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Reinforcing Sexism and Misogyny: Social Media, Symbolic Violence and the Construction of *Femininity-as-Fail*

By Sue Ann Barratt¹

Abstract

This paper demonstrates, through content analysis, how online audiences can enforce gender based violence (GBV) as a real threat in the online space through verbally aggressive speech acts that function as symbolic violence. I examine cases emerging out of the context of Trinidad and Tobago, to articulate, how, for example, prejudicial chastising of women is used as a discourse to not only shame and blame but construct *femininity-as-fail*, however that femininity is embodied. This symbolic violence I read as a spectre, a force that enforces, both in the offline and online, the reassertion of strict respectability and responsibility as standard. This is done through victim blaming and policing, especially of women's bodies, voice and agency. I assert that such talk constitutes an online environment that serves as fertile ground for the reconstitution of traditional and limiting notions of femininity. Such an environment also facilitates constant backlash against feminist discourses and feminist activism to attain gender justice in the Caribbean region. The online environment is a force that breaches offline boundaries across the globe, thus its effect must be accounted for as we attempt to build the resilience of feminist consciousness and gender justice.

Keywords: misogyny, social media, symbolic violence, femininity, Trinidad and Tobago

Introduction

Many Caribbean women in the 21st Century perceive themselves as agentic, as decision makers who have opportunities through education and labour to improve their quality of life and pursue chosen ventures without restriction. As Ellis (1986) observed decades ago, this has long been an ontological position that constitutes a most familiar image of the Caribbean woman as strong, independent and dominant. Women in the Caribbean have long laboured both in the private and public spheres (Caribbean's Different Gender Gap 2015, Baksh-Soodeen 1998, Reddock 1994) and have consistently accessed education as a route to empowerment (Conger and Long 2013, Bailey and Charles 2010, Ellis 1986). Self-determination is often taken for granted because of a tendency, as Bertens, et al, (2008) explain, to "frequently portray Caribbean women as independent, autonomous, mercenary, manipulative and dominating" (p.548). At the same time, agency is still undermined by, as Ellis (1986) warned, factors, problems and situations that discriminate against women in overt and subtle ways, constantly challenging and undercutting their independence.

In this paper I attend to what I assert as one such factor that persists since Ellis's (1986) and others' observations about the Caribbean woman in the 1980's. I refer to the continued salience of one very traditional and limiting discourse – feminine respectability and responsibility (Bertens,

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et al, 2008, Sharpe and Pinto 2006, Boucher 2003). I suggest that through a rigid application of this discourse femininity is constructed as *fail* where it does not meet idealised prescriptions. This discourse appears always salient even in the face of mitigating circumstances which challenge or contradict its relevance.

In this paper I examine how the evaluation of *femininity-as-fail* persists within the talk of online audiences responding to two events which attracted the attention of mainstream news media in Trinidad and Tobago – the Therese Ho/Lendl Simmons Revenge Porn Court Case and the Nude Photos Leak Scandal in June 2016. Through content analysis I demonstrate how gender based violence (GBV), manifest as symbolic violence, operates as constant backlash to feminist activism and scholarship for gender justice, and as a real threat in the online space through, especially, prejudicial chastising of women to not only shame, blame and police the feminine, but construct *femininity-as-fail*.

I use Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) symbolic violence, not to distract from an understanding of gender based violence as corporeal, but to articulate conceptually the location of gender ideology and its mechanisms of asymmetry and power that background that corporeal violence that is experienced. Symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu (1998), operates as a cognitive process, invisible but tangible and experienced in its effects, and thus I see it as a most useful conceptualization of how online feedback forums manifest gender based violence. Bourdieu (1998) explains symbolic violence as schemes of thought that are the product of embodiment of power relations, expressed in the founding oppositions of the symbolic order, and causes relations of domination to appear natural because it takes place without calculation, through schemes of perception, appreciation and action in a cognition that is obscure to itself (p. 33-42).

From this perspective, I argue that such symbolic violence acts as a spectre, a force that enforces, both in the offline and online, the reassertion of strict respectability and responsibility as standard for Caribbean women. Scholars have invoked the force of symbolic violence similarly, in, for example, exploration of everyday narrations of gender in media (Udasmoro 2013), or evaluation of the misrecognition of domination in women's lives (2014), or demonstrations of how domination and violence are reproduced in everyday interactions, social practices, institutional processes and dispositions that undermine agency and voice (Thapar-Björkert et al 2016).

