

National Crime Victims Awareness Week
“Choose Your Words Carefully”

Telling it like it isn't:
Violence, Resistance and the Power of Language

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Centre for Response-Based Practice

- Direct service, victims and perpetrators of violence, children
- Clinical supervision and consultation
Child protection, shelters, victim assistance, therapy
- Research: Language and violence and social responses.
Criminal justice, mental health, human service, museums,
history texts, brochures, fiction, psychological assessments.
- Education and professional training in response-based practice

Today's Presentation

- Effective social responses hinge on accurate accounts
- Observations on violence and resistance
 - Resistance is ever-present
 - Violence is deliberate
 - **Violence is social**
 - **Violence is unilateral**
- Show how language is used to:
 - Conceal violence
 - Obscure offender responsibility
 - Conceal victims' resistance
 - Blame, pathologize victims
- Point to how language can be used more judiciously.

Social Responses to Victims of Violence

- Possibly the single best predictor of the level of victim distress
- Positive Social Responses
 - Victims tend to recover more fully and quickly
- Negative Social Responses
 - Victims receive a variety of mental health diagnoses
 - Greater distress over short and long term
 - Less likely to disclose to, collaborate with, authorities
- Marginalized people more likely to receive negative social responses (Aboriginal, LGBTQ, Disabilities, Poverty)
- Social responses linked to common ways of conceptualizing and “representing” violence, victims, offender

Socially Just Responses Depend on Accurate Accounts

“A sense of **the unique, specific and concrete circumstances** of any situation is the first indispensable step to solving the problems posed by that situation.”

David Trimble

(1998)

The Challenge of Obtaining Accurate Accounts

- Offenders conceal their violence, create secrecy
- Victims' (often) conceal their resistance, for safety
- Open disclosure is often dangerous
- Victims, marginalized have little access to public speech
- Offenders use language to conceal & justify violence
- Professionals in various roles use language in ways that obscure the events in question

“the unique, specific and concrete circumstances”

Violence is Social

- Violence involves at least two people and occurs on the level of social action
- So, to be complete and accurate, descriptions should include the actions of both people
- Example: Contrasting accounts of sexualized assault

First account of sexualized assault:

He followed her down the sidewalk. He sped up to catch her. He grabbed her by the shoulders and threw her to the ground. He dragged her toward the bushes. He overpowered her and dragged her into the bushes. He held a rock over her head and threatened to kill her if she screamed. He called her degrading names. He forced his mouth onto her face. He tried to undo her belt. He grabbed at her pant legs to pull them off. He overpowered her and vaginally raped her.

Second account of sexualized assault.

He followed her down the sidewalk. She sped up. He sped up to catch her. She moved to the side. He grabbed her by the shoulders and threw her to the ground. She rolled on the ground to get away. He dragged her toward the bushes. She grabbed the roots of a tree so he couldn't drag her into the bushes. He overpowered her and dragged her into the bushes. She started to scream. He held a rock over her head and threatened to kill her if she screamed. She stopped screaming. He called her degrading names. She said, "You don't want to do this. You don't want to hurt me." He forced his mouth onto her face. She averted her face. He tried to undo her belt. She stuck out her stomach so that he could not undo her belt. He grabbed at her pant legs to pull them off. She crossed her ankles so that he could not pull off her pants. He overpowered her and vaginally raped her. She went to limp to avoid injury and went elsewhere in her mind.

Contrasting Accounts

- What is the difference between the two accounts?
- Which accounts is more complete and accurate?
- How did the victim respond and resist?
- In which account does the full extent and deliberate nature of the violence stand out most clearly?

Implications of Contrasting Accounts

- Accounts that omit victims' responses/resistance:
 - Portray victims as passive (imply consent)
 - Reinforce negative stereotypes of victims
 - Conceal how perpetrators suppress victim resistance
 - Conceal full extent and deliberate nature of violence
- To conceal resistance is to conceal violence
- Accurate assessments (e.g., child protection, mental health) must include accounts of victims' responses/resistance to violence in order to reveal offenders' efforts to suppress that resistance.

