who has been imprisoned for violating a protection order will likely respond negatively (particularly if he felt that his initial behaviour did not require any intervention). An adverse response is also likely because intervention by the criminal justice system now also has identity implications for the man being imprisoned. These implications are however amplified when the conditions in the system are deemed inhuman, such as a lack of safety, risk of violence, a lack of adequate sanitation, and appropriate facilities. At times men responded to this kind of intervention with further violence or animosity toward their partners who were seen as the reason why they had been sent to prison in the first place.

As above, we are not suggesting that attention to narratives about the ways in which marginalised men continue to be dehumanised in the criminal justice system should come at the expense of a focus on their perpetration of violence against women. In earlier research, Hearn (1998) found that men who had perpetrated violence against known women often reported having endured physical violence at the hands of the police. This violence perpetrated against the men often became the topic of discussion amongst men, as they moved away from speaking about their own violence against women (Hearn, 1998). This 'talk' has been described as way for men to mitigate their violence against partners and avoid responsibility – a finding similarly reiterated in other studies where the presence of a discourse of 'men as victims of gender politics' in their talk about the criminal justice system was argued to act as a tool to reduce accountability for their perpetration of violence (e.g. Boonzaier, 2008; van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2016). Although the data in this study highlighted instances of this 'talk' of men's victimization as a tool to deflect from their own abuse against women partners, there is also evidence of women who describe being ignored and ridiculed by the very police who are meant to enforce the domestic violence legislation meant to keep them safe from abusive partners (van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015) making the police response a legitimate area of concern.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND MATERIAL INEQUALITIES.

Living on the margins of society also means that financial resources are often scarce. Many of the participants recalled a struggle for survival that either characterised their childhoods or was a constant feature of their lives as adults:

>> It was difficult that time because I was going to high school […] no money at all […] Instances where I didn't have lunch and money you see. Other kids take out R50, R20 […] going to eat you know and you like just sitting there, got R2 but it wasn't like nice experience for me. I used to take a train, I think it was R27 weekly ticket, that's, that's all I could get. That weekly ticket. To the station it is 30, 40 minutes' walk – to and from. And then it used to be bad for me when it was raining […] Uniform – you don't have full uniform […] You see its cold, really cold, you have a jersey, don't have a blazer. Going there with your shorts, its cold and its windy outside, you wearing broken shoes or pants are short or, but there was just nothing there. Like, that was my schooling. You know like, when they grow older like, those thoughts you know like they, its coming back more now, now that I'm here [at the programme] […] with only a rand in [my] pocket. (*John*)

In his interview, John vividly narrated about the structural inequalities and financial hardships that plagued his childhood, shaping his experiences of schooling, and framing his understanding of his position in the world. As an adult, he reflected on the injustices he experienced as a child – of seeing the relative privilege of those around

him – while his financial struggle often involved choosing between a meal, clothing, or transport to school. John, along with other men in the sample, reflected on how their childhood experiences of adversity framed their subjectivities as men, and how this cycle of inequality also emerged in their lives as adults:

>> I'm not working, you understand. I'm doing spare jobs and whatever money I can get and, I give her something but if there's no work what can I do? (*Mario*)

The narrative that shapes Mario's experiences as an unemployed black man in contemporary South Africa is part of a longer history of the experiences of black men pushed to the margins by forces beyond their control. As shown by Langa and Kiguwa (2013), for young marginalised black men attaining the ideals of what they are told is a hegemonic form of masculinity (i.e. being the financial provider for one's family), becomes more difficult in contexts that continue to be defined by the historical legacies that shaped them.

The purpose of foregrounding men's narratives on the range of intersectional and violent experiences that shaped their lives is multiple. Firstly, research on the high levels of gender-based violence in South Africa frequently perpetuates the narrative that men's social identities and statuses (i.e. black, poor and low education) somehow produce an inherent risk for violence. In a country so fundamentally marked by racialised inequality, any reading about violence that links it to poverty, low education and unemployment, will uncritically mark black men as inherently violent, isolating their very racialised and classed identities as 'risk 'factors' for violence (Boonzaier, 2018). How black, poor men continue to be subordinated through a white hetero-patriarchal and hyper-capitalist system is thus obscured from view. Our first purpose has been to foreground this through asking men to narrate their violence within the broader contexts of their lives. Our second purpose has been to bring in to view how criminal justice interventions for domestically violent men might benefit from understanding this larger context of marginalised men's histories and their lives.

