Original Research

"Give Her a Slap or Two . . . She Might Change": Negotiating Masculinities Through Intimate Partner Violence Among Rural Ghanaian Men

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Abstract

Critical studies on men and masculinities have gained significant momentum in feminist scholarship in the past decades. The growing interest in feminist scholarship has focused broadly on how male-bodied people construct, negotiate, and express masculine identities. Despite this growing interest, insufficient attention has explored how rurally based Ghanaian men construct and negotiate their masculinities in intimate relationships. Situated within critical discursive psychology and drawing on 16 semi-structured in-depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions with adult men in northwestern Ghana, the results show that dominant notions of masculinity provide a broad context through which participants' narratives, negotiations, and experiences on intimate partner violence could be understood. Findings suggest that various cultural narratives and metaphors were deployed to support men's controlling behaviors and/or intimate violence against women. The implications of how harmful masculine ideologies could frustrate efforts that target the development and promotion of a socially just and less oppressive society are presented and discussed.

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How might we understand the link(s) between dominant notions of masculinity and men's likelihood to perpetrate and/or resist intimate partner violence (IPV)? One could argue that considerable work has been done by feminist scholars in grappling with the systemic causes of men's violence against intimate partners since the 1980s (e.g., Campbell & Wasco, 2005; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Jewkes, 2002; Kilmartin & McDermott, 2016). Yet IPV remains a significant threat to human rights, public health, mortality, and a major risk factor of HIV transmission (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell, & Dunkle, 2011). Around the world, researchers continue to study the deleterious implications of IPV, especially on women's psychological, physical, reproductive, and emotional well-being (Campbell, 2002; Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006; Sedziafa, Tenkorang, & Owusu, 2018). The World Health Organization (WHO; 2013) has estimated that about 30% of ever-partnered women in the world are likely to experience different forms of IPV at some point in their intimate relationship. In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), research has suggested that IPV against women may range from 36% to 71% (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006). Using the 2014 Ghana Family Life and Health Survey, a recent analysis of violence against women conducted by the Institute of Development Studies and Ghana Statistical Services (2016) suggests that IPV is a common phenomenon among Ghanaian population between the ages of 15 and 60 years. The same study indicates that more women than men were at a significant risk of experiencing both lethal and non-lethal, domestic and non-domestic violence in their lifetime. It is feared that IPV may even be much more prevalent in the continent as most violence cases remain significantly under-reported and socially sanctioned as part and parcel of the larger normative gender order (Adinkrah, 2021; Dery & Diedong, 2014; Coker-Appiah & Cusack, 1999; Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015).

There is growing consensus among local and global researchers, activists, and practitioners that IPV is strongly connected to systemic gender and power inequalities between men and women—a major risk factor which has been noted to promote and sanction violence against women more broadly (Coker-Appiah & Cusack, 1999; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006; Jewkes, Flood, et al., 2015; Kelley, Edwards, Dardis, & Gidycz, 2015). It has also been articulated by feminist theorists that the likelihood of women experiencing different forms of IPV is likely to be influenced by multiple factors, including

location, gender, race, class, religion, able-bodiedness, ethnicity, culture, age, kinship, and sexuality (Jewkes, 2002; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Sedziafa et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, gender critical researchers have been deeply concerned with themes of masculine subjectivity and power negotiations and what this may for men tolerance for violence or resistance against violence. Such research has called for a critical understanding of social norms on masculinities and femininities as potentially useful starting point in grappling more meaningfully with the question of why and how some men perpetrate violence against intimate partners (e.g., Adjei, 2016; Adomako Ampofo, 2001; Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2007; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). African scholars have problematized that specific notions of masculinity valorize and promote violence as an acceptable way of resolving interpersonal grievances and conflict (Adjei, 2018; Adomako Ampofo & Prah, 1999; Seedat, van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009; van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015). Masculinity is likely to turn "toxic," resulting in violence when male-bodied people perceive that they are not treated properly as "men" by women and other men. Violence is likely to become a vital instrument to express masculinity, congruent with broader cultural norms and narratives. In a patriarchal society such as Ghana, IPV is often reinforced by dominant notion that a man has the cultural right to secure the obedience of his wife through "appropriate" beating (Adjei, 2018; Adomako Ampofo & Prah, 1999; Dery & Diedong, 2014; Coker-Appiah & Cusack, 1999). IPV is often used to reinforce power structures, dominance, and inter-gender hierarchies either directly or implicitly by conferring greater social status, power, and cultural legitimacy to mostly male-bodied people in relationships.