“the unique, specific and concrete circumstances”

Violence is Unilateral (Coates, 1994, 1996)

- Violence consists of actions by one person against the will and well being of another
- Mutual Acts vs. Unilateral Acts
 - Hand-shaking vs hand-shaking
 - Boxing
 - Kissing
- Mutual acts entail consent, co-action, co-agency
- Quote from anonymous Canadian genius

Unilateral

- forced his mouth on hers
- wife-assault, beating
- forced vaginal penetration
- beating, attack, assault
- workplace bullying
- invasion, genocide

Mutual

- kiss
- abusive relationships
- sex, intercourse
- fight, conflict, argument
- personality conflict
- war, conflict, historical relationship problem

Colonial Discourse

Colonization has always been based upon the existence of need and dependency. Not all people are suitable for being colonized; only those who feel this need are suitable. In almost all cases where Europeans have founded colonies . . . we can say that they were expected, and even desired in the unconscious of their subjects. (Mannoni, 1947, cited in Macey)

Wife-Assault

The partners' characteristics hold them together. . . . As abused partners adapt and become more compliant . . . the partners' characteristics make them increasingly dependent on one another. After prolonged abuse they develop complementary characteristics: aggressive/passive, demanding/compliant, blaming/accepting guilt. (Anonymous Family Violence Project, 2008)

Wife-assault, Sexualized Assault: Judge's Remarks

“The appellant & his wife engaged in an argument Mr. X became upset over something said during this argument. He thereupon grabbed his wife's neck, squeezing it until she nearly lost consciousness. He then let go. This brought the argument to an end. That the earlier of the two assaults arose spontaneously in the course of an argument is not in dispute. To that extent it can be said to have been unpremeditated. He was willing to take counselling in reference to his anger & his marital problems. He expressed his deep remorse for what had happened & his desire to improve the marriage. They went to bed and he said, ‘Jane, I’ll have to screw you one more time’, and he had intercourse with her. . . . It is obvious difficulties were present in the marriage.”

Man Makes Unauthorized Bank Withdrawal

Response-Based Wire Service

Vancouver. Police arrested Martin Jones yesterday for allegedly negotiating an unauthorized withdrawal in the amount of \$500,000.00, from the Olympic Bank of Canada. The bank clerk, who agreed to the transaction when a gun was pointed at her face, was unhurt. “I’m just happy the incident is over”, said Kerry Lightly, who has participated in three similar transactions in recent years. “I don’t know why these customers choose me”, she said. The bank manager, Mr. R.E. Tentive, stressed that Ms. Lightly would receive “psychiatric help to address her anxiety and ensure she no longer attracts greedy customers.” Mr. Jones was released on condition that he have no contact with bank clerks and attends specialized treatment for “wealthophilia”, a congenital disorder, more common in first degree biological relatives, characterized by the compulsive pursuit of financial independence.

Mutualizing

- Obscures, mitigates perpetrator responsibility
- Is associated with reduced sentences
- Co-opts victim consent
- Portrays victim as co-agent, co-responsible
- Conceals victim resistance
- Blames, pathologizes victim

Mutualizing Interventions

- workplace abuse ~ conflict resolution
- child/spouse abuse ~ mediation
- bullying ~ non-violent communication
- genocide ~ reconciliation

From Single Terms to Larger Units of Meaning

mutualizing

how mutualizing

how mutualizing terms work

how mutualizing terms work to create

how mutualizing terms work to create larger units of meaning

Sexualized Assault of Minor Judge's Remarks (2004)

In January of 1997, shortly after Hazel moved into this new “safe” home, Gordon Hunter (foster parent) **began to have sexual intercourse with her**. The first incident took place in a caravan parked in front of the home, where Gordon was repairing a water system and Hazel was watching him work. He began to kiss Hazel, pushed her onto a bed in the trailer. He withdrew a condom from his pocket and removed her clothing. He proceeded to sexually assault Hazel, who was 11 years old, a peri-pubescent girl. Notwithstanding the order to stay away from Hazel, the accused continued to meet and sexually assault her until early in 1998. On at least one occasion **the accused had sexual intercourse with Hazel** in a public park. **The sexual relationship of Mr. Hunter and Hazel was disclosed** early in the proceedings.

