


The Pragmatics of Domestic Violence Discourse in Uruguay

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Abstract

Domestic violence (DV) is a form of gender-based violence and a violation of human rights. As such, it was analyzed from the perspective of feminist theory in the dissertation this article is based on, by analyzing discourse pragmatics. Which are the socially accepted DV discourses in Uruguay? Which coincidences, contradictions, and paradoxes appear when we compare these discourses and those of everyday life? Which codes and subcodes should be modified by the sectors interested in the prevention and eradication of DV? The main hypothesis is that there are different types of opposition between the public discourse of different institutional sectors and that of everyday life. Describing these oppositions and, especially, unveiling the pragmatic paradoxes will enable us to develop a different type of discourse for the prevention and eradication of DV. As I am both a researcher and an activist on the topic, my epistemological choice was the autoethnography. This article provides some final reflections, included in the dissertation, on how the feminist movement needs to succeed in persuading decision makers and the mass media, and in building solid alliances to establish an information and monitoring system; the integration of the subject into the educational system; comprehensive legislation on gender-based violence; and new ways of communicating with all sectors, so as to create a new ideology on gender relations for the suitable prevention of DV.

Keywords

social sciences, communication, communication studies, race, gender, media, society, mass communication abuse, criminology, human rights, political sociology, sociology, sex, women's studies

Why Is It Necessary to Analyze Domestic Violence (DV) Discourse in Uruguay From a Feminist Perspective?

This volume of *Progress of the World's Women* starts with a paradox: The past century has seen a transformation in women's legal rights, with countries in every region expanding the scope of women's legal entitlements. Nevertheless, for most of the world's women the laws that exist on paper do not always translate into equality and justice. In many contexts, in rich and poor countries alike, the infrastructure of justice—the police, the courts and the judiciary—is failing women, which manifests itself in poor services and hostile attitudes from the very people whose duty is to fulfil women's rights. As a result, although equality between women and men is guaranteed in the constitutions of 139 countries and territories, inadequate laws and loopholes in legislative frameworks, poor enforcement and vast implementation gaps make these guarantees hollow promises, having little impact on the day-to-day lives of women. (UN Women, 2012, p. 8)

The introduction to this section was published in 2012, and it reached my hands when I was about to finish my PhD dissertation. I was truly moved by the similarity of our stances, and it strengthened my conviction regarding the need to address the issue from all possible perspectives.

Uruguay is not an island but a mere sample of a problem that extends to women in general: violence.

As defined in the Convention of Belém do Pará (U.S. Organization of American States, Department of International Law, 1994), “violence against women shall be understood as any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere.” It also states that “violence against women includes physical, sexual and psychological violence.”

In this article, which presents my PhD research work, I will address DV, which, according to the above-mentioned convention, is understood as violence “that occurs within the family or domestic unit or within any other interpersonal relationship, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the woman, including, among others, rape, battery and sexual abuse.”

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DV is a form of gender-based violence and a violation of human rights. As such, it was analyzed in my dissertation from the perspective of feminist theory by considering discourse pragmatics, which is understood as the analysis of contradictions and coincidences between hegemonic and subaltern discourses in the public sphere, and the application of specific policies on the matter.

The dissertation set out to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: Which are the socially accepted DV discourses in Uruguay?

Research Question 2: Which coincidences, contradictions, and paradoxes appear when we compare these discourses and those of everyday life?

Research Question 3: Which codes and subcodes should be modified by those sectors that are interested in the prevention and eradication of DV?

The main hypothesis was as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There are different types of opposition between the public discourse of different institutional sectors and that of everyday life.

Describing these oppositions and, especially, unveiling their pragmatic paradoxes will enable us to develop a different type of discourse for the prevention and eradication of DV.

Clearly, this hypothesis reflects a stance on the role of sociology as a science that should contribute to changing the living conditions of people. In this case, it is not only about analyzing discourse pragmatics but also about making recommendations, from evidence, to effect changes in discourse, because discourse is a factor that contributes to socio-cultural change. It would hence contribute to reducing the prevalence of DV in Uruguay. In our country, 40 women are murdered every year, most in cases of DV, and $\pm 20,000$ related reports are made, in a population of only 3,200,000 inhabitants.