While it remains critical to deconstruct and mitigate the violence of men, research on how rurally based adult men in a patrilineal society such as northwestern Ghana construct and negotiate their masculinities in relation to IPV is fairly limited. Therefore, this article is premised on the understanding that men are gendered subjects and the social and cultural narratives that underpin men's behaviors and enactments in diverse contexts should be of critical concern to feminist researchers, activists, practitioners, and policy makers. This article is intended to contribute to the growing debates on the need to approach masculinities as thoroughly complex and socially and historically constructed. Situating this study as a form of critical discursive psychological enquiry and informed by a Foucauldian reading of power, discourse, and language as essential parameters that produce and reinforce masculine dominance in intimate relationships, this article offers culturally nuanced understandings of what it means to be a "man" among adult men in rural northwestern Ghana. While the word "power" remains central to Foucault's own work, it is typical of the Marxist theorist to, instead, deploy and analyze

power relations as complex and mutually reinforcing within a larger network of social relationships (Foucault, 1976/1980). Foucault consistently rejects any attempt that potentially reifies power. Rather, he argues that even in the most brutal state of domination by the ruling regime, there are opportunities for resistance, agency, and contestations among the dominated subjects. Foucault's discussion of the discursiveness of power is further nuanced by his theory of dominance. He argues that dominance or to have domination over others represents a critical component of a multilayered loci of power in which specific ideas, knowledges, discourses, and languages are co-opted to position of hegemonic truths. The normalization and hegemonic framing of certain ideas, discourses, and knowledges within the larger social order is central to critical understanding of how power is accessed and exercised over specific bodies. This makes the concept of power slippery and complex. Therefore, it is important that any productive analysis and discussion on power and social subjectivities, including IPV, should pay critical attention to the microlevel politics on power.

Masculinities in Ghana

In Ghana, a small but growing body of historical, ethnographic, and anthropological research has sought to understand gender in many spheres of life before, during, and after colonialism. Dominant scholarship has argued that, prior to colonial rule, the Ghanaian concept of gender was constructed as complementary between men and women, although boundary maintenance remained salient and widespread (see Dery & Bawa, 2019; Nukunya, 2014b). While not denying the pernicious reach of patriarchy and the fact that more Ghanaian women were and are likely to enjoy less power compared to their male counterparts, historical evidence has pointed to how the onset of colonialism and its assorted heteropatriarchal ideologies and Christianity-inspired philosophies has eroded, and in some cases, deepened the sociopolitical and economic power inequalities between women and men. For example, Stephan Miescher's (2007) work has suggested that the arrival of the Basel missionary was deeply implicated in contaminating, remaking, and refashioning new models and hierarchies of gender relations in colonial Ghana. Situating his work in early 20th-century southern Ghana (matrilineal society), Miescher argues that while people in this part of Ghanaian society embraced masculine identities that mirrored the missionary ideologies and teachings of the hard-working and loyally committed monogamous husband, men were simultaneously invested in keeping some aspects of their indigenous sense of masculine identity (i.e., drawing on local Akan tradition of personhood). In northern Ghana (which practices patrilineal inheritance), a man's ability to marry and

pay the bride price of many wives, as well as his ability to produce many children, especially male children, used to be a dominant measure of successful masculinity.

In contemporary masculinity scholarship, several scholars have analyzed and problematized the ambiguities and contradictions of manhood in Ghanaian society. For example, in a study conducted by Adomako Ampofo and Boateng (2007) and Dery (2019), it emerged that embodying and demonstrating a sense of worth in the socioeconomic realm and exhibiting command of heterosexual knowledge and sexual potency were emphasized as marks of manhood. These notions of manhood corroborate pre-colonial patriarchal masculine ideologies which celebrate the privileged position of the ɔpanyin (Miescher, 2007). The figure of the ɔpanyin represents an important male figure of the family who wields significant authority by virtue of his ability to be an economic breadwinner, to offer physical protection and intellectual security, sustain kinship ties, as well as ensure the safety of his family (e.g., Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2007; Adomako Ampofo, Okyerefo, & Pervarah, 2009; Miescher, 2007). A man's masculinity is further strengthened when he is able to train his male children to succeed in activities traditionally perceived as masculine (Dery, 2019).

