

*Research on violence against women.
A sociological perspective**

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Summary. *This article reviews various approaches to the study of gender violence coming from a sociological point of view. The review is a partial, diachronic reconstruction of the international debate since the 1970s, including the contribution of Black Feminism, Latin American Studies and Gender Migration Studies. We propose to consider gender intersectional asymmetries, including those related to cultural and social groups, to class, age, sexual orientation and legal status. This review assumes symbolic violence as a theoretical perspective.*

Keywords: *violence against women; symbolic violence; intersectionality; gender; feminist research*

This article critically reviews a selection of the scientific literature on violence against women (VAW): in particular, the article focuses on the critical contribution of some feminist thoughts to VAW study (Martin, 1976; Crenshaw 1994; Morgan, Thapar-Bjorkert, 2006 et al.). VAW is supported, both implicitly and explicitly, by a set of cultural meanings related to gender, beliefs, norms and social institutions (Russo, Pirlott 2006). Moreover VAW can be considered as affecting the system of knowledge and practices through which we build and recognize gender identities (Goffman, 1977; Bourdieu, 1998).

The analyses of power relations between women and men in gender violence research highlights that the symbolic organization of society is built upon and sustained by social practices and gender roles.

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This article presents a partial analysis of some areas of research on VAW developed in the last 40 years. The scientific output on VAW has grown substantially in this period and it is not easy to compare the results of the different studies because of the variety of theoretical and empirical approaches used in the research. Among the whole array of approaches under scrutiny, a gender sensitive methodology appears to prevail: this considers the sufferance and agency of women (Schwartz 1997, Creazzo 2008).

I will argue for the relevance of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1998) in VAW research as a relevant pattern of interpretation because it overcomes some of the actual limits of research on gender violence: e.g. the risk of increasing victimization (Heise, 1995; Kapur, 2002); the “biological foundationalism” (Nicholson, Seidman, 1999) dualism men-women; the “empire of choice” (Debert, Gregori, 2008). In my Ph.D. project the perspective of symbolic violence allows to highlight four different issues: first, the different meanings assigned to violence by women; second, the predominant social representations of VAW; third, the structural violence and the contexts in which violence is experienced; and fourth, the women’s different subjective capabilities, agency and empowerment.

Research on VAW before the 1970s

Until the 1970s, research on men’s VAW in Western countries was shallow in terms of quality and quantity. Most research was based on a criminological approach or on empirical studies, which aimed to identify the causes of violence. The causes of violence were explained by three main models. One model explained VAW through biological motivations: violence is a human predisposition conceived as a psychobiological response. Another model explained VAW by focusing on the influence of the characteristics of social systems on individual conditions. A third model considered psychopathological reasons: violence as a consequence of a psychological disorder, of alcohol or drug abuse, etc. Crucially, this search for an “exceptional” interpretation of the violence typically discharges the perpetrator from the responsibility of the act and therefore silences the violence embedded within gender relations. The importance of gender asymmetry was absent in the analysis of violent relationships between men and women. Even when VAW was actually described, it was not recognized or analysed as such (Okun, 1986), rather it was displaced mistakenly for different causes (such as excessive drinking or psychological fragility, poverty, more recently stress, unemployment, crisis or belonging to cultural minorities). As a consequence, the principal problem to be addressed would be the alcohol addiction, depression etc. and not violence in itself (Hume, 2009).

Until the 1970s, VAW suffered from selective inattention (Dexter, 1958). VAW was not seen as an autonomous research topic within the sociological

debate on family, interpersonal violence or social violence acts, apart from the aforementioned criminology.

Family violence

The first to become visible as a social and family issue was family violence. That family life was particularly dangerous for women had already been reported in some books in the 1800s (e.g. *The subjection of Women*, Mill, 1861, and *Wife Torture in England* & Cobbe, 1878,). Many theoreticians observed that the more intimate a relationship, the greater the likelihood of aggressive interaction (Bard & Zacker, 1971, pp. 667-668)

This was confirmed by statistics reported by Bard and Zacker (ib.) in which between 35 per cent and 50 per cent of all homicide cases in the USA were intra-familiar, and the percentage of homicide cases that could be attributed to family-issues grew to about 80% whenever friends and neighbours were included in the analysis. However, before the 1970s family violence was seen as a rare phenomenon. Moreover, in the USA, that a man hit his wife occasionally was considered acceptable by one in every four men, and by one in every six women (Stark & Mc Evoy, 1970).

