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'INVISIBLE VIOLENCE': MEDIA (RE)PRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN ITALY.

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Abstract

Compared to other European countries, opportunities are limited for Italian women to fully and equally participate in Italian social life. In order to better understand Italian women's social position and gender inequality that persists in Italy, this research applies Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence. Specifically, symbolic violence is used to explain depictions of Italian women in the Italian media. Because social institutions such as the media, that reach large audiences, have the ability to transmit dominant cultural representations, they also transmit representations of the roles of masculinity and femininity. This ability permits media outlets to depict images of the gendered status quo. These representations and depictions often reinforce gender domination in the form of promoting and reifying gender inequality. This research uses the Global Media Monitoring Project and the European Observatory on Gender Representations report to analyse how the Italian media misrepresent and stereotype women in television and news by limiting their social roles and status in these outlets, a form of symbolic violence. These limited social roles are also seen in Italy's social reality where women are less likely to be represented in different spheres of social life, like politics. These persistent and prevalent stereotypes and images in the Italian media reify the economic, social, and cultural disadvantage of women in Italy that contribute to continued masculine dominations in all spheres of social life. The implications of symbolic violence in the Italian media and media in general are then discussed.

Key words

Gender, Inequality, Italy, Media, Pierre Bourdieu, Symbolic Violence.

1. Introduction

The media play an important role in the formation, transmission, and reification of culture by way of providing frameworks for interpretation. These frameworks not only inform citizens in regard to various social issues, but also (re)produce the dominant culture in a society (Llanos and Nina, 2011). The media are also a powerful institution because media images are symbolic. Symbolic systems constitute the "instruments by which we construct reality" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 112). It is the everyday media message, "silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating," that contributes to how we define and understand gender, gender roles, and gender inequality (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 51). As other scholars have argued (see, for example, Holtzman and Sharpe, 2014), it is a platform that continues to contribute to the (re)production of gender.

Due to the proliferation of mass communication, the media provide an ideal way to study images of gender stratification (Connell, 1987). Media outlets are sites of cultural reproduction that transmits dominant cultural representations, especially in regards to the roles of masculinity and femininity (Carilli and Campbell, 2005; Dill and Thill, 2007; Furnham and Bitar, 1993; Thomas and

Treiber, 2000). Because mass media are a powerful and pervasive tools, they may influence and shape perceptions of gender relations and identities. Therefore, the way in which we conceptualize, experience, and even think about gender(ed) identities is directly or indirectly influenced by the media. (Doane, 1991; Dyer, 1993; Gauntlett, 2008; Kearney, 2011; Giomi, Sansonetti and Tota, 2013). The media construct these social roles which the public then uses as a schema to make sense of social problems such as gendered inequality (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson, 1992; Kellner, 1995; Surette, 2011). According to Kellner (1995), media culture's pervasive influence not only shapes social life, but individuals' thoughts, behaviours, and sense of self.

Drawing upon the sociological framework of symbolic violence developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 2001, 2004), this paper argues that media (re)produce and further promote a gender hierarchy and perpetuate masculine domination through the use of symbolic violence. More specifically, in *Masculine Domination* (2001), Bourdieu focussed on three main aspects: (1) the process of naturalization of masculine domination; (2) its misrecognition; and (3) its social reproduction. In this paper we aim to apply these three aspects of the masculine domination, stressing the role of mass media as powerful social institutions that influence gendered identities.

Mass media, indeed, are one "public place" in which political, economic, and social relations are manipulated, represented, and/or negotiated. We argue that the media perpetuate, in some specific contexts, a structure that "legitimizes" gender inequality because it (re)produces a system of meaning that reinforces the patriarchal status quo and in a sense naturalizes gender imbalances. This system of meaning often goes unrecognized creating what Bourdieu termed symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984). This in turn promotes a social environment where gender inequality can occur, be tolerated, and possibly even encouraged.