Central to dominant notions of masculinity in both colonial and postcolonial Ghanaian society remain the widespread patriarchal stereotypes that "real men" are worth their salt when they are able to exert power and authority over women by being diligent breadwinners. While unattainable patriarchal stereotypes continue to dominate the broader gender hierarchy between men and women as rightly noted by Dery (2019), the tendency has always been to exploit this to the benefit of patriarchy by positioning men as the principal economic providers and women as domestic caretakers. To maintain the gender hierarchies between men and women, the subversion of women's interests complements and completes male dominance thus reproducing a specific culture of patriarchy. Male power becomes articulated through the exercise of culturally sanctioned discourses, including IPV (Adjei, 2018; Adomako Ampofo, 2001; Dery & Diedong, 2014). Developing culturally nuanced understandings on the meanings of masculinities from the global South is necessary in developing global synergies by complementing the existing body of knowledge produced in the global North.

Method

Setting

The men whose narratives underpin this study lived in six rural communities in northwestern Ghana. Northwestern Ghana (Upper West Region) represents

one of the 10 administrative regions in Ghana with the regional capital being Wa. The selected communities are rural with poor infrastructural amenities. Their major source of livelihood is rain-fed agriculture. Participants came from poor families with the majority spending less than US$1.25 per day. The roads linking these communities to major towns such as the regional capital are deplorable, and vehicles usually go to these communities once, mostly on major market days. Only four out of the six communities had electricity and the majority do not have access to quality drinking water. Two communities (Community D and F) described themselves as "gender-conscious" communities due to their long exposure to gender-equitable discourses and workshops through the work of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that operates in these two communities. Although they identified themselves as "gender-conscious," their conception of gender-consciousness was problematic. For example, during open meetings with all the communities as part of community entry processes, the seating arrangement between men and women was starkly hierarchical and loaded with much power dynamics.

Participants

Participants for this study form part of a larger qualitative study with men aged between 18 years and older. For the purposes of this article, I will focus mainly on the narratives of men aged between 30 and 45 years. The majority of these men had limited formal education with the highest qualification being secondary school. Some had skill training as carpenters and masons and are employed in these trades while others work as security guards in hotels in the regional capital, Wa. Six of these men's female partners are employed as professional teachers, three work as community-waste cleaners while the rest work as housewives. All participants grew up with their biological parents. Most of these men, especially those in their early 30s, told me that they often travel to Techiman in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana in the dry season to seek for menial jobs as unskilled laborers. At the time of the interviews, all the participants described their marriage relationship as heterosexual, and each has an average of four children. Participants described themselves as heads of their families. All the participants also described their religion as Christianity; hence, all reported that they were in monogamous marriage relationships.

Data Collection

Data for this article were obtained from six (6) focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with 30 purposefully selected men. Each group comprised

of at least five (5) participants from different families in each community. Sixteen (16) semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with participants who initially took part in the group discussions. Both FGDs and IDIs were successfully completed over a 6-month period (i.e., October 2015 to March 2016). FGDs were initially used to gain firsthand information on what could be described as collectively held views on masculinities and intimate violence. Despite this, previous experience has alerted me to the fact that people may not say the truth about their experiences in a public space such as focus group. Against this backdrop, I adopted IDIs to further unpack the complexities, contradictions, contestations, and nuances about the discursive connection between masculinities and IPV.

Participants were recruited through close collaboration with community leaders such as chief, Assembly Member, and Tindana (earth priests who serve as custodians of the land). Building trust and rapport with community leaders and members is a key ingredient in field research in Ghana. Community meetings were organized and held in each community during which I (the principal researcher [PR]) explained in Dagaare (dominant language spoken by participants), the purpose of the study to community members. A series of meetings were held to allow prospective participants to seek clarity on what participation in a research framed as "Understanding Men's Masculinities" entails and how data could be managed. My cell phone number was circulated and men who were interested in taking part in the study but had doubt could call me. Using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling technique, I approached and vetted all participants who expressed interest to ensure that they met the age requirement and that they were actively married.