As I am both a researcher and an activist on the topic, my epistemological choice was the autoethnography.

The Objectives and Approach

To answer these questions, the first objective was to show that, despite legislation about DV, its implementation has not had a true positive impact on the lives of sufferers. The discourse of law and what has been really happening with its application, and the prevailing ideology in members of the judiciary, end up denying adequate protection to women and revictimizing them. To demonstrate this, four different speeches were considered, in which we proceeded to check the dimensions established in the theoretical framework, using the tools of verisimilitude analysis, which are explained in section "Discourses Analyzed."

The first discourse analysis examined the contradictions between the letter and the application of Law 17.514 of DV, taking into account the document review of two initiatives of the Women's Movement. The first initiative took place on October 28, 2010, when 20 Uruguayan civil organizations denounced the Uruguayan government for DV and femicide in a public hearing of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The second initiative was the project "Time Gender Justice." This project, which had several phases, was implemented in October 2010 by Organization of Women Now (member of the Uruguayan Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence [RUCVDS]), with the support of UN Women. In October 2011, this project began its second phase, focused on requesting constitutional status for the human rights of women to the highest ranking body of the judiciary, the Supreme Court, and, particularly, inquiring into the justice system's response to those situations of family or DV regulated by Law 17.514. The petition was signed by more than 90 organizations, groups, collectives, and networks that work in the field. The importance of this initiative was ratified by the response of the Supreme Court itself, which recognized in its 7755 Agreed 2012, the veracity of the vast majority of the facts that were outlined by the petition.

The second objective was to reveal the contradictions between the "politically correct speeches regarding DV" and pragmatic public policies that did not have the resources to prevent the scourge. One of the problems in Uruguay is that institutions do not translate what is written or verbalized into efficient and effective public policies. For a full understanding of the situation, the stage where these contradictions take place needed to be considered. On one hand, my research addressed the institutional structure dedicated to the prevention and eradication of DV, and particularly the state of its current situation, taking as a source the evaluation of the First National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence 2004-2010, a plan that covers all actions carried out in that period. This evaluation, conducted by the author, assessed all the institutional aspects of DV in Uruguay, both structurally and functionally. On the other hand, my research also addressed the process carried out by the Women's Movement in Uruguay, because their members have been major players in the placement of DV on the agenda of public problems, and probably the ones responsible for the policies that have been developed in the matter, even if these policies are still weak. This weakness is amply demonstrated by the growth in the number of murders of women and the evaluation of the plan that was referred to earlier. Also, coinciding with the autoethnographic option, the author participates and has participated in this movement for almost two decades.

Third, ignorance and subservience on the topic of DV were demonstrated, particularly concerning the agenda of most decision makers and opinion leaders. Twenty-seven interviews were conducted in this regard during the second half of 2011 and early 2012. Most of them corresponded to

the institutions discussed in Evaluation of the National Plan to Combat Domestic and Sexual Violence (2004-2010). Others were made specifically for the dissertation, to complete the segment related to opinion leaders, which included members of civil society and journalists.

The fourth objective was to demonstrate how Uruguayan public opinion, despite its condemnation of DV, is still far from recognizing the scale of the problem and its real causes. There is no real empathy toward victims and important sectors of society still justify violence. These statements were supported by the analysis of the main results of two national surveys of statistically representative public opinion directed by the author in 2010 to 2012, Herrera Sormano (2015). Both surveys were conducted under the project "Strengthening Articulation of the Uruguayan Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and Groups Working on the Issue," funded by the European Union.

The Position of the Researcher and the Epistemological Choice

According to Creswell (2007), to study this problem, we need to choose a qualitative research strategy to use new techniques to collect evidence, in a natural environment that is sensitive for researchers, to analyze data that are inductive and to set out guidelines for addressing the different areas. Its final written presentation includes the participants' voices, the reflexivity of researchers, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and literature is widened or there is a call to action. "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 36).

In this respect, I believe I must make my epistemological choice of autoethnography explicit. As I am both an academic and a militant, my research falls within the tradition of the ethnography, but this ethnography is based on the idea that as a researcher, I am at the same time a social actress, as I am part of the context under study.