Using Italy as a case study, our aim is to demonstrate how women in Italy are portrayed on Italian television and how these portrayals are forms of symbolic violence. Here, we use the theory of symbolic violence to better understand cultural transmissions of gendered hierarchies and the gendered distribution of power in Italy. Following Bourdieu's suggestions, culture and media culture play key roles in maintaining power relations and in the reproduction of symbolic violence. With this in mind, we focus on Italian media and we show examples of symbolic violence against women, especially gendered stereotypes, and argue that these are the root of legitimization and reproduction of masculine domination. Because researchers have shown that this type of gender stereotyping is associated with gender-role values and increasingly aggressive attitudes toward women (see, for example, Lanis and Covell, 1995; Timson, 1995), it is important to raise awareness of social forces that continue to perpetuate gender inequality. Using symbolic violence as our theoretical lens, we ask: In what ways does symbolic violence operate in the Italian media?

2. What is Symbolic Violence?

The notion of symbolic violence comes from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and is part of his overall aim to analyse the domination, power, and their social reproduction. Symbolic violence should not be confused with stories of media violence, because it is not the acts of violence or murder portrayed on television, but the unnoticed domination that everyday social habits maintain over the conscious subject. Symbolic violence is an extension of the term "violence" in that it includes various modes of social and cultural domination in order to preserve the status quo. In short, dominate groups can maintain their status through the use of 'symbolic violence' by imposing their social reality on others without resorting to any type of physical force (Bourdieu, 1979). The media are one source of this cultural transmission of symbolic violence.

According to Bourdieu (2001, pp. 1-2), symbolic violence in the simplest sense is "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition

(more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling." Symbolic violence is the slight, delicate and often invisible imposition of systems of meaning that legitimize, normalize and, consequently, solidify structures of inequality. Through symbolic violence the dominant group accepts its own domination as a condition, not imposed with coercion, but as "natural and legitimate." The individuals tend to accept the hierarchies and structure of the social settings in which they live (fields) into their 'mental structures' (habitus) (Swingewood, 2000, p. 214). Thus, symbolic violence functions through the internalization of existing social structure.

Here, the theoretical application of symbolic violence is used as a tool to better understand the relationship between the dominate class and the dominated which is then reproduced through structural and cultural devices such as the media. Symbolic violence, as exerted through the media, is therefore related to (re)producing society's larger social order and imbalance of power between the sexes. Is it the symbolic – science, religion, language and media – that sets the base for domination. These symbolic institutions shape knowledge by constructing a world view that is dominant-based. In this specific case, symbolic capital is constructing a world that is male-dominated and in so doing is "constructing gender hierarchies" that have strong potential to be accepted as legitimate. Thus, symbolic violence is the imposition from the dominant (male) to dominated (female) of cognitive categories and social roles, including gender roles. This imposition transmits through the mass media, and various other social institutions, with its ideological construction of reality. This social construction of reality hardly appears as such to the reader and may be largely unconscious (Gamson *et al.* 1992). Indeed, as Bourdieu (2001, pp. 79-80) pointed out, masculine domination finds one of its strongest supports in the misrecognition which results from the application to the dominant of categories engendered in the very relationship of domination and which can lead to that extreme form of *amor fati*, love of the dominant and of his love of the dominant and of his domination, a *libido dominantis* (desire for the dominant) which implies renunciation of personal exercise of *libido dominandi* (the desire to dominate). More specifically, symbolic violence against women has three different defining characteristics. First, through illustrations of gender socialization, women and feminine characteristics are subordinated to the domination of men and the masculine. This gender subordination is linked to the other sociocultural hierarchies, imposing inferiority of women to men, de-legitimization, and differentiation. Second, symbolic violence produces, reproduces, and maintains gendered depictions of social life that are developed from a male-dominated perspective. Lastly, symbolic violence is recognized as a natural, normal, and a daily occurrence, shaping gender subjectivity and objectivity.

3. Symbolic Violence and Inequality in Italy

Opportunities are limited for Italian women to fully, and equally, participate in social life. According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) Italy (2010, p. 4), "Italy is showing, especially in comparison to many European countries, worrisome shortcomings as far as equal opportunities for women in different sectors, from the economy to the socio-cultural." Because of women's position in Italy compared to other European Union member states, analyzing media depictions of women help us to better understand their social positions in Italy and the media's role in (re)producing gender inequality.