Using a flexibly framed interview guide, both IDIs and FGDs covered similar topics with an initial focus on the meanings of manhood. Although questions for both IDIs and FGDs were similar, they were approached differently, sometimes asking questions in the third person or using a vignette. Specifically, participants were asked to share with me what it means to be a "man" in their communities. What does the process of growing up as a "man" entail? Who is an "ideal man" and what qualities describe such a person? The second segment of the interviews focused on participants' own expectations in intimate relationships. FGDs typically lasted between 1 and 1.4 hr sometimes with intermittent breaks. IDIs lasted for an average of 1.5 hr with the least being 45 min. Both FGDs and IDIs were conducted in Dagaare and were audio recorded with the permission of participants. Interview data were independently translated and transcribed by the PR and a graduate male research assistant (RA) who are both native speakers of Dagaare.

Data Analysis

In this study, I was interested in consensus among participants on what it means to be a "man" in the selected communities, as well as points of diversities, contestations, ambiguities, and disagreements. After transcribing the data into English, both PR and RA engaged in thorough and repeated reading and re-reading of the transcripts to develop initial codes. Our approach to coding was both inductive and data-driven. After various codes were initially developed, both PR and RA met to discuss our individual codes. In instances where codes differed, we discussed it extensively before arriving at a common code which represents the data. To enhance the validity of our findings and minimize potential biases, we triangulated data from IDIs with the FGDs by comparing and contrasting how dominant ideas on masculinity and femininity play out in both spaces. Attride-Stirling's (2001) approach of thematic qualitative analysis was used to make meaning of the various codes which were clustered into themes and sub-themes. Building on a constructionist paradigm, Attride-Stirling's (2001) approach allows me to critically examine, identify, and problematize the ways in which sociocultural realities, meanings, and experiences produce and legitimize specific discourses within society. I bring to the fore the ways individual men may make meanings of their behaviors and experiences and how such meanings making are shaped by the broader social and material context.

Ethics

Appropriate institutional ethical approval was obtained for the study. Participants had to thumbprint a written consent form before one could participate in the study. To protect the identity and enhance the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms are used throughout this article. Participants were compensated with snacks after successfully completing the interviews.

Findings

Making "Men" Out of "Boys" and the Violence of Masculinization

Throughout the transcripts, the process of growing up as men in rural communities was infused with complex meanings and negotiations on manhood. Many participants recounted being encouraged by their parents to aspire to hegemonic masculine ideals, such as developing the ability to contain pain and emotional vulnerability. Traditionally, hegemonic masculine ideals were

constructed to be culturally desirable when expressed in a range of social and behavioral domains. For example, participants described the process of growing up as boys as a "chaotic" and "limiting" experience; a process full of contradictory information, personal dilemmas, and expectations on manhood. A common thread that staples participants' narratives and their experiences of growing up as boys was a strong emphasis on the role parents play in making "men" out of "boys." The process of making "men" out of "boys" was characterized by parents' desire for their boy child to imbibe and display strong spirit of physical and emotional strength (i.e., denouncing vulnerability), engaging in revenge peer-to-peer violence, avoiding activities which could potentially make boys feminine, and aspiring for an economic breadwinner position. Gender binaries became strongly marked and enforced by different social agents and boys who trespassed gender boundaries were severely penalized, and their masculinities compromised. Naa illustrated this poignantly,

> A hunter trains his son how to hunt. In our culture, we all know that as a boy, I must not go to the kitchen while my sisters are around. Doing this question my manhood as an upcoming man. Boys become men tomorrow and the sort of person you become tomorrow starts today. That is why boys are taught to learn and aspire for hard stuff. My father taught me that I needed to be hardworking so that I can provide for my family when I marry. Girls become wives and they are expected to learn kitchen stuff to be good wives. These messages were clear in our minds when we were growing up, but hey, I just wanted to try something else . . . just being curious about life. I still remember the day that I went to help my sisters in the kitchen and my father punished me very well. He asked me whether I wanted to become a woman. (32, IDI, Community A)

Another participant, Ben, suggested that the process of growing up as a boy was also an intense period for learning what is desirably masculine and what is not. He explained,

> Every parent, I mean fathers always want to see their boy child excel in life. Fathers get excited if they see their boy child acts as example to other boys. Fathers always want to see their boys behave like "*doo le kyii ra"* (an active and assertive boy). When you don't behave like this, even your own peers will bully you. I used to fear that I will be hurt or even killed if I fight others. But my friends took advantage of that and bullied me several times. So, my peers will beat me up when I go out to play. When I return, my father also punishes me "well well" for allowing my friends to bully me. It was tough for me. But you know, it was all for my own benefit. Today, you cannot just walk on me like that and gets away with it. No. You pay a price for that. (35, FGD, Community D)

