

Cultural Conversations: Using Liming as a Tool to Engage Men and Boys in Conversations on Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean

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Imagine a group of people gathered under the Caribbean sun, laughing, drinking, sharing stories and engaging in lively conversation and debates. This scene, a quintessential ‘lime’, is more than a relaxing pastime, it is a deeply rooted cultural practice of bonding and dialogue. Liming, as both a practice and a concept, holds significant potential for encouraging meaningful conversations on critical social issues (Fernández Santana et al, 2019). However, as Kerrigan (2016) demonstrates through his work on grassroots football in Trinidad, liming spaces are complex sites where both solidarity and exclusion coexist. In this article, I argue that understanding this duality is crucial to effectively using liming as a platform to promote positive change in attitudes toward violence against women and girls, an issue pervasive throughout the Caribbean and beyond.

The term ‘liming’ is believed to have originated in Trinidad during the 1920s and is now used throughout the Caribbean region, although the exact origin of the word has been contested (Mendes-Franco, 2021; Winer, 2009). In the original academic article on liming by Eriksen it is roughly translated to ‘hanging-around’ (1990), however Eriksen argues ‘there is no exact linguistic or cultural equivalent to liming in the cultural contexts with which most of us are familiar’ (p.25). In some cultural contexts, lounging and being inactive is not viewed in a positive way; however in Trinidad and the wider Caribbean, liming is an activity that people proudly take part in (1990). While the term liming is specific to the Anglophone Caribbean, there are equivalent expressions in the Francophone, Spanish and Dutch Caribbean (Fernández Santana et al, 2019). ‘Caribbean-centred’ refers to a theoretical and methodological approach that places the experiences, worldviews, and cultural knowledge of Caribbean people at the centre of analysis. It seeks to privilege Caribbean voices and traditions rather than framing the region and its people through colonial or external perspectives (Girvan, 2006). Theoretically, a Caribbean-centred approach aims to reclaim intellectual and cultural sovereignty by foregrounding the lived realities, histories and practices that emerge organically from the region, challenging Eurocentric frameworks and colonial narratives that have historically dominated discussions about the Caribbean (Girvan, 2006). This approach aligns strongly with decolonial methodologies, which seek to dismantle colonial power structures and epistemologies. Decolonial thought challenges the dominance of Western paradigms and calls for the recovery and privileging of knowledge systems that have been marginalised by colonialism (Pierre, 2007).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence directed against a person due to that person's specific gender, or violence that disproportionately affects a certain gender and is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm, online violence, forced marriage or FGM (International Rescue Committee, 2022). It is a widespread public health issue limiting the lives and livelihoods not only of women, but also of sexual minorities and transgender people (Garcia-Moreno et al, 2002; Nakray, 2013; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). GBV and violence against women and girls (VAWG) are often used as interchangeable terms as GBV affects women at a disproportionate rate and the vast majority of violence against women is carried out by men (European Commission, n.d.). According to national surveys carried out between 2016 and 2019 in Jamaica, Guyana, Grenada, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, one in four partnered women has experienced physical violence (Caribbean Women Count, n.d.). While in 2021, three of the 20 highest recorded rates of rape per 100,000 citizens were in the Caribbean: Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, and Guyana (World Population Review, 2021). These statistics highlight the urgent need to address GBV as a public-health crisis, due to the danger to life as well as the implications for survivors' mental health. The prevalence of such violence and a culture of silence regarding GBV in the Caribbean reflects deep-seated issues such as entrenched gender norms, while systemic inequities perpetuate cycles of abuse (Cassinelli, 2023). In countries such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, rape cases can take more than a decade to be tried in court, leading some survivors to drop their case; it is also often difficult for survivors to access support in terms of legal aid, therapy and temporary sheltered accommodation (Legore, N. et al. 2024). For sexual minorities and transgender people, the risks are often exacerbated by inadequate legal protections, social exclusion and targeted violence (UN Women Caribbean, 2021).