In order to illustrate the use of symbolic violence in the Italian media, we draw upon the European Observatory on Gender Representations report, the OERG 2013, and the GMMP Italy 2010. These projects assess the representations and portrayals of men and women on television in various ways such as investigating who is interviewed, whom the media content is about, and the roles of each sex in television. Through the use of these reports, we illustrate the three defining characteristics of symbolic violence and apply them to Italy in order to better understand women's subordinated positions in Italian social life.

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Subordination of Feminine Characteristics. Symbolic violence occurs in the news through the relegation of women to certain roles or statuses. This is part of the experience of mediated-gender constructions. As both the GMMP Italy 2010 and the OERG 2012 and 2013 show, men and women's functions and roles differ in the news. We posit this difference relates to power structures and gender hierarchies. Women compared to men are more likely to appear in the news in a personal and anonymous capacity. This form of symbolic violence decreases the credibility of women and at the same time culturally reproduces that women are not knowledgeable enough to be considered experts on politics, the economy, and other important areas of social life, reinforcing gender power imbalances. Media frameworks (re)produce gender inequalities in numerous ways. In particular, Italian television shows depict women in ways that place emphasis on certain characteristics. According to the GMMP Italy (2010), 53 percent of women appearing on Italian television shows do not speak. This reduces women's roles in television shows to the equivalent of props or background characters. Because language is an important symbol, the lack of dialogue on the part of women is a source of symbolic violence. The absence of language, and to some extent the absence of action through speech, draws distinctions and reinforces the hierarchical structure between men and women. Understanding the absence of language through Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, this suggests that women lack a legitimate discourse. Gerbner (1972, p. 44) takes this absence one step further and theorizes that "absence means symbolic annihilation."

Whereas men are shown in the media to be in leading roles, and roles that place them in the position of expert, women are typically depicted in terms of their sexuality or family status. Almost half of Italian women are portrayed in specific roles related to the body. Women who are depicted as "showgirls" are usually young and attractive. This sends a message to media consumers that physical attributes and beauty are more important than competence and merit. This is especially pertinent in Italian television, because women rarely are associated with roles pertaining to social commitment and professionalism, politics, or cultural pursuits. Women are more likely to appear on television with silicone-enhanced lips, thighs, and breasts, relegated to being mute, or presented as an object.

Women compared to men are also more likely to appear in the news in relation to their family status, such as wife or mother. Men are referred to by family status in only 1 percent of the news media broadcasts whereas women are referred to by family status 11 percent of the time (GMMP Italy, 2010). This perpetuates the stereotype that women's social position is in the private instead of public sphere. Focus on the private sphere can in turn place barriers on public sphere aspirations, such as employment (Tuchman, 2000). In this way symbolic violence limits women's capacity for autonomy and individuality, because their status is often tied solely to their familial roles.

Male Dominated Media and Depictions of Social Life. Top positions in the media industry, such as executives, chief editors, publishers and producers, are still very male dominated (White, 2009). There is also evidence that those who control media outlets also control, and can interfere with, media content (see, for example, Doyle, 2002; Djankov, McLeish, Nenova, and Shleifer, 2003). While the majority of these studies have focused on politics, we argue that this line of reasoning can be extended to (re)producing gender hierarchies that reinforce gender socialization.

According to Durante and Knight (2012, p. 2), in Italy "the main private television network is owned by Silvio Berlusconi and the public television corporation is traditionally controlled by the ruling coalition." Therefore, in Italy, the media is controlled by individuals who are powerful, such as the private ownership of a large private media conglomerate by Berlusconi, and those who are in the political majority in control, which is primarily composed of men. The media, an institution controlled by an increasingly small proportion of the dominant class, are an outlet that constructs widely viewed cultural schemas. The media then have the potential to extend male privilege and female subjugation into the public purview through media content.