Jonas explained further the relationality of boyhood experiences:

> "You know a ripe fruit by its look." To be a boy is to tell the world that you're different from girls . . . So, depending on how your father trains you today, you can become a "real man" tomorrow which is the desire of every father. If you're not well trained, you become a disgrace to your family. (45, IDI, Community F)

Broadly, dominant narratives among participants suggest that whether a boy engages in particular behaviors and gendered activities by displaying his competence or the lack thereof has huge implications for his masculine identity. Participants in the study suggested that they were always encouraged to aspire for specific activities and behaviors which could potentially confer power and authority on the masculine figure over other identities. It appears natural that to be a "man" in these communities is to aspire to be a heterosexual family breadwinner. The naturalness of this discourse (illustrated by Naa's comment that "these messages were clear in our minds when we were growing up") discouraged boys and their fathers from paying attention to other aspects of their lives. This is seen in the ambivalence of Ben and Naa. Both participants revealed the importance of sensitive parenting. To productively approach sensitive parenting, fathers always need to demonstrate keen interest in listening to, caring for, and nurturing alternative gender discourses among their children. Parents must watch out and encourage their male children to explore other facets of their lives, including non-violent and caring behaviors. Unfortunately, this critical aspect of less hegemonic masculinity as contained in both narratives was sacrificed in lieu of dominant masculine ideal which endorses rigid gender norms.

The challenges that participants were found to be negotiating, I suggest, were not simple issues that individual boys could easily manage. Rather, boys' behaviors, displays, and actions were thoroughly monitored, regulated, assessed, and contrasted in comparison to the larger social order, especially in relation to femininities; "things that girls do." Proverbs and metaphors became powerful patriarchal vehicles through which problematic patriarchal vocabularies are activated to support certain notions of masculinities and femininities. Local proverbs and metaphors are powerful tools in reproducing and reinforcing specific public knowledge which extols patriarchal ideals such as hard work, heteronormativity and the image of an independent, and breadwinning figure. On the other hand, girls are supposed to demonstrate keen interest in traditionally emphasized femininities which endorse qualities of docility, dependence, submissiveness, sexual attractiveness, and good wifely practices. Beyond their political significance, cultural proverbs, and messages such as

"A hunter trains his son how to hunt," "You know a ripe fruit by its look," and "doo le kyii ra" also have predictable pedagogical and psychological ramifications to which children cannot easily relate, imagine, develop, embody, and express healthier and more progressive masculine ideals in society. There is a potential difficulty that boys who may want to disrupt the prevailing gender order are likely to face as illustrated by the narrative of Naa.

Men's aspiration for risk-taking behaviors, such as peer-to-peer violence, enhances their chances of wielding social dominance and thus creates intra-gender hierarchies in the process (Dery & Ganle, 2020). The future benefit for boys of being encouraged to be aggressive and invulnerable cannot be ignored. The future value of boys being encouraged to pursue aggressive behaviors while remaining invulnerable was a dominant argument among participants. Ben's narratives make this clear when he asserts that "it was all for my own benefit. Today, you cannot just walk on me like that and gets away with it." It seems therefore reasonable to say that male-to-male violence in this part of Ghana is a normal way of expression masculinity. When a boy does something that can make him, or his father look feminine, he is subjected to appropriate parental punishment. Such punishments arguably aim to correct socially undesirable and transgressive behaviors because what it means to be a "man" tomorrow starts today. Since all participants had been brought up to believe that it is appropriate to punish boys who trespass gender boundaries are themselves adult men now, it will be important to know how such messages are likely to be translated into men's relationship with their wives.

Regulating "Disruptive Femininities"

This section is interested in exploring and understanding how men who were trained to aspire for specific values, qualities, and behaviors negotiate masculinities in their intimate relationships. Participants were asked to share what they expect in their marriage relationships. If what men expect in their relationships are not forthcoming, how might different masculinities play out in such circumstances? Different approaches were deployed to answer this question in different communities, yet the different approaches all speak to a common discourse: husbands are heads of the families and their positions as men of the house must be respected and maintained, irrespective of the situation.