Caribbean governments have been taking steps to address GBV and VAWG. In Guyana, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security has implemented programmes to support women, such as training women to own small businesses and achieve financial independence, as economic abuse is an element of GBV (Cassinelli, 2023). Guyana Police Force recruits are also now required to take courses on how to respond to instances of GBV (Cassinelli, 2023). In 2021, the Jamaican government, in collaboration with private companies, created the first two government-run shelters for survivors of domestic violence, and passed the Sexual Harassment Act, which gives women greater employee protection in the workplace (Cassinelli, 2023). In 2023, Trinidad and Tobago launched its 2023-2027 National Strategic Action Plan on GBV and Sexual Violence. The plan aims to eliminate GBV and sexual violence, particularly against women and girls, through coordinated, gender-responsive efforts across public, private and civil society sectors. It provides a national framework, outlining stakeholder responsibilities and five key areas to ensure effective prevention, protection, prosecution punishment and redress for all affected populations (UN Women Caribbean, 2024). Additionally, in March 2025, Trinidad and Tobago was the first Caribbean nation to launch a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, focusing on gun crime and gang-related violence, which disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups including women and young people. Whilst these are improvements, many further changes are needed. Renata Chuck-A-Sang, chief executive officer of the Guyana Women and Gender Equality Commission, states:

Recognizing that gender violence is not just a women's issue, more efforts to engage men and boys in discussions about healthy masculinity and the prevention of violence

can have a positive impact on reducing gender-based violence, too. Finally, it is crucial to access accurate data on the prevalence and types of gender violence to understand the scope of the problem and to design effective interventions. (UN Women Caribbean, 2024).

According to the Caribbean Development Bank, addressing GBV in the Caribbean requires a multifaceted approach that combines public-health initiatives, legal reform, community engagement and cultural shifts to challenge the norms and systems that sustain violence (Caribbean Development Bank, 2018). Both Jamaica and Trinidad have launched initiatives in barbershops in recent years, to bring together men and boys over 14 years old to discuss topics around male and female relationships, mental health, masculinity, stereotypes and domestic violence (Gender Affairs Division, 2018; The Gleaner, 2020). In this way, liming as a tool of community engagement can also serve as a platform for engaging men in conversations regarding GBV and violence against women and girls.

Relevance of engaging men and boys in GBV discussions

GBV and VAWG is predominantly perpetrated by men, often rooted in harmful norms of masculinity (Kurebwa, 2023). Engaging men and boys is crucial for dismantling these norms, promoting emotional regulation, and challenging the belief that violence is an acceptable means of asserting power. The concept of a ‘crisis of masculinity’, as discussed by McDowell (2000), reveals how economic downturns and societal shifts can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy among men; this, coupled with toxic masculinity, sometimes leads to violence. Addressing these psychosocial challenges requires engaging men in discussions about their roles and responsibilities within society. Men and boys also have the potential to be powerful allies and agents of change in combating GBV. Organisations like Jamaican faith-based organisation Men of God Against Violence and Abuse (MoGAVA) and sports-based organisation Fight for Peace demonstrate how male-led initiatives can lead to accountability and empathy among peers. Despite the potential of formal GBV discussions, men often face stigma or discomfort when participating due to societal expectations of masculinity and the absence of a safe space that can encourage more open and honest dialogue on issues around GBV and VAWG (Gender Affairs Division, 2018; Spotlight Initiative, 2022). Liming, with its informal and familiar nature, offers an alternative that can reduce barriers and encourage more open participation, particularly among men. As it is a casual environment, where conversations flow naturally, liming allows for more comfortable and authentic engagement, avoiding the rigid or confrontational tone of formal settings. However, effectively using liming in contexts such as the Barbershop initiatives discussed earlier, requires careful planning: selecting the right facilitators to guide the discussions, who are skilled, trusted and culturally attuned; and thoughtfully choosing the subject matter to ensure conversations remain constructive and do not reinforce harmful perspectives. When these elements are in place, liming can become a powerful, culturally grounded approach for encouraging dialogue, and community-oriented problem solving (Gender Affairs Division, 2018).

Jayson Downer, president of MoGAVA, argues that it is ‘vital’ to get men involved in the conversation about gender-based violence (Spotlight Initiative, 2022). In 2022, MoGAVA hosted a ‘Bands and Conversations’ event for adolescent male youths, which included a drumming session followed by a workshop involving discussions on

combatting toxic masculinity and spreading awareness of the levels of GBV against women and girls in the Caribbean. ‘I attended the GBV workshop and it was stunning to find out the percentage of violence against women,’ shared Romeo, one attendee. ‘It’s alarmingly high, too high... I think there should be more done and if I can do something about it, I most definitely will.’ The response to these initiatives further highlights the need for increased informal sessions that engage men and boys in spaces where they feel more comfortable to participate in challenging conversations. MoGAVA’s event exemplifies how culturally relevant practices can lead to meaningful dialogue. The event’s combination of drumming and workshops effectively engaged adolescent boys and men, providing a template for similar initiatives. Religion plays a significant role throughout the Caribbean, specifically Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Rastafarianism, with 30% to 60% of healthcare and educational services provided by faith-based organisations (UNFPA SROC, 2022). Alison Drayton, director of the United Nations Population Fund Caribbean Sub Regional Office (UNFPA SROC), highlights that faith leaders can be ‘critical catalysts for change in influencing and transforming cultural behaviours, perceptions and attitudes around GBV’ (UNFPA SROC, 2022). This may involve collaborating with state authorities and civil society to develop workshops and campaigns aimed at engaging religious institutions and faith-based organisations.