One component of symbolic violence is Bourdieu's discussion of object versus subject. Men or women are considered the subjects of the news if men or women are being interviewed in a news piece or the news piece is about men or women (GMMP, 2010). This static picture of women as subjects occurs in Italy. Within the news media, as with television shows, women are more often presented as an object instead of an active subject that is knowledgeable. The first GMMP in 1995 found that 17 percent of all news stories worldwide focused on women as subjects. Almost 20 years later, in Italy, that percentage has not drastically changed. According to the OERG 2013, men are still making the majority of the news and approximately 3689 of 5410 male subjects were detected as being the 'news makers.' Women are less than one third of news subjects and/or people interviewed by the European news programs. In addition, according to OERG 2013 report Italy, among the European countries, Italy is the one with greater inequality between women and men. This imbalance is particularly striking in Italy where only about 25 percent of women are news subjects or are interviewed in the news (Azzalini, 2013). In addition, only 14 percent of Italian women are interviewed as experts whereas 86 percent are Italian men (Azzalini, 2013). Conversely, 38 percent of the popular opinions are from women (Azzalini, 2013). Therefore, well over the majority of news stories focused on men and/or interviewed male experts downplaying the role of women as knowledge makers.

This is in line with what the GMMP 2010 underlined: women were subjects in the news 19 times for everyone 100 news stories that were aired on Italian television, or approximately 19 percent (GMMP Italy, 2010). More specifically, the 'hard news' of the politics and economy continue to give higher visibility to men. In the case of political news, men are subjects in 85 percent of the media broadcasts while women comprise 15 percent (GMMP Italy, 2010). This pattern holds with economic news where men dominate almost 90 percent of the broadcasts (GMMP Italy, 2010). Moreover, in the OERG 2013 report, in Europe, women still receive little coverage by political information programmes with only 20 percent representation. Italy, once again, is the country with the lowest women's presence in the political news stories (13 percent), followed by England and Germany (19 percent), Spain (28 percent), and France (34 percent).

Because of the social construction of reality, men's voices are perceived as more important than women's voices in areas of great social importance, such as politics. More clearly, this is part of the symbolic violence theoretical framework. The root of domination is continued by a socially constructed male-dominated world view. This tends to legitimate the social structure and the social hierarchies, which individuals then internalize into their habitus or mental structures. In so doing, male dominance appears natural and legitimate. In fact, in the OERG 2013 news media research, there is a strong dichotomy between prestigious and authoritative roles, covered mainly by men, and anonymous and common roles, more likely to be covered by women. This socially constructed dichotomy, portrayed and emphasized by the media, shape the cognitive categories of individuals making this dichotomy real and real in its consequences.

Because these media trends, the representations of men compared to women in the media, have persisted year after year with little change in women's representation, we argue that symbolic violence is occurring because these representations, from a male dominated perspective, continue to be accepted as natural.

Symbolic Violence as a Natural Phenomenon. The representations and portrayals of women in media television, based in the social (re)production of meaning, become accepted as "reality" where there are "natural" divisions between men and women (Bourdieu, 1991, 2001, 2004). Based on the data above, these depictions of women have remained relatively static year after year. We argue that this is a product of the dominated seeing these roles of women and men as natural divisions. The (re)production of reality serves to justify and normalize masculine domination and culture. Symbolic violence is domination within a society that is accomplished on the basis of "consensus" or a common view of social life. The mass media

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(re)produce these common views in which women are subordinate to the men.

Gender, operating as a symbolic mechanism that organizes social life, has become a powerful classification scheme, and gender domination is a classic example of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Krais, 2006). Symbolic violence, as a form of social and cultural domination, is as harmful as other types of violence in that it imposes stereotypes that influence social life, and social agents, of a given culture and society. The dominated do not rebel against those who dominate because the differences between them, men and women in this specific case, as portrayed and reinforced through media content, are accepted as natural dichotomies even though they are social constructions. It is in this way that we argue the mass media, as a social institution, are "doing" symbolic violence against women, because the obedience to all forms of social relations of power involve forms and categories of perception, cognitive and emotional processes, and principles of vision and division (Bourdieu, 1998). Evidently mass media are only a small part of the whole process through which acts of submission and obedience to all forms of social relation of powers are created and reinforced. The mass media, and the TV in particular, are particularly useful in (re)producing these forms and categories of perception that emphasize and normalize and legitimize male domination.