Despite clear evidence that the processes through which men sustained their patriarchal dominance in relationships were marked by different forms of intimate violence, they did not describe their behaviors and acts as such. In fact, none of these men described himself as a violence perpetrator. They have specific ideas about what violence is as will be shown shortly. Participants in the FGDs made it clear that violence against wives

undermines masculinity and "real men" maintain their masculine integrity when they resist violence against intimate partners. Considering that none of the participants in the FGDs describe ever perpetrating violence, I decided to ask questions in the third person, or use a vignette to find out how men will likely react to potentially violence scenarios in the individual interviews. In a vignette, I described a man who had returned from his farm in the evening exhausted and hungry. He had given his wife some money (popularly known in Ghana as "chop money") in the morning to go to buy food from the market to prepare a meal for the family. She did not prepare any meal and the money was nowhere to be found. The children had returned from school and had no food to eat. The wife did not offer any form of explanation or apologies. Participants were asked to share their thoughts and reflections on how they would feel if they were in the position of this man.

Based on their thoughts and reflections, participants were probed on what it means to be a "real man" and what characteristics qualify this description? Men's responses to this vignette generated richer but contradictory messages different from the group contexts. An overwhelming number of participants in their early 30s, mostly from gender-conscious communities, suggested that the man in question should walk away with his dignity intact to avoid the discord that the wife wanted to bring to the family. The dominant narrative among this cohort of men was that "the woman was up for something dubious." Influenced by various evangelical teachings, men within this camp thought that the "devil was at work" evident through the misdemeanor of the woman. To this category of participants, resisting the temptation to be violent represents the definition of who a "real man" is. To them, violence is as shameful an act to them as men and walking away without taking any action against the woman was thought to be the most appropriate thing to do.

Some participants in their early 40s across communities had different ideas about this. Such participants thought that when the misdemeanor of the woman continues and has become entrenched, the husband should report her to his family first. "Let your family intervene, she might change," Fred alluded. When this approach fails, the husband needs to report the woman to her natal family. "Hopefully, her parents could speak to her to change. They may remind her of her cultural obligations in marriage," David added. Patrick explained,

> When all attempts to let her change fail, and um, she still causes more problems, give her a slap or two . . . She might change. You know, some women are like children. Sometimes they need some force to change. People will understand you. You've tried your best. It is not your fault.

Although this category of respondents stressed that a man's ability to forgive, to be tolerant, and being patient to a reasonable period defines who a "real man" is, violence is inevitable when the behavior of the woman reaches an "abominable" limit. Describing the behavior of the woman in the vignette as deeply "disruptive," John argues:

> Violence against your wife does not speak well of you as a man. But I think some women understand that language better than words. If I were this man, I will hold her hand tight to tell her that she is going beyond bounds as a woman. This is not violence, you know. I only want to put fear in her to be a good wife. (45, IDI, Community F)

The narratives above suggest that men in this study are aware that IPV is a shameful and unacceptable act yet a range of controlling behaviors and other non-physical forms of intimate violence pervade their narratives. While emphasizing the role that age and exposure to gender-equitable discourses may play in shaping understanding of violence, what is fascinating is how participants in their 40s theorize violence as something that probably hurts, physically. In other words, anything that does not speak to the physical pains of beating is not perceived to be violence. With this perception assuming significant currency in men's theorizing of what it means to commit violence within a conservative patriarchy, we can safely say that men have the cultural and moral authority to teach their wives useful and lasting lessons to be feminine enough else the gender order may be destabilized. To discourage women from dictating the pace of intimate relationships, controlling behaviors and actions were widely described by participants in their 40s to be culturally legitimate measures to assert masculine dominance as "husbands" similar to the findings of Adjei (2018), Dery & Diedong (2014), and van Niekerk and Boonzaier (2015).

The process of making women good wives through marriage and the meaning of credible "husbandhood" and "wifehood" play a significant role in normalizing certain behaviors and actions of men toward their wives as amounting to instilling fears in a wife who deviates from her representations of respectable femininity. While it is extremely hard to tell what exactly might have informed the different orientations and reactions to IPV among the two demographic categories of participants, I suspect that the exposure of participants in their early 30s to a different culture in Techiman could be a potential contributory factor. It is also possible that the activities of the NGO could have mixed effects on the behaviors and attitudes of rural men of varying ages toward violence and gender-equitable discourses. One could also speculate that the differences in men's orientations and the likelihood of

men to be accepting of controlling behaviors is rooted in participants' own unresolved interest in pursuing alternative masculinities as illustrated in the first theme.