As Scribano and De Sena (2009) state, citing Bohman,

This author identifies indeterminacy as an intrinsic feature of social practices and of the central concepts of social science, like causality, rules, criticism, correct interpretation, etc. Indeterminacy is not about impossibility and lack of understanding, but rather it is related to the reflexive character of knowledge. It is an ontological feature of social reality. On the contrary, beyond all theories, social actors are not simple bearers of social forces or foolish decision-makers within a cultural order. Agents, with the capacity to know and reflect, can alter their circumstances and the conditions of social life. If this were the case, then the root cause of the problems of social sciences is indeterminacy rather than their failure to produce a sole prediction as is the case of natural sciences (1994, p. 13). It is within this context that we can understand that the perspective of the subject involved in the analysis of the object is not only an

obstacle to comprehension, but also a resource and/or a condition to such comprehension. (p. 3)

In this case, autoethnography is the study where the researcher and author describes a cultural context where she is an active participant in more or less the same terms as the other participants whose discourse will be analyzed.

Autoethnography breaks away from positivist logics to account for the bias in the investigation. In this case, the researcher's position crosses paths with what is researched, connecting personal experience with the social context where it develops.

Therefore, it is important to point out the need to make the subjectivity of the researcher explicit in the research process.

Autoethnography, a qualitative method, is a postmodernist construct in that it combines autobiography with ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Ellis and Bochner (2000) posit that autoethnography displays multiple layers of consciousness in mixing the personal with the cultural and includes dialogue, emotion, and self consciousness through first-person accounts. It is highly personalized writing "where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture" (Holt, 2003). Pratt's (1999) suggestion is that alternative forms of meaning and power from those associated with the dominant culture could be explored in autoethnographical texts. Buzzard (2003) saw autoethnography as the "perfect aegis under which every heretofore silenced group might enunciate, from its own location and according to its own agenda, its vision of itself and the world." (Franklin & Todd, 2007, p. 169)

This epistemological position is even more relevant, as this research is undertaken from a feminist perspective. According to Bonder (1998), work undertaken from this perspective

would entail accepting that the existence of lines of flight regarding the docility of the prevailing models is essential for the construction of subjectivities; accepting that, as Guattari would say, we are traversed by desiring, semiotic, social and material flows. We are both subjects and subjected, which gives us back a degree of freedom, and consequently, of responsibility. Additionally, considering ourselves a heterogeneous set of subject positions that in certain circumstances "harmonise," in others crystallise and in others are in tension, allows us to explain "agency" without resorting to metaphysical voluntarism, or reproducing the idea of a historical subject appointed theologically. However, it does allow us to acknowledge its capacity to become an "ethical political" actor/actress in certain contexts and situations. (p. 13)

Observing from this perspective also allows us to remain on the lookout for risks:

Considering ourselves in this way entails an invitation or an obligation to act in the knowledge that it is impossible to remain

uninvolved with regard to power relationships; however, it also entails accepting that the rules of the game can be changed while playing, although the game could be in favour of some players and against others. So, where should our “game” go in the feminism of the turn of the century? With which rules and against which rules should we play? (p. 13)

Regarding DV, the following questions were considered, trying to maintain the following ethical and professional position:

This implies taking as a political responsibility the habit of distancing, objectivation and problematisation of the chain of crystallised meanings, including those that we gradually build from the feminist practice itself; keeping the “spark” of creative subversion alive in gender definitions and regulatory practices, but also accepting that all regulations are tentative, even the most “progressive” ones, and finally the affirmation of an ethics of hope as essential for intersubjective relations based on solidarity, diversity interplay and unity of action. (p. 17)

From a Private Problem to a Public Problem

For this work, I chose a pragmatic analysis approach to study DV discourse in the public sphere, whose relevance as a theoretical approach I explain below.

As Fraser (1997) rightly says, Habermas’s idea of “public sphere” as the setting “where participation takes place through discourse is the space in which citizens deliberate on common problems, therefore, an institutionalised space of discursive interaction” (p. 97).

According to Fraser (1997), an accurate conception of the public sphere should fulfill four conditions:

1. Elimination of social inequality (in this case, the submission of women, girls, boys, and adolescents to male violence).
2. Need to have multiple publics (in this case, to conquer the different strata of public opinion).
3. It should favor the inclusion of the topics that the dominant sexist conception labels as private (no explanations needed).
4. It should allow for the existence of *strong publics* and *weak publics*, and to favor interaction between them (creation of alliances).