Stanko (1990) underlines that the family was, and still is, considered immune from “real” violence. So, there was an arbitrary separation between “violence” and “violence against women”. Similarly, recent Italian research recognizes that several approaches based on the polarization between social order and disorder describe families and communities as “naturally” aiming toward an ordered equilibrium (Trappolin, 2003).

During the 1970s, VAW became a topic of public relevance. It began to attract scientific interest. For example, in 1971 the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* published a Double Special Issue on “Violence and The Family and Sexism in Family Studies”. This is the first time that a title with the word “violence” appeared in the journal index (Okun, 1986). However, many of the articles published in the special issue were gender-blind and focused only on the couple per se. Moreover, as denounced by Goode (1971), the social sciences still lacked a systematic observation on the influence of force and its threat on day-to-day interactions. Also, some of the studies published in the Special Issues showed the methodological limits that characterized research on violence at that time. There were few empirical research studies, with no common definitions and the proper tools for gathering empirical data was lacking. Research on VAW was primarily based on analysis of complaints to the police, the percentage of homicides, psychological and medical samples of violence cases. In conclusion, at the beginning of the 1970s it was impossible to know the spread of violence and to distinguish among gender violence and the factors related to individual and pathological violent behaviour which lead to public identification.

Thanks to the scientific output of Feminists, during the 1970s, analysis of violence began to change. VAW started to be studied through the development of new methodological and theoretical approaches. Feminist scholars analyzed the family empirically, as an asymmetric field of power considering both the financial, cultural, sexual and affective aspects of relationships, as well as the relationships of love and dependence. Previous theories on violence underwent a critical revision. One of the goals of the feminist contribution was to deconstruct the explanatory models by replacing them with new ones based on empirical data collected from a standpoint that considered the experiences of women. These were the first steps toward the development of a new scientific epistemology of VAW.

Feminist contributions on scientific research on VAW

In the 1970s, feminist activists and scholars focused on masculine power and violence: violence became a real, autonomous concept and its hidden dimensions began to be uncovered (Hume, 2009). Strauss (1974), referring to US society, identified three factors explaining the shift of VAW from “selective inattention” to “high priority social issue”. A first factor was the increased sensitivity to violence by social scientists and public opinion, due to the general concerns over the War in South East Asia, social protests in Western countries, and the increasing rate of homicides in the USA. The second factor was the unsuitability of prior categories employed by social scientists to explain the social changes up until that period. This challenged the past sociological works and even strengthened the elaboration of new practices of research, which demonstrated that research on VAW could also be conducted on non-clinical populations (Gelles, 1980). The third, most important, factor seems to be the rise of the Feminist movement which played a decisive role in the development of research on violence, thus bringing to the fore the problem of VAW. Since then, VAW has become a public issue, not a private one. By documenting the histories of VAW, feminists created a space for the voice of women in the public arena. Activists opened shelters and activated phone-lines to support women who had been victims of violence; they demonstrated publicly against violence; they published books and pamphlets (e.g. Brownmiller 1975; Pizzey 1974; in Italy: Rivista Effe, Number 0 in 1973).

Now studies focus on understanding the structural features of society in the specific contexts of couples, families, relationships between peers, as well as in schools, governmental agencies and through the media and religious practices and institutions.

This changed approach in the study of VAW, shifting the standpoint from “the responsibility of woman” to the social and subjective responsibilities of men; and from vulnus to society, from “protections of moral” to the

suffering and agency of the individuals (Russell, 1975; Martin, 1976; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Studies were focused on women rather than on the perpetrators of violence (Katz, Mazur, 1979). The topics receiving most attention were sexual and domestic violence and violence in intimate relationships, which included physical violence, psychological-emotional violence, verbal, economic and sexual violence. Moreover Russell (1975), Martin (1976), Dobash and Dobash (1979) introduced the theme of rape in marriage into the scientific debate.

Domestic life was the most analysed context, (Hanmer & Itzin, 2000), but other types of violence received attention too: e.g. violence in the workplace (Mac Kinnon, 1979) and in colleges (Koss, Gizycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Couple's relationships were investigated in order to understand the correlation between violence and emotional investment, women's strategies of resistance to violence and how women reacted to violence (Walker, 1979; Browne, 1987). Researchers indicated that even if some women might not have known their perpetrators, in most cases, the perpetrator was a person with which they had or had had a relationship with (Johnson, 1995).