GAPS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper showed that the psychoeducational, pro-feminist, cognitive behavioural approaches currently used in intervention approaches with domestically violent men may have important implications for the success of these interventions. The men's narratives revealed that the *context* of their lives, relationships, and actions were central to telling their stories about violence and that these contexts needed to be understood as meaningful in relation to the intervention processes they were undergoing. In making an argument about the broader context of their lives, men were possibly suggesting that the intervention efforts drew too heavily on just *one* dimension of their identities (that of 'perpetrator'). Given the range of contexts and experiences discussed above and their construction by these men as important for understanding their identities as men, an intervention's focus on just one dimension of their violence (i.e. gender and power) is a possible cause for concern.

Situated alongside our critique of current intervention practice in South Africa is also an acknowledgement of a huge gap between theory and practice. Feminist theorising on the African continent and elsewhere has certainly, for a long time now, acknowledged the complexities of 'men's and 'women's lives. Yet, the 'feminist' model of domestic violence used in much intervention work presents a particular, caricatured version of feminism that often retains a one-dimensional focus and, as Corvo and Johnson (2003) argue, the more creative and innovative dimensions of feminist theory end up being ignored. There are possible reasons for why this gap between theory and practice exists, including funding demands from international agencies that may ensure that local practitioners rely on international models assumed to have greater legitimacy. There are varieties of feminisms that exist in South Africa and on the continent, which also include progressive pro-feminist work, and it is to these avenues that we should look for providing insight into local problems. This body of progressive feminist work (Gqola, 2007; Ratele, 2013) has the potential to begin to seriously grapple with issues surrounding power

and difference. The challenge for feminist interventions would be to give attention to cultural and other forms of diversity, while simultaneously acknowledging and challenging all forms of male privilege.

The data presented in the paper may be argued to be limited by the frame through which the participants were located, namely talk of their violence through an intervention programme and the once-off nature of the interviews. In order to design culturally appropriate interventions with marginalised men, more in-depth life-history methods that aim to fully unpack how the disadvantage and brutalisation men may have experienced may be linked to their violent behaviour (Gadd, 2004) would be recommended. In order to effect a positive transformation of men in IPV interventions, we need to understand the various trajectories and transitions that have led to their violence and criminalisation (Gadd, 2004).

Without colluding in men's violence, greater attention should be paid to these themes that emerge from men's narratives with a view to designing more effective interventions with such men. It is, of course, important to challenge men's particular understandings (such as those surrounding male dominance) in relation to their violence towards women, and to recognise and challenge their rationalisations, minimisations and justifications when they occur, but it is equally important to respect particular contextual nuances in interventions with violent men.

NOTES

1. A protection order is a court order enabled through the Domestic Violence Act 116 (1998), ensuring a woman protection from violence from an intimate partner.
2. The terms 'perpetrator' and 'batterer' are used interchangeably in this paper. The former term is more commonly used in South Africa.
3. The term 'black' here is used to identify all groups who were oppressed under apartheid.
4. Not only were our identities as women made visible in our interviews with men but our shared 'racial' identities also manifested in the interviews. We were also able to identify with the men we interviewed, ourselves having lived in different areas of the Cape Flats and coming from working class backgrounds. A detailed analysis of our how shared and differing identities played themselves out in the interviews is beyond the scope of this paper. Boonzaier however has written elsewhere on the reflexive dynamics of interviewing (see Boonzaier, 2014).
5. Words placed in square brackets are either directly translated into English from Afrikaans or included to clarify the meaning of the extract.
6. A square bracket with ellipsis indicates that text is missing.
7. Round brackets with words in italics signifies non-verbal communication.
8. Manenberg is one of the areas created as a result of the Group Areas Act of 1950 during apartheid and to which black people were forcibly relocated.
9. Italics indicate emphasis in the talk.

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