Cultural context of liming

Liming is a practice of informal socialising, often characterised by sharing food, alcohol, storytelling, humour and companionship. It is a cornerstone of Caribbean culture, occurring in communal settings such as rum shops and beaches (Fernández Santana et al, 2019). Liming is often spontaneous and inclusive; it creates spaces where people can connect and discuss different topics without rigid hierarchies or formal agendas. Fernández Santana (2022) brings attention to liming’s significance in community building, describing it as a space where serious topics can surface naturally within everyday conversation. In their work on ‘Liming and Ole Talk,’ Fernández Santana et al (2022) describe how these practices can facilitate open communication and create trust among participants. The non-confrontational nature of liming makes it an ideal setting for discussing sensitive issues, including GBV.

From a decolonial perspective, Caribbean scholars such as Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant have long advocated for reclaiming indigenous cultural practices as tools for liberation. Glissant’s concept of opacity defends the right of individuals and cultures to exist without being fully understood or reduced to simplistic explanations, a principle reflected in liming, where people connect without the pressure to disclose, define or justify themselves. Liming’s unstructured, unscripted nature creates a space for casual, communal interaction, reflecting Glissant’s idea of relationality without domination (1997). More than just socialising, liming is also a distinctly Caribbean mode of shared storytelling, where narratives unfold collectively through orality: individuals take turns, interrupt, add details and redirect the story, demonstrating an emic art of communal narration. This aligns with Glissant’s image of the archipelago – scattered yet connected islands – as a metaphor for archipelagic thought, which honours rooted, plural ways of knowing in contrast to homogenising Western frameworks (Constantin, 2021). Furthermore, liming resists the colonial emphasis on productivity by valuing leisure, linguistic play and creation, and spontaneity, making it a lived expression of opacity and a celebration of Caribbean identity (Stephens-Peace, 2024). Both practices

honour the richness of being and coexisting without requiring full transparency or assimilation.

Fanon also critiques colonialism's emphasis on productivity and discipline. Liming, with its focus on leisure and unstructured community interaction, acts as a subtle form of defiance against these values. By prioritising collective joy, conversation and shared storytelling, liming subtly resists colonial narratives of economic productivity, affirming a uniquely Caribbean identity rooted in culture and relationality. Yet, as seen in contexts like Kerrigan's 2016 anthropological study on 'small goal' football in Trinidad, liming is not inherently egalitarian; it can also reproduce forms of exclusion, including misogyny and racial hierarchies, showing the ways that power can circulate even within culturally affirming spaces. Fanon argues that:

a national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of inert dregs of past traditions. Rather, it is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which they have created and keep themselves in existence (2002, p.223).

Fanon's call for decolonial relationality, solidarity and the reclamation of dignity is reflected in liming's egalitarian and communal nature, which calls for authentic human connection and offers a space for healing and mental liberation. His emphasis on colonised people decolonising from Western social norms and embracing self-determination further highlights the practice of liming as a tool for liberation. Through storytelling, laughter and the collective release of stress, liming embodies Fanon's vision of joy as resistance, creating a liberatory space where life can be celebrated on one's own terms. Liming, as an organic, culturally grounded practice, aligns with this vision by providing a framework that resonates with the lived experiences of Caribbean people. Similarly, Fernández Santana (2022) highlights how Caribbean cultural practices such as liming serve as valuable tools for constructing knowledge and building strategies that challenge colonial ways of thinking. In this manner, these practices can be utilised as a culturally affirming approach to combat social issues facing the region. However, this freedom is often confined to the liminal space of the lime itself, with broader oppressive structures, such as racism, classism and sexism, remaining intact beyond it and sometimes even reproduced within it, underscoring the layered and contradictory nature of liming as both a site of resistance and reinforcement. Therefore, whilst liming offers moments of joy and cultural affirmation, its transformative potential must be understood in relation to the wider social landscape in which it exists, one that demands ongoing critical reflection and structural change.