To assert these points I first briefly explain the pressing cultural significance of respectability and responsibility to the definition, framing, valuation and legitimacy of femininity within the Caribbean in particular, setting up as background those notions that are referenced by the online audience evaluated. I then outline details about the audience and the online space that facilitated conversation focused on coverage of the cases selected. Using these cases, I explain social media as one communication context that facilitates the persistence of constraining notions of femininity. Speakers express their significance through talk marked by verbal aggression and symbolic violence. Finally, I articulate my evaluation of audience speech acts as enacting *femininity-as-fail*. I conclude the paper by re-asserting the need for vigilant attention to mechanisms that reinterpret and reinforce challenges to feminine agency in particular and gender justice in general.

Respectability and Responsibility: Valuations of Feminine Identity and Worth

Femininity finds its worth in respectability, its relevance in responsibility, and these ideals, along with purity, persist as defining characteristics, core values and fundamental ideals of legitimate femininity in the Caribbean (Hosein and Outar 2016, Ghisyawan 2016, Trotz 2009,

Sampath 2004, Freeman 2000, Rohlehr 1999, Barrow 1999, Ellis 1986). Such ideals function as prescriptive, defining the parameters of what it means to be appropriately feminine and, in terms of respectability in particular, determine how women can live in their bodies and the limits placed on their bodies, especially in terms of appearance and sexuality.

These notions are steeped in a discourse of respectability politics, a concept first discussed by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham to contend with how, as part of a reform and uplift politics, African Americans, especially African American women, were encouraged to practice temperance, cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners and sexual purity in order to attain the respect of the white majority society in the United States (Harris 2003).

Respectability politics is grounded in a set of standards that prescribe piousness, temperance, decorum and self-restraint, sexual restraint, propriety and morality, neat appearance and self-protection. It requires public display of these standards by the person and is used to determine those worthy or unworthy of respect, as Rowe (2013) discusses, respectable status is precarious and requires constant policing of self. Thus, respectability politics functions as a discourse which not only constructs performance at the intersection of race, ethnicity, class and gender, but it absolutely mediates the feminine in particular. As Springer (2007) explains, womanist/black feminist, and Caribbean feminist scholars have well established that respectability functions as the ultimate criteria for legitimate entry into womanhood, especially by women of colour.

This is directly applicable to women in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean at large. Freeman (2000) traces well the empirical and theoretical articulation of respectability to Caribbean femininity, by outlining the “cult of Victorian femininity” as a colonial inheritance and asserting her critique of Peter Wilson’s first gender polarizing reputation/respectability model which maps respectability to femininity and reputation to masculinity. Besson (1993), initiated critique of this model’s conceptual erasure and limited account of the nuances of Caribbean women’s lived experience. Scholars have long contended with the pressing significance of respectability to femininity, as Franco (2010) continued to do in her study of women in Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, explaining that, still, femininity is constituted by dominant notions of sexual responsibility, motherliness, virtuousness and containment. This observation immediately makes relevant respectability politics. Responsibility is also made relevant as a complimentary force, as women in particular, Franco (2010) found, define their femininity based on ideals of independence, freedom and self-actualization. These ideals were also cited by Bertin’s, et al, (2008) sample of women who tied them closely to motherhood and accountability for caregiving and caretaking, roles which invoke the notion of responsibility. These ideals, also discussed by Hosein (2004), Niranjana (2011), Baksh (2011) and Smith (2010), mirror historical perspectives of Trinidadian femininity. For example, in terms of the Afro-Trinidadian feminine identity, there have existed shifts between perceptions of femininity as docile and vulgar, as having parity with masculinity and not, as the seat of tradition and as economically and sexually independent. And in terms of Indo-Trinidadian femininity, respectability and purity are dominant ideals, with notions of independence, responsibility and achievement also defining such femininity.

While cultural differences may reflect some variation in terms of specific descriptors, there is a tendency to similarity across the Caribbean. At the same time different social identities – race/colour/ethnicity, class, region, sexuality for example – which mediate gender identities, do complicate the experience for people of the region. In terms of similar perceptions of femininity, relevant markers include respectability and honour, nurturing and mothering, expressive

emotionality and the ability to work (Brennan 2004, Parry 2000, Wekker 1999, Young 1999, Ellis 1986).