Pragmatic-goal-guided research was conducted in the 1970s, trying to solve the methodological problems in defining violence, or relating to sampling or measurement issues (Gelles, 1980). Feminist research offered new tools to investigate VAW. The empirical information was collected more accurately than before by gathering complaints filed by the police, welfare offices, and at the emergency rooms of hospitals. Medical records, reports and legal judgments, and the number of admissions of women in hospitals were all monitored (Martin, 1976; Walker, 1979). Research was also based on life histories and in depth-interviews gathered, for example, from women residing in the shelters (Walker, 1979; Dobash & Dobash, 1979), who responded to newspaper advertisements (Prescott, Letko, 1977), who were clients of lawyers, or college or university students (Bergen, Edleson, & Renzetti, 2005).

In this section we have presented some contributions of Feminist research on the study on VAW that have been useful, especially for latter studies. Feminist research related VAW to gender. Accordingly, VAW was considered as embedded in "normal" gender relationships, and it then begun to be described as a social practice. Hence, VAW was a transversal problem. Research demonstrates that gender violence occurs in all countries, irrespective of social, economic, religious or cultural group (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Edwards, 1987; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). This violence is born from the inequality between women and men, and from the subordination of the first to the second.

Feminist patriarchal theory (Firestone, 1970; Millet 1970; Dobash & Dobash, 1978) challenged the first studies on family violence that overshadowed gender asymmetries (Goode 1971; Bard & Zacker, 1971; and ot.), argued that they hid the perpetrators and the directions of violence itself. The patriarchal theory states that, throughout history, men have systematically

enacted violence towards women. Both from the methodological and interpretative point of view, this recognition was a necessary statement to reveal the “neutral universal” that hid the asymmetry of violence and its gender dimensions. Moreover, the patriarchal theory deemed necessary the diachronic analysis of economic and social processes that support social order and a patriarchal familiar structure (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Debert & Gregori, 2008): VAW is useful in the perpetuation of a social structure based on unequal power relations. VAW was considered a structural phenomenon, an integral part of the hierarchic order, which defined the genders (Castro & Riquer 2003). VAW started to be considered as a unique phenomenon that any woman could be subject to.

Beyond patriarchy

The Western patriarchal approach used different empirical tools to demonstrate the cross-cultural universality of masculine domination and the subordination of women. However, these researchers did not consider that the social context in which a cultural and symbolic complex is played out could vary greatly in significance. Therefore, since the 1980s, the patriarchal approach has undergone hard criticism because the violence experienced by women belonging to “marginalised” groups (e.g. lesbian, black, migrant) revealed the need to explore the different meanings associated with the same patterns of violence (Crenshaw, 1994; Hart 1986; Wyatt, 1985, etc.).

During the 1980s Black Feminist Studies, Latin American Studies and Gender and Migrations Studies (linked to Post-Colonial and Subaltern Studies) emerged, highlighting alternative stories of women and violence. According to Mohanty (1988), Western Feminist scholarship represented a reproduction of the relationship of dominion. She criticized Western scholars because of the creation of a monolithic Third World woman as the object of study, thus suppressing the heterogeneity of the subjects: women of different classes, religions, and cultures would be homogenized into the “Third World difference”. This would lead to a homogenized notion of masculine domination. Correspondingly, specific experiences of women merged together into a universal one, which is produced not on the basis of biological essentials, but rather on the basis of sociological and anthropological universalities: women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of the sociological notions of the sameness of a shared oppression. Hence, the critique of the patriarchal approach should be associated with the critique of the idea of “gender” as a self-sufficient modality of difference built on the construction of a singular, universal, unique identity, namely that of the heterosexual, Western, white and middle class woman (Butler, 1990; Moore, 1994; Scott, 1988; etc.).

Mohanty further criticized the “falsely universalizing methodologies” used to explain different practices of violence and control. Therefore,

different practices of violence were considered equivalent, regardless of cultural and historical specificities, of different social determinants and personal interests and desires. The fact that the practices might appear similar should not automatically imply that the interpretation of these practices has the same meaning in different social spheres: e.g. the case of the “strategies of veiling” enacted by young Muslim women in the UK and France (Werbner, 2007). The veil could be taken into consideration in the analysis of gender relations’ field in order to understand and explain asymmetries and power hierarchies. As Werbner describes, veiling can assume complex meanings, meanings that shift according to different situations. Taking into account the different meanings of the veil is by no means relativizing violence: it is the first step for a situated interpretation of gender hierarchies which considers also the subjectivity of women.