The narratives of men demonstrated above have very important implications for program development and its implementations. For example, men who are in their 40s are likely to employ both physical and non-physical forms of IPV as discursive mechanisms to enforce and promote a sense of husbands' moral authority to correct the wrong of women. Dominant understanding in Ghanaian literature has problematized how the language of culture and morality has always been deployed by violence perpetrators to trivialize and justify IPV (Adjei, 2018; Adomako Ampofo & Prah, 1999; Dery & Diedong, 2014; Sedziafa et al., 2018). The legitimacy of husbands to correct an "erring" wife is profoundly revealed through language embedded in the larger gendered social order. The immediate importance of the linguistic undertone of participants' narratives is how women are discursively constructed to be highly capable of change if only an appropriate amount of force is applied (giving a slap or two). Patrick's deployment of the statement "People will understand you. You've tried your best. It is not your fault" seeks to accomplish two interrelated things. First, the statement allows an abusive man to shift responsibility for his violence onto the woman and thereby engaging in a victim blame game. Second, shifting the responsibility for violence to the woman enables the violent man to maintain his cultural and moral authority unquestioned in the face of violence. The language of moral authority and how this discursive authority is deeply woven into the larger social fiber in northwestern Ghana, as revealed in this small study, tacitly justifies violence in specific circumstances as excusable, acceptable, and normal.

Discussion

In this article, I have sought to explore and put into perspective how wider social and cultural narratives and processes shape men's constructions and negotiations of masculinities in six rural communities in northwestern Ghana. I have made an attempt to grasp more deeply, the complex processes of making men out of boys and how such complex processes could potentially serve as fertile grounds that repudiate less dominant masculinities. In the process, I have argued that boyhood experiences represent complex articulations of masculine meanings and identities. At the same time, boyhood experiences represent problematic social terrains through which dominant patriarchal discourses are always invoked, judged, and evaluated in relation to other masculinities and, more importantly, in relation to femininities.

Unlike studies conducted in other parts of Africa which found that younger generation of people are more likely to be supportive of conservative patriarchal ideologies, including wife beating than older adults (e.g., Hindin, 2003; Lawoko, 2008), findings in this study did find different evidence. This difference could probably be explained by the exposure of some of these young men in my study to gender-equitable discourses through the activities of NGOs in their communities. It could also be possible that young men in this study did not share a sincere account of their intimate relationships since some of their narratives in the individual interviews were problematically infused with controlling behaviors. It is even possible that participants only reflected and shared what they could remember on IPV as far as their current intimate relationships are concerned. This study was conducted in a patrilineal society where women's access to social support services is hugely lacking despite that women may be economically empowered and independent. Most importantly, as suggested by some participants in this study, a woman's deviation from culturally feminine obligations comes with a huge social cost. The cost associated with this could lead husbands to report such women to their natal families. In this sense, specific expressions of IPV as qualitatively reported in this study is likely to be undermined and the behavior of the husband figure likely to be treated as unproblematic and socially desirable when it does not inflict physical pains on the female body (Adjei, 2018; Anderson & Umberson, 2001; LeCouteur & Oxlad, 2011; van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015).

Broadly, findings from this study are consistent with other studies which suggest that experiences and exposure to parental violence, especially corporal punishment play a significant role in determining how adult men are likely to develop and reproduce supportive attitudes toward "wife-beating" (e.g., Gass, Stein, Williams, & Seedat, 2011; Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015; Koenig et al., 2004). This becomes complicated by a dominant patriarchal ideology which privileges heterosexual marriage (and its doctrine of husbands having the right to punish wives) as an important zone through which masculinities and femininities find expressions. It must be highlighted that the social organization of northwestern Ghana which allows men to dominate in intimate relationships is a major risk factor for IPV. IPV which take the form of "instilling fears," "teaching women lessons," and many other forms of nonphysical IPV are more likely to be used to secure the submissiveness of women. This finding resonates with the argument of Jewkes, Flood, & Lang (2015). These authors argue that dominant masculinity ideology including specific cultural roles and qualities embedded in intimate relationships between men and women may be demonstrated through violence when the man perceives that the woman is not acting feminine enough.

At the same time, subtle forms of IPV in male-dominated relationships are likely to be trivialized and condoned thus further limiting the autonomy of women. Consistent with other studies conducted in Ghana (Adjei, 2018; Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2007; Dery & Diedong, 2014; Mann & Takyi, 2009; Sedziafa et al., 2018), argument in this study found that even among supposedly gender-conscious and potentially egalitarian families, there can be patriarchally supportive attitude toward IPV. In particular, non-physical violent actions in the form of controlling and domineering behaviors against women are more likely to be widespread.