It is these persistent ideals and valuations of femininity that emerge in feedback forums attached to news coverage uploaded to the online space. Before I elaborate on the trends in their talk I briefly outline the relevant details of the cases, audiences, and content analysis as method of analysis.

The Online News Audience as Evaluative Force

I use the term *force* as a concept of social impact theory to establish how audience talk functions on the feedback forum attached to news stories. Social impact theory

“conceives of social influence as being the result of social forces (pressures from other people) that operate on a target. The theory uses the metaphor of physical forces, such as light or sound that can affect an object. The overall influence of a set of social forces depends on the forces’ strength, immediacy, and number” (Breckler, et al, 2006, p.337).

I also use force to establish the significance of this audience, first because online feedback unlike any other feedback context, is often anonymous as well as immediate, interactive and, though censored by site administrators, is not as rigidly censored as traditional on air (e.g. call in) or print media (e.g. letters to the editor) feedback. As Landa (2016) explains, commenters “can say whatever they want to communicate with minimal fear of retribution” (p. 122).

The feedback forum attached to news coverage uploaded online is a type of forum based social media. The forum is traditional in that online communities are created around topics rather than around people, as is the case with more dominant social media such as Facebook or Twitter (Boyd and Ellison 2008). Media hosts the feedback forum or comments section to invite readers to share opinions on coverage, with readers often establishing a powerful online community. This community can set the agenda or initiate collective action around a particular topic because of a concentration of interests hashed out through sometimes rewarding, contentious, cohesive or divisive debate about that issue (Landa 2016, Reader 2015). The online commentary attached to a series of stories on the two selected cases detailed below was examined through quantitative content analysis, focusing on overt content and the frequency of themes emerging from that content. In addition, to clarify my arguments I also conducted some qualitative evaluation of the meaning which rested in the content of the commenters’ talk.

Case One – Revenge Porn: Therese Ho vs Lendl Simmons

The details of this case were taken from television and newspaper coverage as outlined below.

- Television Coverage
 - CNC3 News Story - *Court Orders Simmons to Pay \$150,000 For Leaking Sexual Images of Former Lover*, October 26, 2015
 - CNC3 Morning Talk Show Morning Brew – *Therese Ho Speaks Out on the Morning Brew*, October 27, 2015
- Newspaper Coverage

- Newsday Newspaper Front page Story – *Ho Accuses Simmons for Sex Photo Leak*, February 11, 2015
- Guardian Newspaper Front page Story – *Ex-lover as Simmons Loses Porn Revenge Case “I’m ready to forgive him now”*, October 27, 2015

Media reported on the court proceedings, the events which led to the case and the ensuing scandal that emerged from what was the first case of revenge porn to be heard in the courts in Trinidad and Tobago. The case was especially significant because it involved a cricketer, well known in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region. Therese Ho, former girlfriend of West Indies Cricketer, Lendl Simmons, filed a lawsuit of Breach of Confidence, claiming malicious dissemination of photographs of herself and Simmons engaged in sexual activity prior to the end of their relationship. The court ruled in favour of Ms. Ho, ordering Mr. Simmons to pay \$150,000.00 TT compensation. Public attention was engaged not only because it was the first such case but because both Ms. Ho and Mr. Simmons were in relationships with other partners at the time. Their relationship was branded an affair, with heated debate, especially in the online feedback forum, focused on who was the bigger wrongdoer in their shared infidelity. In addition, much debate also focused on what factors justified or did not justify the court case, the breach of confidence, the infidelity and the events that led to all. It is these debates that serve as the data source for analysis discussed below.

Case Two – Nude Photos Leak Scandal

The details of this case were taken from television coverage as outlined below.

- Television Coverage
 - CNC3, *Two Held in Connection With Leaked Nude Photos*, June 24, 2016
 - CNC3, *SWAHA hopes lessons are learnt from nude photos scandal*, June 17, 2016
 - CNC3, *Victim of Leaked Nude Photos Speaks*, June 15, 2016
 - CNC3, *Police issue warning amid circulation of hundreds of nude local women on social media*, June 15, 2016

Media reported on the leak, the police investigation into the leak, the arrests which followed, and commentary from stakeholder voices such as religious leaders and some of the victims. The details of the case were that hundreds of photos containing images of young women and girls nude or partially clothed and, in some cases, engaged in intimate acts, were leaked by employees of a cybercafé. A list of names of the young women and girls was also released. As the investigation progressed, reports indicated that the photos were collected through hacking social media accounts over a number of years. Some were edited using photoshop and there were attempts to distribute some to porn sites and/or to sell the photographs. Two people were arrested in connection with the case. Public attention was engaged not only because private photos were leaked but especially because many of the photos featured students, including many minors. In this case too, online debate was most heated over who was the greater wrongdoer, the young women and girls who appeared in the photos or the individuals who breached their privacy and leaked the photos. It is this debate that served as data source for content analysis and elaborated below.