Moreover, a de-territorialized analysis ignores also the context in which research is conducted. Since the end of the Cold War, in Europe, various media outlets and politicians have represented Islam as a problem, thus making the veil a good case for anti-Islamic rhetoric. Doing research but ignoring the influences of public discourses on the analysis can overshadow the power relations embedded in the field observed. All research must be conducted with a critical attitude of the political dimensions of the research itself (Scarfò, 2010).

Today, criticism against patriarchy can be extended to analysis building of a-priori categories such as “women”, “the others”, “the migrants”, “the Latinas”, “Muslim women”, and “women married with arranged marriages”. This type of analysis ignores the differences among people who are “categorized” into each group and also the similarities among women of “different groups”. The subjects grow (individually and as a group) through the practices and the belongings originating from the interaction between class, cultural, religion, and sexual identities.

The critique towards generalization should not be intended towards building hierarchies of violence or sufferance, neither relativizing or denying violence. These critiques aim at positioning violence in cultural, socio-economic contexts and specific experiences in order to define the different practices and the possible solutions: the task is then to analyse when and how “difference” matters.

Intersectional approach

In VAW analysis, the difference between various experiences is crucial: these are constructed in different ways depending on the social, political and economic contexts. In everyday life gender codes are usually mixed with other attributes of identity. The intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1994) points to considering simultaneously all the axes of subordination that women experience and incorporate. Intersectionality accounts for the form

of inequality affecting the symbolic constructions and shared representations of gender and “race”, sexual orientation, age, legal status, class and culture.

Studies on violence and migration stressed the importance of distinguishing among difference (Bograd 1999; Jonshon & Ferraro, 2000 Menjavar & Salcido, 2002; Nixon & Humphreys 2010; Sokoloff & Dupont 2005; etc.). Also, they highlighted the specific vulnerability that every woman may suffer as a woman and a migrant: for example, in most cases, it can be difficult for a migrant woman to leave her violent husband or employer if her legal status depends on her marriage or her job.

Gender, “race” and culture are not to be considered as separate categories. Mason (2002) proposes to consider the intersectional approach as an interactional approach, thus starting from the concrete experiences of women and considering all the different systems of domination, not only that of patriarchy. This is the basis for the analysis of the relationship between symbolic violence and the different effects of violence (be it physical, sexual, emotional, or economic). The process through which different categories of identity build up and interact with each other should be included in any analysis. Gendered violence, racist violence, homophobic violence are different but we need to recognise the connections between them. A violent act is characterised as gendered, homophobic or racist because it reflects the hierarchical constructions of a particular form of difference, and the identity categories associated with it. These regimes of difference are linked to each other. A young, educated, black, lesbian woman from the working-class can relate simultaneously to all these belongings (and many more). In any interactions these affiliations are not acting independently but rather they merge together in a unique entity.

The meaning of an event (as well as violence) is built on the differences that are shaped through the discourse by a never-ending cultural construction. This does not mean that differences and experiences are limited to the level of discourse, rather they, and particularly their hierarchies, are a cultural construct through which the subject is built and assumes a particular identity. Differences exist, but their hierarchies are closely related to discourse and power relations: difference makes a difference because it is built as such. Therefore, violence emerges not from intrinsic features of any particular body but rather from the hierarchies of difference between such embodied constructs.

Hence, the intersectional approach can highlight the interactive potential of every difference, through considering how identities work together, in the context of violence and, further, may even hinder us in moving away from essentialised understanding of violence (Mason, 2002, 59). In this sense, once connected to symbolic violence, intersectionality makes it possible to overcome the dualism between men as perpetrators and women as victims.

Using symbolic violence in research on VAW

Bourdieu (1998) uses symbolic violence as an analytical perspective to describe how differences are built, acted on and reproduced. This perspective considers not only the difference of power between women and men but also the mechanisms of production and reproduction of the practices involved in the re-negotiation of asymmetry. The socially legitimate patterns of identity and behaviour are social constructions, which are adopted as temporary representations, even though they seem natural and immutable.