Liming as a tool for addressing GBV

The relaxed setting of a lime can reduce defensiveness, enabling participants to explore sensitive topics such as GBV without fear of judgment. By incorporating peer influence, group dynamics during liming can challenge harmful behaviours and normalise healthier attitudes towards women, girls, transgender and non-binary people. For instance, hearing stories from peers about the impact of GBV can lead to reflection and accountability amongst the group. Using liming as a medium ensures cultural relevance, avoiding the pitfalls of imposing foreign frameworks that may not

resonate with local populations (Fernández Santana, 2022). Additionally, the storytelling and humour often present in liming create opportunities to discuss serious issues in a relatable and accessible way. This aligns with Fanon's (2002) call to harness indigenous cultural tools for development. Despite this, it is important to recognise that the Caribbean also has deeply rooted social norms and historical structures, including those that perpetuate gender-based violence, which are homegrown and complex. Therefore, while liming provides a culturally grounded approach, it must also critically engage with and challenge these internal dynamics to be truly transformative.

To effectively use liming as a tool for addressing GBV, several practical strategies can be implemented. First, community leaders and activists can be trained to subtly introduce GBV topics during limes by using relatable anecdotes and scenarios to engage participants. Everyday topics such as relationships, music or current events can also serve as entry points for discussions, for example analysing song lyrics by Caribbean artists such as Vybz Kartel and Stiffy could lead to conversations about respect and consent. Additionally, incorporating activities such as role-playing, storytelling and reflective exercises can challenge gender norms and create empathy amongst participants. Creating safe and inclusive spaces is essential, with facilitators ensuring that discussions remain respectful and intervening when necessary to maintain a supportive environment. While these sessions would be male led, it is essential that women's voices and perspectives are included in both the planning and execution stages. This involves providing a platform for women to share their lived experiences of GBV. Additionally, women's input can help shape the content and approach of the sessions by identifying key areas of concern that need to be addressed, and the changes they hope to see in male attitudes and behaviours. Ensuring that women's insights guide the discussions can lead to more fruitful and meaningful dialogue, making the sessions more effective in challenging harmful norms and promoting positive change.

Hypothetically, a lime at a rum shop could start with light-hearted conversations about music and evolve into a discussion about healthy relationships. However, for this to be effective, it requires the presence of a facilitator or participant who is knowledgeable and sensitive to these issues. In many communities across the Caribbean, young men often face multiple challenges, including exposure to violence, economic anxiety, mental health struggles, unsafe environments and entrenched problematic gender norms, rooted in complex social and familial dynamics (Kerrigan, 2016). Therefore, using liming as a methodology must intentionally address these realities, creating supportive spaces that not only foster open dialogue but also critically engage with and challenge harmful norms and conditions. By grounding the conversation in shared cultural experiences, facilitators can create a space where participants feel comfortable exploring sensitive topics. Mark Cole, programme coordinator of Fight for Peace, states, 'As unfortunate as it is, the fact is that men are mainly the perpetrators [of GBV]. For us as a gender to become part of the solution, we also need to become part of the conversation' (Spotlight Initiative, 2022). This underlines the necessity of including men not only as allies, but as active participants in challenging harmful norms and contributing to sustainable solutions to end GBV. Both MoGAVA and Fight for Peace demonstrate how creative, community-based approaches, whether through faith, sports or the arts, can facilitate meaningful discussions and increase accountability among men.

Whilst toxic masculinity and deeply entrenched cultural norms may lead to resistance or discomfort during these conversations, starting with less contentious topics, such as healthy relationships or fatherhood, can help ease participants into deeper discussions. Overcoming patriarchal values requires sustained effort and repeated engagement. Peer-led interventions and success stories can help demonstrate the benefits of change. Additionally, facilitators should emphasise the organic nature of liming to help maintain the authenticity of the conversations, and strike a balance between guiding conversations and allowing the natural flow of liming to unfold.

Conclusion

Liming, as a Caribbean-centred culturally resonant practice, offers a unique and effective platform for engaging men and boys in discussions about GBV. Its informal, inclusive nature allows for open dialogue, peer influence and the integration of storytelling and humour. By embracing innovative, culturally rooted approaches such as liming, communities can engage in meaningful conversations and drive transformative change in the fight against GBV.

The integration of liming into GBV outreach efforts not only affirms the value of Caribbean cultural practices but also offers a pathway for addressing one of the region's most pressing social issues. It is a call to action for communities, policymakers and organisations to embrace these methods and invest in strategies that resonate deeply with the people they aim to serve.

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