Social Media Commentary: Disciplining Femininity through Verbal Aggression and Symbolic Violence

Debate definitely dominated interaction in the feedback forum. While commenters contended with each other, contradicting or challenging, sharing or bolstering each other's opinions, many directed their comments to the individuals involved in the case, very often the female victims. The comments had the force of disciplinary speech acts. Again I see the force exercised by the audience as especially significant. Their utterances have force if understood from the perspective of speech act theory which views language as social action, conceptualizing human communication as having meaning in use, implication and effect, with each utterance having illocutionary force (effect on hearer) in a context (Holtgraves 2002). These forceful utterances I collated through content analysis based on frequency. Figure One below presents coded audience commentary relevant to Case One - the Revenge Porn Case, and Figure Two presents coded commentary relevant to Case Two - the Nude Photos leak scandal.

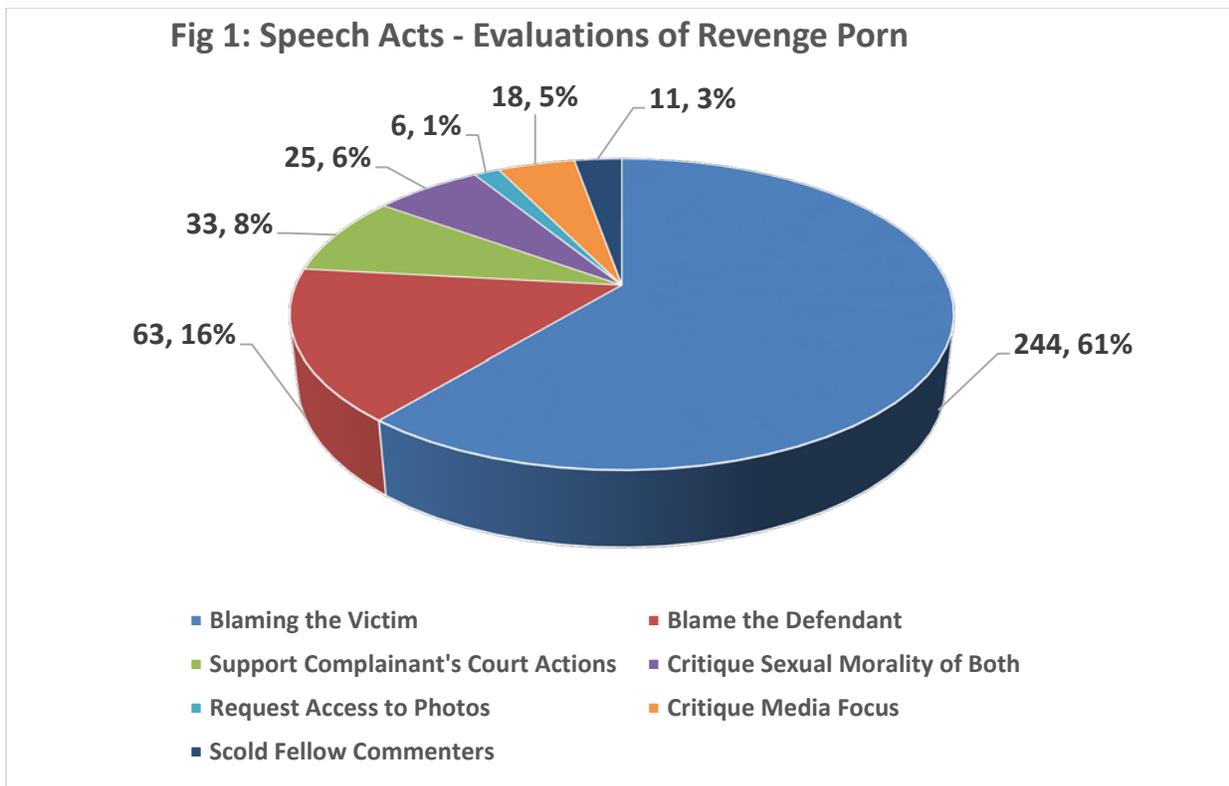
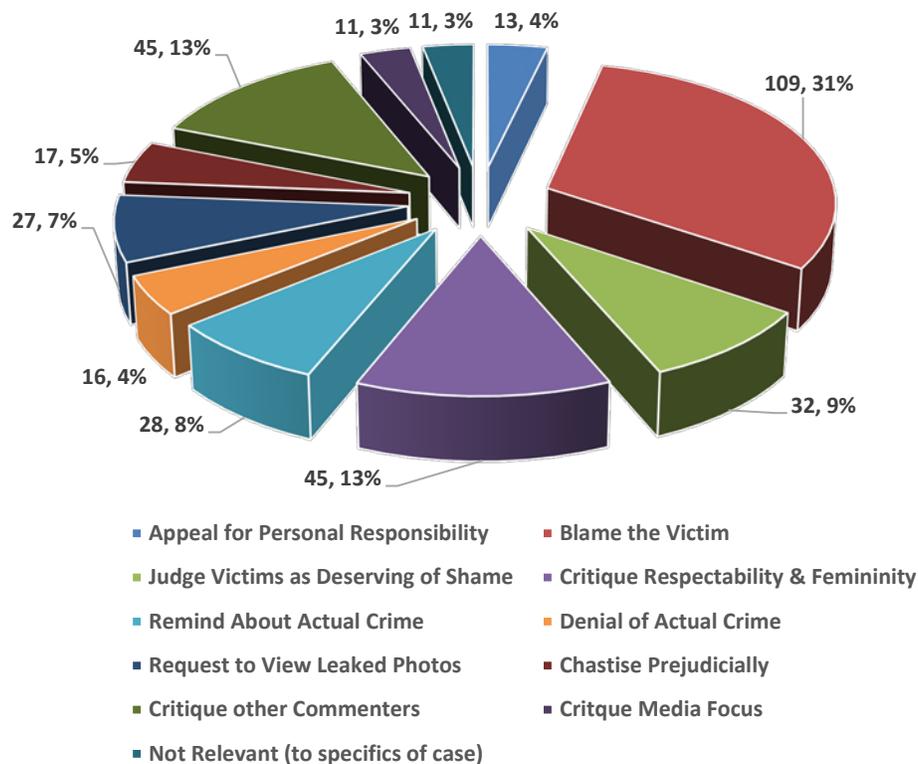