There domination is embedded in our everyday lives and shapes social experiences and subjectivity. In this context, domination is based on a social representation which describes the domination as “normal”, “natural”, “inevitable”. Domination does not have a coercive dimension: in fact dominants and dominated individuals can share the same understanding of their world.

Symbolic violence does not only act upon the bodies, but through the bodies, reproducing relations of power, domination, control, in a whole mixture of complicity, consent, lack of recognition (Morgan, Thapar-Bjorkert 2006). Symbolic violence coexists with other forms of violence, and because it sustains them, other patterns of violence are legitimized.

It is important to note that gender violence does not depend on some undefined sort of inclination (although socially constructed) of men and women. Women and men internalize sexual social order and gender hierarchies as “habitus”. Habitus is the set of dispositions which generate, unconsciously, practices and perceptions (Bourdieu, 2005). However, the model of symbolic domination is not a deterministic, universal, or an unchanging one: within certain limits, starting from habitus it is possible to “improvise” and innovate (Bourdieu, 2002).

As a matter of fact, the relational dimension is essential to the analysis of domination and the struggle for symbolic power. Masculine domination is situated in the field where the conflict between women and men is enacted, and other multiple asymmetries and inequalities (cultural, of class, of age) are reproduced, negotiated and challenged.

Nevertheless, the concept of symbolic violence poses some risks, both at the empirical and the analytical levels. The risks occur if the influence of material domination and specific contexts are ignored. Those who represent the mainstream culture (e.g. the researcher) risk enforcing universal features to the moral principles according to which s/he makes judgements about the behaviours of “others” (Calabrò, 1997). One of the problems, for example, is the possibility of imposing a-priori categories on the interviewee, playing down the implications of the lack of recognition of the domination. The choice of considering as being violent only the acts that a woman recognizes as such, prevents only partially against this risk: in fact, we should also consider that many studies show that violence is often defined as such only when the woman exits her relationship (Hagemann-White 2006; Istat, 2009).

Using a self-reflexive approach (Bovone, 2010) should help prevent the researchers from applying categories that can be “oppressive” because they have tended to constrain individual desires and practices into preconceived sets of possibilities.

Symbolic violence against simplifications

The approach of symbolic violence is useful particularly in overcoming some simplifications which appeared in the scientific debate on VAW: e.g., the victimization of women, the biological foundationalism concerning men and women, and some representations of autodetermination as being self sufficient to overcome violent situations.

It is possible to identify two interpretations in the international literature on gender violence, both based on the “normality” of violence between men and women. The first is the result of Feminist research (Hearn, 1996; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Kelly 1987; Rubin 1976); the second, contrary to the first, centres on the idea of gender symmetry (Felson, 2002; Kelly 2003). Beyond this opposition, it is important to read with care the normality of violence: the risk is to build a new victimizing approach based on the idea of the normal insuperability of violence, where the only possibility of change is limited to different modes of domination (Debert & Gregori, 2008). The substitution of “women” with “victims” complicates the comprehension of social phenomena (Heise, 1995), it obscures the potential of “negative capability” (Lanzara, 1993) and it ignores the needs, desires and pleasures of women.

Bourdieu’s approach attempts to account for the mobility of gender relations by considering the continuous redefinitions of meaning, of socio-cultural rules, of power relations. These gender relations are renegotiated in the field of masculine domination and this represents a space for change and differences.

The victimization view also produces a deterministic interpretation of women’s oppression (predestined victims) and male sexuality (biologically aggressive). Such dualism obscures the social hierarchies enacted by women and men, as well as the contents connected with each of these terms. Within this dualism, sex and gender do actually coincide and, therefore, it reinforces the universality and naturalness of the principle of normative heterosexuality (Butler, 1993), not to mention the polarization process which lays at the basis of genocide (Danna, 2007). Also, the experiences of those who do not match with the model are obscured. Within this dualism there is no place for gender violence perpetrated by women on other women, as in the case of the violence enacted by mother-in-law upon daughter-in-law whenever the latter is forced to adhere to the patterns of behaviour of the “good” mother/wife (of course, according to the parameters of the mother-in-law). Gender violence can be considered as such when the origin and the justification of violence can be identified in asymmetrical

relationships and when stereotyped gender identity (functional to dominant social order) is attributed to an individual (Carnino, 2011).