This consideration of the public sphere is relevant when addressing DV, because in women’s discourse, the “subaltern discourse,” this matter is paradigmatic. In modern and postmodern times, feminists have been a minority who have argued that this should be a public concern.

Besides the committed action of women, it was necessary for their discourse to be deemed “legitimate” from two sources: on one hand, international actions and, on the other

hand, multilateral organizations dealing with concerns about discrimination toward women (e.g., CEDAW, Belém do Pará, the 2002). In Uruguay, this became a “legitimate” issue when prevalence studies of DV were conducted in 1996 and 2003 (IADB, 1996 and 2003), with the creation of the Observatory of Violence and Criminality of the Ministro del Interior, and with the development of regulations: Law 16.707 of Citizen Security of 1995, which modifies the Criminal Code and criminalizes DV; and Law 17.514 of DV of 2002, already mentioned as well.

In Uruguay—in the private sphere—traditional discourse regarding gender relations and violence survives to this day, epitomized by the following statement: “One shouldn’t meddle in the affairs of a couple.” It is in daily life where it is the hardest to effect changes, and this is the problem that will be analyzed in this article.

Analysis of Mass Discourse

The notion of *discourse* implies the idea of an interpretation of the world made reference to. That is to say, it expresses the difference between the fact itself and the narrative of such a fact. This difference, generally unseen by the receiver, is very important for the analysis of media discourses. One thing is the real fact, what and how it happened. Now, to recount what happened is different.

Neglecting this narrative instance means disregarding the specific conditions where the discourse took place, be them social, historical, or cultural. That is to say, the *context*. As a consequence, what is actually a quality of the text is taken as a quality of the fact; thus, we forget that this is not the fact itself but its representation. Ignoring this instance is one of the reasons that explains the power granted to media regarding the truth of the facts recounted.

By analyzing the different social discourses, we can discover and systematize the elements that make up the perception different stakeholders have on a given subject. Social discourses organize reality to persuade through reasoning and to move through literary images, and they will do so, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their power to be connected, implicit or explicitly, with the accepted values and the symbolic configurations of each place and each moment.

This idea implies that the object of study of semiotics is the text, leading to a textual or discursive semiotics.

Following Verón (1987), discourse is the material manifestation of sense production. “Whatever the storage medium, what we call a discourse or a discourse set is but a time-space configuration of sense” (p. 127). Therefore, this medium can be an image, the linguistic text itself, or a combination of both.

In previous sections of this work, I have mentioned women’s discourse as a discourse that is subaltern to the dominant ideology. According to Verón (1987),

What is ideological is not the name of a dimension in the name of a discourse type (not even at a descriptive level), but the name of a dimension present in all the discourses which are internal to a social group, to the extent that the fact that it is produced in this social group has left its marks on the discourse. (p. 17)

These statements define what Verón calls discourse analysis. In other words, it is not about analyzing the discourses that explicitly refer to the object of analysis, but rather it is necessary to disclose the meaning of those that probably account for the underlying ideology. For the topic at hand, it has to do with the discursive expressions of gender relations beyond (or within) DV. Therefore, it is necessary to establish fundamental concepts: the grammars of production, circulation, and recognition. According to Verón (1987), grammars of production and recognition correspond to generation and reading rules. These rules are never identical to each other, that is to say, grammars of production and recognition never share the same conditions. In fact, "... in discourse, once produced under certain conditions, such conditions remain and will always remain unchanged. Reception and consumption, on the contrary, are 'condemned' to be indefinitely modified" (p. 21).

This concept has a correlate in Eco's (2000) "resignification" theory, which states that messages are decoded by receivers in terms of their own codes and subcodes.

When referring to the concept of "code," it must be defined according to the importance it will have for this work, and according to Bateson, Hall, Watzlawick, and Goffman (1987): How ambiguous the term is ... here should be understood in the imprecise sense of "set of rules" (p. 7). However, I must state that the concept will be developed according to Eco's statement: A code is a way of modeling the world: Verbal languages are primary modeling systems, whereas secondary modeling systems are all the other cultural structures, from mythology to art.