Conclusion

The arguments that have emerged from this study are very important for broader understanding about masculinities and IPV as linked to broader sociocultural, discursive, and ideological narratives. In this article, I have discussed the role that harmful masculine ideologies may play to frustrate healthier relationships and promote a socially just society. One contribution of this study which might be of concern to feminists, pro-feminists, psychologists, and development practitioners in male-dominated settings is the relationship between fathers and male children. There is a strong evidence in this study to suggest that father figures play important roles in shaping and enforcing sons' conformity to traditionally hegemonic masculine ideals. These hegemonic ideals are strongly woven into the larger social fiber to the extent that questioning them becomes almost always unimaginable thus strongly foreclosing alternative discourses. There is even compelling argument in this study to suggest that fathers make "men" out of their sons to mirror their own deeds. The pride of fathers feeling fulfilled when their sons are able to live up to hegemonic masculine norms is instructive. While such findings are not too surprising considering that inheritance in this part of Ghana is transmitted patrilineally, the significance of such findings lies in their immediate revelation of the range of implicit and explicit cultural messages, proverbs, and metaphors that fathers use to demarcate what is "desirable" or "undesirable" masculinity for male children. Taking these findings together, it is important to stress that fathers' rigid enforcement of problematic gender identities can have deleterious effects on their male children, on women, and on society. Importantly, fathers' rigid socialization of their male children and subsequent sanction of uncompromising behaviors undermine the potential for alternative masculinities.

Findings contribute to better understanding of the complexity and dynamics of men's violence against intimate partners. At the same time, findings from this study have the potential of opening up useful and culturally relevant

entry points for program intervention on how to mitigate IPV and nurture healthier and more progressive masculinities in northwestern Ghana and Ghana broadly. One important contribution of this study is the finding that although some men are likely to desist from acts of physical violence against intimate partners, there were relatively high tendencies of men exhibiting controlling behaviors toward their wives. Given that men above the age of 40 were more likely to support acts perceived to be culturally legitimate in teaching women lessons in such a male-dominated society, it will be helpful if program interventions are collaborative in their approach to deconstructing problematic cultural narratives that mask gender-power dynamics in intimate relationships. Such interventions should promote increasingly broader understandings about gender equity in marriage and encourage positive and non-violent negotiation of masculinities. An important intervention that should concern feminists and pro-feminists is to consider exploring the usually strong affirmation of parents when they see their boy child acting as example to other boys. Through collaborative and gender-transformative strategies, it is possible that parents could be guided to develop and embrace exemplary behaviors such as gender-equitable masculinities. When parents develop interest in gender-equitable values, it could serve as an important entry point for children to embrace less harmful masculine ideals. In a research conducted by Lucas Gottzen (2016) in Sweden, the author explores how gender equity has become a strong pillar in constructing desirable masculinity and revealed that men who had perpetrated violence came to construct themselves as "shameful." To get the best out of men as far as developing gender egalitarianism is concerned, it is likely to be more productive to start engaging with the range of behaviors and activities that boys at young age are indoctrinated into believing as desirable of masculinities.

A critical examination of the possibility of opening alternative spaces for men to develop and imagine healthier and more equitable masculinities is what we need as critical feminist and pro-feminist scholars. As critical feminist and pro-feminist researchers, our approach to deconstructing the complexities of a range of problematic behaviors of men, including violence should not only be a matter of talking about the things that men do daily which frustrate social justice; rather, we should create an enabling space that allows men to reflect on alternative ways of being men. Any policy interventions and programs seeking to disrupt and transform problematic gender norms must show sufficient interest in understanding "men" as gendered subjects located within specific social contexts.

The potential limitations of this study are worthy of attention. Future study could explore participants' direct experiences of peer-to-peer violence (e.g., bullying) and how this is likely to translate in their intimate relationships.

Future research could consider using an ethnographic approach to engage and dialogue with the nuances, complexities, tensions, and multiple contestations inherent in heteronormative relationships, especially incorporating the views of wives, children, and other extended relatives. The outcome of this study may also be biased by my own gender and familiarity with participants. Even as I am conscious of the need to stay close to my data, I am aware that self-reported narratives, accounts, and lived experiences on the meanings, representations, and negotiations of sensitive issues (e.g., IPV) may be influenced by social desirability.

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