Ultimately, though symbolic domination does exist and the hierarchy of differences affects material life, the trajectories are not inevitable. If symbolic violence is considered in the field of masculine domination, it is also possible to analyse agency, empowerment and practices of resistance of women. Along with Subaltern Studies, some written works focus on the capability of dominated women to exercise power and resist oppression. In some instances, these studies conclude that if women developed appropriate attitudes, these should be sufficient to release them from subordination (Debert & Gregori, 2008). Some of the studies based on “the empire of choice” (ib.) replaced the patriarchal model with a model based on individual trajectories which are always flexible, and where social and economic constraints seem irrelevant. The integration of the Bourdesian approach with the contributions of Black Feminist Studies and Gender and Migrations Studies, shows that it is not possible to reduce the complexity of violence to the level of individual choice and subjective capacity: violence is not just a problem of self-confidence or lack of communication within the couple. The “empire of choice” perspective risks to hide economic, social, material and structural violence as well as masculine domination. Symbolic violence presents an analytical tool in understanding the context where relationships are played out and representations are negotiated.

Symbolic violence in an Italian approach on VAW

Symbolic violence is a central concept in my research project, which focuses on the connections between VAW as a “normal possibility” and the self-recognition of women as active subjects in the asymmetric field of gender relations.

Research on VAW in Italy is based on various sources: local research conducted by Antiviolence Centres and Shelters; Feminist academic research; research related to practical intervention protocols; national research conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (Istat, 1998, 2006) or during several projects funded by Government and Local Authorities, like the Urban Italian Cities Networks (Adami et al., 2000, 2002).

It is possible to identify an analytical branch that crosses through this variety of empirical research and which highlights the concept of universal patriarchy: VAW is a transversal problem that affects women independently of their social and cultural belonging, their age, their class or education (Romito, 2000). During the Urban Project, Bimbi (Adami et al., 2002) pointed out three research considerations for VAW: within studies on violence, gender-blind social science theory considers VAW to involve deviant and pathological behaviours; VAW can be considered as a gender social construction with different definitions according to different social

contexts; symbolic violence can be considered as a general framework to interpret different typologies of VAW.

In Italy, the first consideration occurred with Ventimiglia (1987): assuming the difficulty for the male researcher in recognizing that his gender produces violence, he stated the relationship between masculine identity and violence. However, he also states that it is essential to assume the normality and cross-over of male violence in order to analyze gender violence (Ventimiglia, 1997). On the topic, Bimbi points out the necessity of relating VAW and men's social hegemony to the "normal" use of violence: men are not "naturally" more violent than women, but social scientists need to consider and study VAW as embedded in the legitimized use of violence. At the international level, this approach has developed in Men's Studies (p.e. Hearn, 1996, 2004) that focus on the construction of masculinity and its relationship with VAW.

The abovementioned Urban Research Program deals with the social perception of violence. VAW is studied as a differentiated social-construction challenging the approaches based on a naturalized patriarchy.

Finally, Bimbi (2009, 2010, 2012) proposes symbolic violence as a meaningful perspective in research on gender violence: this would allow the researchers to distance themselves from the already established approaches on violence which are based on violence phenomenologies. The Padua Research Group deals with it by analyzing many different contexts: the workplace & the family (D'Odorico & Vianello 2011), European documents and Italian campaigns about VAW (Bertolo, 2011), and gender advertisements as a possibility to explore women's body accessibility (Toffanin, 2011).

Hence, the perspective of the symbolic, highlights: the violence embedded in "normal" gender relationships as well as in the construction of masculinity and femininity; the social representation of VAW; the different meanings related by women to VAW, and the different ways of recognizing and overcoming it; the gendered dimensions of structural and institutional violence.

Conclusion

Gender violence is a multifactorial phenomenon, containing political, social, cultural and interpersonal conflicts. All these tensions are played in the field of gender relations, both implicitly and explicitly.

The research on men's VAW require us to analyse the fields of difference and power relations as well as those patterns of inequality which refer to symbolic constructions. A research approach using symbolic violence as a perspective, needs to set the analysis of habitus and relationship both at subjective and structural levels. Therefore, symbolic domination offers an interpretational framework which is highly suitable in sustaining the complexity of practices and representations (Bourdieu, 1998).

The de-naturalization of the historical backgrounds that support masculine domination is the first step required to dismantle the social and political devices that produce differences of class, culture, gender and sexuality, as well as in the social rules and institutions which structure daily life.

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