This concept of code as a system categorizes *s codes*, which enables us to consider the institutions as such, because their compliance or non-compliance are not cases of truth or falsehood, but of correctness or incorrectness. If we consider gender a social institution, any gender or DV-related discourse, especially on DV, will follow this logic. Therefore, its meaning should be analyzed, not from a perspective of truth, but of verisimilitude, as I will explain below.

Verón (1987) further states that the theory of social discourses is based on a double hypothesis:

a. Every production of meaning is necessarily social: it cannot adequately describe nor explain a significant process, without explaining its productive social conditions.

b. Any social phenomenon, in its constitution, is a meaning production process, whatever the analysis level (more or less microsocial or macrosocial level). (p. 125)

For the purpose of this analysis, "any production of meaning, in fact, has a material manifestation" (Verón, 1987, p. 126). Therefore, the object of discourse analysis is not within or outside the discourses themselves, but rather they are "systems of relations that every construct has with its generating conditions on the one hand, and also with its effects" (Verón, 1987, p. 128).

From a methodological point of view, we should be able to represent this system of relations systematically: We should keep in mind generation rules as well as reading rules. When we talk about generation rules, we refer to production grammars, in so far as reading rules refer to recognition grammars.

Each discourse has elements in line with the receiver's concept of reality, with their view of the world, and with the public's opinion. These elements ensure the verisimilitude of the discourse.

The credibility of each discourse exists in the receivers as the acceptance of a conventionalized system of codes, therefore the significance of the stereotyped verbalizations of factors or situations involved.

When we say stereotype, we are referring to a "partial and emotional view of reality" (Prieto Castillo, 1985). Stereotyping implies not viewing people as a whole, but from one specific characteristic, which stems from real or imaginary attributes, which society usually considers negative.

The discrediting attributes that create first the prejudice and then the stereotype also include "labels" applied to the person and which refer to just one aspect of their nature. This label is usually so strong that it prevents the person from being classified in a different category.

We believe, by definition, of course, that the person with a stigma is not completely human. It is from this assumption that we discriminate people in different ways. In practice, due to this discrimination, we reduce their chances in life, even if we are not aware of it. (Goffman, 1986, p. 177)

According to the above, reading or hearing a discourse would be an encounter with reality, strengthened by the "complicity" of the receiver upon sharing the verisimilitude elements used, with the added recognition of the authority on the subject, in the case of media discourses.

However, in our analysis, we must consider that the decision to say something implies not saying other things, and in such a case, the unsaid does not exist, it is canceled out.

This refers to two mainly ideological operations undertaken by the sender when creating a message: the selection and combination of the units that make up said message, within a repertoire of possibilities. This analysis is possible by comparing different actors' discourses on the same subject.

Classification, the third operation, adds one more dimension to the analysis in the case of media discourses if we

analyze where certain pieces of news have been laid out when compared with other news on the pages of the newspapers.

After this reading, we have the elements that make up discourse at the denotation level, that is to say, the level of what is perceived in the first reading. Then, we will need to reach what is implicit, at the connotation level, which is concealed behind denotation, and is received unconsciously.

In this sense, it is also necessary to search for the terms in the text that Verón (1991) calls “semantic operators.” They carry socially crystallized meanings that are highly stigmatizing and that permeate the entire discourse. These semantic operators would be conceptualizing categories. This approach can be easily applied to the subject under analysis, mainly because this is, without a doubt, clearly considered as a social problem nowadays: DV has gone from the private to the public sphere in recent years; therefore, its meaning has changed and it is now connected to new dimensions, such as specific legislations.

To conclude this section, I would like to summarize the theoretical approach of my research.

First, each discourse should be considered according to its relations with other discourses. This considers social life as something dynamic, because discourses are created from their dialectical interrelations with other discourses. Their structure and content (in short, their specific elements of verisimilitude) are not created autonomously, in an isolated way; they are created following other discourses they are confronted to or that they want to align with.

Second, the specific situations in which the discourses analyzed are produced are also a reflection, at a microsocial level, of what happens at a macrosocial level. They are actual instances of the global social process they belong to. Therefore, among other things, this level of analysis aims to connect these moments to the process that affects them.