Fig 2: Speech Acts - Evaluation of Nude Photo Leak Case



Both Figures One and Two above illustrate a clear majority in terms of speech acts, i.e. speech acts which blame the victim. It is the tendency for the majority of utterances to blame the victim in both cases – 61% of speech acts in Case One and 31% in Case Two – that I interpret as having a disciplining force on the feminine. Other less frequent but significant speech acts reinforce this disciplinary action. I see this force as disciplinary because of the nature of victim blaming. Victim blaming is a psychological and cultural tendency to respond in a variety of ways which questions the victim's ability to prevent a crime through more responsible action, essentially accusing the victim of failing to protect themselves in spite of the circumstances of the incident (Roberts 2016, Suarez and Gadalla 2010). In so doing and in light of the focus of the cases, there is invoked the discourse of respectability and responsibility which I discussed as the basis of definitions and valuations of the feminine.

In Case One, some speech acts, more than in Case Two, also critique the behavior of the male defendant, and criticize the sexual morality of both parties. These speech acts do not disrupt the majority position however, as even though they indicate some support for the female complainant and her court action in particular, and criticize the majority who blame the victim, these utterances remain a considerable minority.

In case two, the disciplining of the female victims is consistent, first through the majority of the speech acts which blame the victim and, second, through reinforcing speech acts which critique respectability and femininity (13%), judge victims as deserving of shame (9%), appeal for personal responsibility (by victims) (4%), and prejudicial chastising of female victims (5%). There

are speech acts which even deny that the crime (breach of privacy) even occurred (4%), the mitigating factor asserted being that the victims were no longer respectable because of the content of the photos and the effects of their irresponsible act of posting such photos to their social media accounts. Thus commenters insisted that they deserved the consequences of the hack that exposed them publicly.