Symbolic violence captured in media depictions reproduces the inequalities that exist between men and women and fosters an environment where women can become or are objects instead of subjects. This is in line with the defining characteristics of symbolic violence against women: shaping gender subjectivity and objectivity. Symbolic violence is applied to the Italian context because, through the institution of media, in particular the TV news, the domination by men and the masculine are recognized as a natural, normal and, above all, a daily occurrence. Furthermore, it is worth noting that men as well should be freed from the same dominant patriarchal structures. This is why, according to Bourdieu, the efforts to free women from domination "must be accompanied by an effort to free men from the same structures which lead them to help to impose [domination]" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 114). It seems that media depictions not only decrease women's cultural capital but also their social and political capital. Because the media are a powerful source of meaning creation and cultural transmission, this reinforces a culture of masculine domination where women are portrayed as submissive to men. Those in the position of social, cultural, and economic power who create women's roles in Italian television continue to treat women as objects of domination.

4. Symbolic Violence and Women's Position in Italy

Symbolic violence can have devastating consequences for women. The following illustrates the potential that the role symbolic violence can have in the (re)production of gender domination through unequal opportunities for women that are reified through representations of Italian women in media. Unlike other European countries, women in Italy face far greater inequality between the status of men and women. Although there have been some steps toward decreasing this inequality, Italy is still ranked among the lowest nation-states in areas such as government representation and employment representation by women. This is in part from discrimination due to life events, such as marriage and children, but we argue also due to the

persistent and unnoticed symbolic violence that occurs in the Italian media. These depictions aid in shaping the social milieu for women and women's roles in society.

The representation of women in Italian government is still far below that of other European countries. Italy's 2013 Parliament had the highest number of women in the republic's history with approximately 32 percent of female lawmakers in the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) and 30 percent in the Senate. Although the data are positive compared with the previous Parliament, at 21 percent and 19 percent respectively, other European countries, such as Sweden (44.7 percent) and Finland (42.5 percent) have greater representation of women

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among their political leaders (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013). The low number of women Parliamentarians could have potential consequences in terms of decision-making and law-making in Italy, especially pertaining to women's issues. In addition, because the political majority controls a large portion of public television in Italy, more women leaders could equate to greater diversity of women's roles in television.

Italian women are also underrepresented in employment statistics. According to the statistics of the OECD, or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Italy is one of the worst countries in the world in regard to the employment of women. Only three countries are ranked below Italy: Greece, Mexico, and Turkey.

Only 47 percent of Italian women between the ages of 15 and 64 years are employed whereas in other counties, such as Switzerland (73.8 percent), Norway (73.5 percent), and Sweden (71.8 percent), women are employed at a much higher rate (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2013). Women who have children, and even those who marry, have additional obstacles because these life events can cause women to be released from their employment (National Council of Economy and Labour, 2013). When looking at the employment as a whole, unequal access to employment has many social implications such as women's ability to be autonomous and independent.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Media discourse about social problems plays a key role in constituting reality, embodying meaning and social relationships. It constitutes fundamental notions of power and authority, because media discourse are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak; discourse do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention" (Foucault, 1974, p. 49). This discourse is not a transparent or neutral means for describing or analyzing the world, but constructs, regulates and controls knowledge, institutions and social relations. Media discourse therefore shapes lived experiences and influences the conceptual frameworks by which social actors try to understand experiences in the world. By consequence, an inaccurate representation of gender creates a false sense of the reality and contributes to the continuance of gender inequalities.