Third, every discourse is a form of social praxis, both because it entails an ideological dimension, and because of the actor’s actual involvement in discourse actions in the discourse situation.

Discourse Alternatives for Persuasion Regarding DV

One last matter to discuss from the theoretical perspective is the characteristics of mass communication processes that are developed for public well-being.

According to Mosquera Vásquez’s (2003) approach to communication models and strategies, we can see that a healthy combination of mass media and interpersonal communication, media advocacy, social participation, social marketing, and edu-entertainment can improve the chances of effecting changes in behavior in the mid and in the long term.

The tone of the message falls within proactive communication, that is to say, the communication used when implementing a public policy when trying to solve a problem. To

that end, we must remember that effective messages are based on the meanings of the problem for the target populations, and they are also designed according to the rules of social marketing; that is to say, they are attractive, positive messages, and not just didactic or frightening messages.

Social marketing aims to change or modify attitudes to achieve welfare for the consumer and society in general through the different means used by the company or institution to effect change in the behavior of individuals; they should go through different phases until the necessary change takes place.

In this way, social marketing is defined as follows: A social change management technology that involves the design, implementation, and control of programs aimed at increasing the acceptability of a social idea or practice in one or more groups of target adopters. It utilizes concepts of market segmentation, consumer research, product concept development and testing, directed communication, facilitation, incentives, and exchange theory to maximize the target adopter’s response (Kotler, Roberto, & Roberto, 1989).

Therefore, the authors state that the degree of adjustment between the social product and the market determines the value given by adopters to what the expert in social marketing is offering. Consequently, this adjustment has an impact on the perception, the attitude, and the motivation of the target group. The wrong adjustment can cause the target adopters to show an insufficient response or the opposite response to what was expected.

Discourses Analyzed

Different discourses were considered, using the tools of the analysis of verisimilitude.

First, the legal hegemonic discourse was analyzed and a strong contradiction was found between the Law of Domestic Violence and its application.

A second analysis showed lack of knowledge and the subordination of DV in the agenda of most decision makers and opinion leaders. Perceptions and evaluations were very different, often conflicting and, especially in the case of members of the institutional structure, their discourses, from the perspective of logical verisimilitude, showed paradoxes between what is said and what is done. Moreover, among the contradictions between *politically correct discourses* and the pragmatics of public policies, the research found that institutions do not have the necessary resources to prevent this scourge. The term *resources* should be understood here in its broadest meaning, that is to say, not only in financial terms but also in terms of qualified human resources.

In the analysis of referential verisimilitude, what *goes unsaid* is very important; therefore, for any authority, DV should include the definition of DV as a concept. This conceptual gap becomes meaningful and it is related to public policy deficiencies and the number of murders; the logical

conclusion is the lack of credibility regarding the importance given to DV, beyond the “politically correct discourse.”

The Uruguayan public opinion, despite a majority discourse that condemns DV, is very far from acknowledging the importance of the problem and its true causes. Many myths about the relations between men and women still prevail. Structural and cultural violence is not seen.

The issues analyzed, in line with the hypothesis, showed us that the Uruguayan public opinion, in agreement with its leaders’ discourse, does not associate DV with the prevailing gender relations, as many sectors still believe it can be justified.

To put it simply, there is solidarity with the dead, not with the living, and in this last interpretation, immanence is the prevailing rhetorical figure, because the notion of process is missing. The deaths of the women victims of DV, deep down, for all the sectors analyzed, both hegemonic and subaltern, with the obvious exception of feminists, are seen as inevitable.

Despite the important role the women’s movement has had in taking the issue of DV from the private to the public sphere, no appropriate codes have been found in mass communication to persuade people about its true causes. However, these organizations are the only ones the public opinion takes as referents on the topic. The lack of presence of the State with regard to DV is very clear, which is understandable, because most mass messages have been sent by civil society women’s organizations and protection services, which are not only insufficient but also unknown.

My dissertation provides some final reflections on how the feminist movement needs to succeed in persuading decision makers and the mass media, and to forge solid alliances to establish information and a monitoring system on DV. It is also necessary to integrate the subject into the educational system at all levels, and to have comprehensive legislation on gender-based violence and new ways of communicating with all sectors, so as to create a new ideology on gender relations for an adequate prevention of DV. This point will be addressed in the following sections.