Such speech acts and those that reinforce them I read as symbolic violence which has an especially powerful effect because commentary is verbally aggressive when uttered. Verbal aggression refers to attacks or venting against a person's self-concept instead of or in addition to a person's position in an interaction and is intended to cause psychological pain (Rancer and Avtgis 2006, Infante 1995, Straus and Sweet 1992, Infante and Wigley 1986). Infante (1995) sees verbal aggression as especially harmful as it, along with hostility, is one of two destructive traits of aggressiveness and can be more potent or damaging than physical aggression because of the persistence of psychological harm and the multitude of negative affective states (feelings of inadequacy, humiliation, depression, despair, hopelessness, embarrassment and anger) triggered by attacks on the self-concept. Verbal aggressive messages may usually take the form of character attacks, competence attacks, background attacks, physical appearance attacks, maledictions, teasing, swearing, ridicule, threats, and nonverbal emblems, and may also include blame, personality attacks, commands, global rejection, disconfirmation, negative comparison, sexual harassment and attacks on the target's significant others (Infante 1995). This list is extensive but valuable because it gives the descriptive language for the especially harmful commentary that I suggest are both disciplining and violent. Commentary featured especially but not exclusively blame, swearing, ridicule, disconfirmation, personality attacks, physical appearance attacks, character attacks, and teasing (especially in the case of Ms. Ho, whose last name became a source of further ridicule because of its similarity to "hoe/ho" the slang form of "whore" and what some felt aptly clarified the character suggested by her behavior).

A few and by no means exhaustive examples of the most intense verbally aggressive messages are listed below to give some indication of how commenters consistently put the female victims in the role of wrongdoer through consistent critique of respectability and femininity, asserting absolute rejection and harsh discipline through ridicule, interrogation, evaluation and demands. Multiple forms of verbal aggression and multiple speech acts can be seen in a single example. Those relevant are cited in brackets.

Case One – Therese Ho vs Lendl Simmons

- *"Yeah he was wrong but two wrongs don't make a right, why did she open her legs to a married man in the first place? That should have told her anything can happen from here, she should own up to her own mistake"* (**Speech Acts** – Appeals for Personal Responsibility, Blame the Victim, Critique Sexual Morality of Both; **Verbal Aggression** – competence attack, blame)
- *"She should have said in the interview "don't be a whore and sleep with people man", although both wrong, don't you feel like a slut, and they are still together so when that \$150k finish what you gone do? Look for another married man to rob!"* (**Speech Acts** – Prejudicial Chastising, Blame the Victim, Critique Sexual Morality of Both; **Verbal Aggression** – character attack, competence attack, ridicule)

- *“Revenge porn with a girl name Ho, the irony lol”* (**Speech Acts** – Blame the Victim, Judge Victim as Deserving; **Verbal Aggression** – character attack, ridicule, blame, disconfirmation)
- *“Her last name says it all”* (**Speech Acts** – Blame the Victim, Judge Victim as Deserving; **Verbal Aggression** - character attack, ridicule, blame, disconfirmation)
- *“Never trust a girl with the last name ho”* (**Speech Acts** – Blame the Victim, Judge Victim as Deserving; **Verbal Aggression** - character attack, ridicule, blame, disconfirmation)
- *“But look at the girl name na, “Ms Ho”, what do one expect?”* (**Speech Acts** – Blame the Victim, Judge Victim as Deserving; **Verbal Aggression** - character attack, ridicule, blame, disconfirmation)
- *“Best you did say don’t be a rat and a cunt like yourself, you know the man married, is money you want that’s why you went there, take money now big porn star”* (**Speech Acts** – Blame the Victim, Prejudicial Chastising; **Verbal Aggression** - character attack, ridicule, blame, disconfirmation, swearing, command)
- *“She look old, smh, these young ladies of these time”* (**Speech Act** – Prejudicial Chastising; **Verbal Aggression** – personal appearance attack, ridicule, blame)
- *“She ugly as fuck”*(**Speech Act** – Prejudicial Chastising; **Verbal Aggression** – personal appearance attack)
- *“That girl wicked, it on she face”* (**Speech Act** – Prejudicial Chastising; **Verbal Aggression** – character attack)
- *“So personal responsibility and respect means nothing, hoes could be hoes and get paid, well legalize hoe clubs, steups”* (**Speech Acts** – Appeals to Personal Responsibility, Prejudicial Chastising; **Verbal Aggression** – character attack, ridicule, command)
- *“That bitch shouldn’t have gotten a fuckin \$...after her pussy got so wild”* (**Speech Acts** – Prejudicial Chastising, Judge Victim as Deserving, Denial of Crime; **Verbal Aggression** – swearing, ridicule, character attack)
- *“What a dumbass”* (**Speech Act** – Prejudicial Chastising; **Verbal Aggression** – ridicule, swearing)
- *“The side bitch get through”* (**Speech Act** – Prejudicial Chastising; **Verbal Aggression** – ridicule, character attack)