Symbolic violence, from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), provides a framework to better understand how media portrayals of women have the potential to impede gender equality. As we have shown, symbolic violence operates in various ways in the Italian media. Historically, one of those ways has been gender stereotyping (Furnham and Voli, 1989). This is why, among the strategic objectives declared by the Fourth World Conference on Women, there is an attempt to

"promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media" (United Nations, 1995). Nonetheless, gender stereotyping still occurs in Italian television shows and in the news media with little significant progression toward equality. Because symbolic violence is a quiet violence, often going unrecognized or misrecognized as violence toward women by society at large, the way women are portrayed on television shows and in the TV news media may seem inconsequential. Symbolic violence of domination is 'misrecognised' as 'natural' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 35). If symbolic violence against women remains invisible and is seen as natural, it remains unchallengeable. Patriarchy and symbolic violence form a reciprocal relationship that maintains gendered hierarchies in Italy and, by extension, in other patriarchal countries. The (re)production of these symbolic divisions between men and women hamper efforts to increase gender equality, even more so when the subjects of this domination misrecognize this type of violence. Media portrayals can and do shape the social milieu in regard to women and their roles, opportunities, and sense of self in society (Collins, 2011; Grabe, Ward, and Hyde, 2008; Meyers, 2004). One recommendation to combat symbolic violence is to raise the public's awareness of symbolic violence, how symbolic violence is used in the media, and its role in perpetuating gender

inequality. With greater public awareness of this type of silent violence, there is potential to break the cycle of misrecognition of symbolic violence by victims and spur social action toward creating more equitable roles among men and women in television and on the news. This could be one step within one social institution to reduce gendered domination.

Overall, symbolic violence permeates the Italian media by imposing specific cognitive categories of rigid gender roles for women. Using the GMMP Italy 2010 and OERG 2013, we illustrate how the Italian media system reduces women to a few roles. These roles consist of woman as popular opinion, women as sexual object, and woman as kin keeper. The media therefore play a key role in creating and reinforcing stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, typically relating to men's sexual desires, reinforcing the dominant constructions of 'desirable' femininity to appeal to male imaginations (Carter and Weaver, 2003). These depictions also highlight the perceived "natural divisions" between men and women creating a symbolic narrative that women have less value, less life opportunities, and less power. They (re)produce stereotypes of women and that in social life women are only suited for traditional roles, such as housewife, or their worth is valued based on their bodies as a commodity. In so doing the mass media are (re)producing the hegemonic masculinity maintaining a clear hierarchy between men and women; a hierarchy that promotes masculine qualities and feminine behaviour that reifies male dominance (Connell, 1987).

Using the evidence of depictions of women in the Italian media, the media do become one venue where these gendered distinctions are culturally (re)produced and reinforced. Reflecting back on the statistics on Italian women participating in government and the work force, while we do not test this, we do hypothesize these low numbers may be one direct or indirect consequence of media driven symbolic violence. Bourdieu (2001) argues that this domination is exercised by the complicity of mental structures that are not conscious. The way in which news coverage presents women is fundamental in influencing perceptions from a young age about gender roles in society. That is exactly what symbolic violence is: the imposition of mental structures through which the subject perceives the social and intellectual world as 'natural.'

The research and discussion on symbolic violence and gender inequality should not end here. The media transcend countries and continents. In order to better understand the influence of symbolic violence and the cultural reproduction of gender hierarchies, international and comparative research should be undertaken. For example, how does symbolic violence differ or converge in the different countries? Does symbolic violence take on the same or different forms? The cross-cultural saturation of symbolic violence remains unexplored. Cross-national comparisons can help us to better understand symbolic violence narratives and how they may translate into gender inequalities. Studying how the media contribute to (re)produce these inequalities, although a difficult and complex topic, may offer possible solutions to how symbolic violence can be alleviated across differing nations and cultures.

Overall, in order to better understand gender inequalities there needs to be an understanding of how the gendered hierarchy is culturally reproduced that maintains the status quo of power structures. Symbolic violence, from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), provides the lens in order to better understand how the media are a venue of this cultural reproduction of gendered domination, favouring the unconscious internalization of the acquired dominant values. Indeed, as Bourdieu argued (1991), gender domination is unconsciously reproduced within both institutionalized and informal social fields. As an awareness of media-driven symbolic violence increases, especially across the globe, and as victims of this quiet violence become cognisant of its existence and implications, this may provide another avenue to promote social change and greater equality between men and women.

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