Evaluation of “Successes” and “Failures” of Women’s Movements When Taking DV Discourse Into the Public Sphere

The subaltern discourse of the Women’s Movement, with some support from communicators, is the one that contrasts the most with the hegemonic discourse. Hence, the inverted commas in “failure”; this is really about a languages/power struggle, and given the above, it is clear that we, feminist women, are far from holding a large proportion of the positions of power.

Undoubtedly, the most significant progress made has been the fact that DV has gone from being considered a private problem to becoming a public problem. In other words,

this change is not just about being “politically correct” but it has also been materialized in the legislation (despite the failures, with regard to the latter, in the enforcement of the Law and the lack of a more “comprehensive” legislation, as present in other countries).

Another major advance is the awareness of the victims on the fact that they can report the violence, which has increased the number of police reports. But the visible failures in the protection of complainants entail a risk that can cause a “boomerang” effect in the short term. In this regard, the Decree of the Supreme Court recognizing the deviations of justice public officials in the application of Law 17.514 after the constitutional petition of women’s organizations is a major step toward achieving justice for the victims.

The great discourse failure is the failure to persuade both decision makers and the public opinion about the root causes of DV as gender-based violence. Therefore, the pragmatics of men–women relations is still mostly about the subordination of women, and violent practices are seen as completely natural.

It is here that we find an explanation for the concept of immanence of DV. As I stated above, it is clear that both decision makers and most of the public opinion consider these are “inevitable” deaths, given how “pathological” relationships can be or because of the “complicity” of the woman herself.

These last two paragraphs summarize the conclusive interplay of my roles as researcher and activist, the experience of this situation, heightened during my term (2007–2010) as co-coordinator of RUCVDS, which led me to write the dissertation.

It is true that nowadays nobody says that the women (and sadly the few men) who fight DV are “crazy,” but it is also true that being a feminist remains highly condemned. If I had to propose a continuum of discourse legitimization, I would say that the highest level is found at direct violence, especially physical violence, followed by some aspects of structural violence, mainly those that have become measurable: gender wage gap, for example. Most structural violence remains invisible, both for the authorities and for the public opinion. I believe that in many cases, as other types of structural violence are prioritized, such as socio-economic violence, and as there is not even an order of precedence, gender inequality is simply not seen. I believe this results from the fact that cultural gender violence is the least visible violence, and therefore, the corresponding discourse is not only not legitimized, but it also is many times the target of mockery and disregard. If true, the corollary is that violence against women is condemned in the hegemonic discourse as violence in general is condemned, but the reasons behind it are not condemned. Hence the sense of “inevitability,” which is what underlies, and therefore what explains, why the prevention and penalization of women’s deaths are not a priority.

The road toward the *resignification* of this conceptualization is long, as the tradition is deeply rooted.

Determining These “Successes” or “Failures” According to the Evaluation of the Relevance of the Codes Used to Persuade Interlocutors

According to Nancy Fraser (1997), the feminist movement “should promote the inclusion of the subjects that the dominant male sexist conception labels as *private*” (p. 97): This battle seems to have been won. However, it is important to highlight this *label*, which is what I consider this to be, just a label. For the verbalization of the hegemonic discourse, it is a public issue. For its pragmatics, it remains a private problem.

Before referring to the relevance or irrelevance of codes, I must state that even the most relevant codes need to be used more frequently, that is to say, the message must be sent repeatedly, and not in an isolated way or just on November 25.

In this sense, the first great “failure” of the Women’s Movement has been its inability to persuade institutional decision makers to fulfill their commitment signed in the 2004-2010 Plan to Combat DV, whereby they agreed to organize frequent and systematic public campaigns in the mass media. Quoting Fraser (1997) again, it has not been possible to create alliances between “strong publics” (institutional decision makers) and “weak publics” (feminist women) to persuade “strong” interlocutors to comply with their commitments. On the contrary, the messages sent by the institutional structure have been fragmentary, scarce, and lacking in definition. Television, the most important means, has not been used, let alone social networks.