Case Two – Nude Photos Leak

- *“hoes, hoes and more hoes” (Speech Act – Prejudicial Chastising; Verbal Aggression – ridicule, character attack)*
- *“Why they taking nude pictures? They are so stupid. They should know better not to do this because that’s what happen when you do” (Speech Act – Prejudicial Chastising, Judge victim as deserving of shame, denial of actual crime, appeal to personal responsibility, victim blaming; Verbal Aggression – ridicule, character attack, prejudicial chastising, competence attack)*
- *“Like you said, they’re so stupid have no morals no value whatsoever and expect to get respect” (Speech Act – Prejudicial Chastising; judge victim as deserving of shame, denial of crime, critique of respectability; Verbal Aggression – ridicule, character attack, competence attack)*
- *“So I must now feel sorry for these foolish women? Steups” (Speech Act – denial of crime, victim blaming; Verbal Aggression – ridicule, disconfirmation, global rejection, competence attack)*
- *“Every dumb bitch who sends nude pics of herself over the phone, computer, etc. DESERVES TO BE DISPLAYED. I have to say that I have enjoyed witnessing these accounts. It’s humorous, erotic, and quite pleasurable” (Speech Act – Prejudicial Chastising, judge victim as deserving of shame, blame victim, denial of crime; Verbal Aggression – ridicule, character attack, disconfirmation, teasing)*
- *“I’ve zero sympathy for half of these people because they are simply stupid and brainless! Everybody knows that you should not share such pictures online. Facebook, etc., because once it’s there, it’s there forever. Also, only a stupid and brainless person will take pictures for any boyfriend. And of those girls who said her boyfriend made her feel sexy, etc., etc., sounded desperate. Are they so desperate that they need a man to tell them they are pretty?? And the sixteen year old. How did the man intimidate her?? He held a gun to her head and threaten her? Or she was just stupid and desperate. And we’re supposed to feel sorry for her? LOL, no! Also, her mother should have given her some good licks! Or maybe, the mother should have been a better parent. Or maybe the mother was a good parent, but the girl was stupid and desperate. This situation could have been prevented if it was not for simply stupid, thoughtless, careless actions!! This will be a lesson to these women. Yes, it was a very unfortunate, troubling and sick incident but sometimes people have burn to learn.” (Speech Act – Blame Victim, prejudicial chastising, judge victim as deserving of shame, appeal to personal responsibility; Verbal Aggression – ridicule, character attack, competence attack, blame, attack on target’s significant other, disconfirmation, global rejection)*

These comments and their effect all reflect symbolic violence, particularly against women. As discussed earlier, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence refers to a subtle, euphemized, invisible mode of domination that, in its impervious and insidious nature, prevents domination from being recognized as such, and, therefore, as misrecognized domination, is socially recognized, legitimized and sustained (Thapar-Björkert, et al, 2016, Kraus 1993). In these cases aggression is not subtle, they are overt and violent. But prescriptions of domination are subtle. The examples of verbal aggression cited give overt examples of social recognition, legitimization and sustaining of domination of the feminine through disciplinary speech acts such as prejudicial chastising, appeals to personal responsibility, and victim blaming. While some question the absolute failure to acknowledge these women as victims of legislated crimes, the majority take it for granted that once branded as "hoes, whores" these women deserve their negative experiences. Comments that dismiss Ms. Ho's award of compensation by the courts or dismiss breach of privacy in tandem with comments which remind women to be respectable and responsible in their relations with men and in containing their bodies and sexualities enforce containment of feminine agency and voice. Where women act outside of valued and legitimate expectations of the feminine, even in their own interests, they are severely chastised for stepping outside of such bounds of femininity and are subject to aggressive statements which swiftly remind them of their place.

