

Problematizations: violence intervention and the construction of expertise

Kate Seymour

Abstract

Foucault's (2007, p. 141) 'history of problematisations' draws attention to the ways in which 'things' become 'problems'. This paper focuses on the dichotomisation and categorisation of violence as either serious/abnormal (non-gendered) violence or 'domestic' (gendered) violence, reflecting the transformation of some forms of violence into problem violence. Evident here, based on the findings of an exploratory study of the ways in which practitioners who work with male perpetrators of violence construct and understand violence, is the creation of particular realms of intervention, divided along disciplinary lines, each associated with distinct domains of knowledge, authority and expertise. In the process certain behaviours are 'claimed' as the 'territory' of a professional group. As Foucault emphasised, 'for knowledge to function as knowledge it must exercise power' (2007, p. 71). Expertise thus performs a powerful exclusionary function, controlling who can speak authoritatively about an issue. I argue that this partitioning of certain behaviours, as representing particular types of problem and particular types of people and the 'territory' of some professional groups and not others, reflects the broader context of (gendered) power and disciplinary knowledge and has significant implications for the ways in which male violence is conceptualised, named and addressed.

Biography

Kate Seymour, a qualified social worker, has worked extensively in the areas of child protection, public housing, vocational rehabilitation and correctional services (with adult offenders). She commenced her current role, as a lecturer in criminology and justice studies with Charles Sturt University in NSW, in 2004. Kate's research interest and activity is focused on gender and violence, specifically the relationships between masculinities, power, sexuality and violence. cseymour@csu.edu.au