This lack of communication with citizens is clearly seen when people are asked to identify institutions that deal with or fight against DV; according to the results of the national Public Opinion Survey conducted for the RUCVDS (Herrera Sormano, 2015), State institutions are not known to people (with the obvious exception of the police). On the contrary, it is civil society organizations that are considered references: At least in this respect, we have achieved Fraser’s (1997) aim: “to conquer the different strata of public opinion” (p. 97).

This result is the most conclusive communicational evidence of the lack of action of the Uruguayan State regarding DV. This omission becomes more significant when we remember that most members of the public opinion consider (rightly so, may I add) that the State should be in charge of this issue. I ask myself, how can a State protect when it does not comply with the most basic element, which is providing information?

Regarding communication in civil society organizations, two institutions were analyzed: RUCVDS and Colectivo Mujeres de Negro (Women in Black Group), the most salient institutions regarding DV communication: The RUCVDS is an organization of civil society second-degree founded in 1992 and composed of 34 NGOs. Women in Black is a member of the network, and its objective is the public denunciation. It is an international organization that is 12 years old in Uruguay. It was founded by Israeli and Palestinian women more than 20 years ago.

They have found converging and divergent lines of action: Both institutions put forward reporting to the police and awareness raising; both do it using accessible and clear language; RUCVDS has chosen a strategic road of “positive” testimonies through the tone of the messages and colorful iconic codes (with the exception of “ECG”) to get interlocutors to identify with the cause; Mujeres de Negro, however, has chosen a different strategy, to impact using aesthetic codes related to death or other expressions of violence, seeking to cause outrage.

According to the results of the Public Opinion Survey, we know that the highest impact was achieved by Mujeres de Negro.

Regarding the relevance of codes, it is not possible to give a conclusive opinion, because although “failure” is clear when a gender order is de-constructed, lack of frequency of the message is a clear obstacle to success.

In turn, trying to change an ideology that is accepted in people’s everyday life is a very long process that cannot be successful through media campaigns alone: Media campaigns are necessary but not sufficient.

Discursive Strategies That Could be Successful for the Prevention and Eradication of DV, to Contribute to Cultural Change

Taking over the rules of a hegemonic discourse and using the rules of marketing and, therefore, of publicity is not a bad idea, as long as it is not done in a simplistic way, as was the case of the United Nations campaign (NO-ON). Quite the opposite is true: Social marketing has proven to be more successful when it comes to modifying behavior patterns. This is true if the strategies are properly applied. What does this mean? It means finding messages that motivate people positively, that show models of alternative behavior, and that make them appealing. Motivation and appeal are essential components.

In fact, to find these messages, it is necessary to follow a technical process that covers research, creation, testing, and systematic campaigns and their monitoring. As in any marketing process, we must also consider the multimedia and multi-gender focus, which seeks to establish the parameters needed for the communication strategy to be effective and efficient. From this viewpoint, it is necessary to segment audiences and messages.

The great master of communication in Latin America, Mario Kaplún, wrote numerous works reclaiming the role media could play as “educators” through fiction by compiling the needs and codes of “learners.”

According to what I have said above, it will be necessary to design messages and to use different media depending on the target audiences. I especially would like to address the important role played by social networks in this process. Any current communication campaign should consider them in the top position, particularly keeping in mind young people and the new possibility of developing new types of gender relations.

Is this enough? Of course not, if it is not done within a comprehensive design of public policies to fight DV, which,

as I have stated several times here, should begin at the earliest ages in the educational system. However, the educational system is insufficient on its own if the gender division of work remains the same, where women do most of the unpaid work, and if the socially accepted model of interpersonal relations is that of the dominance of men over women, and as long as the deaths of women are considered inevitable. To make this possible, as I have said before, we need to train students systematically at universities and in teacher training centers on the issue, as well as those delivering justice: judges and prosecutors. The issue of DV within gender-based violence cannot be just an optional subject or graduate course any longer. It is necessary to learn new types of gender relations, and this issue should be a priority.

A final reflection is as follows: The Women's Movement should be able to create an alliance to achieve these aims as Fraser (1997) called for. It needs to really persuade institutional decision makers, the mass media, the union, and business worlds, the public opinion in general, that gender equality will not only make us better people and a better society but happier as well. What is life but the search for happiness? This fundamental human right is being denied to so many female humans.

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