Social Media Commentary: Reinforcing Sexism, Misogyny and *Femininity-as-Fail*

I argue that in part it is this effect that reinforces sexism and misogyny. This reminder that legitimate femininity is always bounded that is in itself sexist, constituting prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping of women. This assertion that women who do not perform their femininity within that legitimate space bounded by respectability and responsibility, are flawed in their character and thus deserve to be brutally maligned, e.g. as "stupid" and "desperate", is indicative of sexist attitudes and misogyny. The insistence that the women's actions were inherently wrong and more wrong than those who were legally in breach, as well as were tainted by immoral motives constitute *femininity, as anything other than respectability and responsibility, as ultimate fail* in spite of circumstances. In other words, there is no legitimate feminine action outside of these parameters. Two commenters to the Therese Ho/Lendl Simmons court case present in their response a clear example of this perspective. Suggesting that Ms. Ho was undeserving of compensation for breach of confidence,

*"The message sent by the court is that reward awaits for home wreckers. Ms. Ho, as a woman and mother of two, should have had enough personal decency and class to counsel Simmons to work it out with his wife. She should have shown respect to the wife. But she didn't as she saw an opportunity. We now know her underlying motive for having an affair with the famous cricketer.
\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$"*

"She's a home wrecker and she's on her way to see whose home to wreck and get some more money. It's always up to a woman to say no or yes and she knew he was married. You home wrecker!!!"

For these commenters, the female is ultimately the guilty party because she did not act respectfully and responsibly thus not feminine enough, and the man is absolved through a complete failure to acknowledge his role in the shared infidelity.

In addition, misogyny or the extreme dislike and contempt for the feminine outside of the set parameters of legitimacy is demonstrated absolutely in the extreme verbal aggression and hostility, especially name calling, victim blaming and insisting that the female victims were deserving of the breaches of their confidence and privacy. The frequency of speech acts chastising the woman vs those chastising the man presents a sharp contrast and demonstrated a sexist attitude that blames the victim who is viewed as deserving of shame, pain and punishment, “*you look for that*”. The woman is more or exclusively morally reprehensible as ho/hoes/whore, stupid/mentally flawed, immoral, unworthy of respect and pathetic, too free in the contemporary, and always responsible even if not for her own actions “*it’s always up to a woman to say no or yes*”. Preferring to make the topic of the immoral feminine more salient in the feedback forum, the commenters often diminished, trivialized, ignored or denied actual criminal activity. The female victims, insufficiently respectable and responsible, were immoral criminals and media/police/court time wasters, while the unfaithful man was too harshly punished and the hackers were simply taking advantage of an opportunity.

Conclusion

Even where a woman’s fight for gender justice is endorsed as valid, public sentiment (as it is evident in feedback forums) asserts erasure of this ‘win’ based on a construction of her *femininity-as-failure*; failure because she does not meet prescriptions of respectability, responsibility and containment of her body and sexuality. Even when women are clear victims of crime and can be established as a “pure victim” their right to gender justice is constituted as irrelevant/undeserving within the public imagination (judging by majority perspective). Women who fail to uphold feminine standards of respectability, responsibility and containment can never be a victim and are subject to the worst forms of misogyny.

Online feedback forums operate as an additional agenda setting force to traditional media, reconstituting through talk traditional ideas about gender identity and sexuality, as exclusive and compulsory to legitimate femininity. These discourses are used to other, vilify and chastise contemporary femininity; ultimately embedded sexism and misogyny persistently construct *femininity-as-fail*.

Despite many gains by activists and scholars in the Caribbean, feminist consciousness and gender justice remain precarious and should not be taken for granted. I assert this position because of the persistence of sexism/misogyny as a normative and moralized belief system, a perspective that is reinforced despite question/critique from a minority. In the contemporary, feminist activists and scholars have taken advantage of the opportunities of the online space to build and propel movements and consciousness. However, the analysis of feedback forum talk suggests the pressing need for vigilance in terms of persistence in maintaining the visibility of counteracting discourses from scholars and activists. In addition, while a small percentage of commenters, 13% in the Therese Ho/Lendl Simmons case and 11% in the photo leaks case, asserted this counteracting discourse, they did not do so without subjecting themselves to verbal aggression. There is then the continued need, as Massiah et al. (2016) advise in their look to a Caribbean feminist future, to be doggedly assertive in the face of what I suggest is a definite obstacle/hurdle. In addition, feedback forum talk invokes the need to consistently evaluate the online environment and its utility to

feminist activism, scholarship and consciousness raising. In addition, the responsiveness of the feminist voice to persistent backlash and the proactive, strategic management of the gender agenda must be monitored by online activists in particular if the effects of often uncensored user generated content are to be counteracted.

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