Hazel

intercourse

sexual intercourse

sexual intercourse with her

began to have sexual intercourse with her

intercourse

sexual intercourse

had sexual intercourse

had sexual intercourse with

the accused had sexual intercourse with Hazel

Hazel cont'd

relationship

sexual relationship

the sexual relationship

the sexual relationship of Mr. Hunter and Hazel

the sexual relationship of Mr. Hunter and Hazel was disclosed

Macleans Magazine (2009): Priest sexually assaults three boys

In 1969, John Swales and his brothers attended a summer camp for low income kids where they met a charming, larger than life volunteer named Father Barry Glendinning. [T]he priest soon became a surrogate big brother. He gained the trust of the boys' parents, showered them with pizzas, movies and booze, and, **when opportunity knocked, introduced them to sex**. John was 10 years old when the first assault took place. "You name it, he did it," Swales says. "The impact is so intense and so deep-rooted it is beyond my ability to express it. **When you have sex at the age of 10 with your priest, it's pretty weird.**" John's family won a landmark \$1.3-million judgment against Glendinning and the London diocese, but not before a bitter court battle that dragged on for years

Priest

sex

to sex

them to sex

introduced them to sex

when opportunity knocked, introduced them to sex

sex

have sex

have sex at the age of 10 with

you have sex at the age of 10 with your priest

when you have sex at the age of 10 with your priest its pretty weird

Kamloops man accused of procuring sex with child Vancouver Province Newspaper 2009

A 33 year-old man who allegedly **wanted to purchase sex from a three-to-five-year-old girl** remained in police custody Monday. The man was arrested Saturday night at a home in Kamloops where he went **believing he was to meet a young child for sex**. Police received a report from a person who said they had received a text message from the suspect. “The text allegedly asked the person to provide the suspect with a three-to-five-year-old girl for sex, and that he would pay for the service by way of a finder’s fee”, said Sgt. Scott Wilson. **The man was arrested for procuring for sexual purposes** under Sec. 212 of the Criminal Code. Wilson said the suspect is known to police and was charged with a sexual-related offence with a person under 12 years of age in 2008. He was convicted of sex assault in 1999, police added.

Kamloops man

sex

sex from

sex from a three-to-five-year-old girl

purchase sex from a three-to-five-year-old girl

wanted to purchase sex from a three-to-five-year-old girl

sex

for sex

a young child for sex

meet a young child for sex

believing he was to meet a young child for sex

Kamloops man cont'd

sexual

sexual purposes

for sexual purposes

procuring for sexual purposes

the man was arrested for procuring for sexual purposes

Misrepresenting Intent:
Drawing Mental Inferences from Distorted Accounts

wanted to purchase sex from a three-to-five-year-old girl

believing he was to meet a young child for sex

the man was arrested for procuring for sexual purposes

Alternative: Re: Kamloops man

violate

to violate

a young child to violate

abduct a young child to violate

planning to abduct a young child to violate

The West Australian
March 20, 2010, p. 3

“Hickey gives job to **sex abuse** priest

A Catholic priest convicted of **child sex** offences while teaching religion is working in what has been described as a leadership role given to him by Perth Archbishop Barry Hickey.

Michael Slattery confessed to **dealing with** a 14-year-old girl indecently while he was working as a religion teacher at a Sydney girls’ school. . . .

Father Slattery was given a suspended 18-month jail term for **embracing, kissing and masturbating** in front of the girl, whom he had **befriended**, over about a year.”

Man Arrested in Frying Pan Dispute

Ottawa: Response-Based News Service

Things got too hot in the kitchen for Bill and Sue Smith yesterday, when a disagreement over dinner turned violent. Sue was hit on the head with a frying pan and went to hospital with minor injuries, after police and paramedics attended the scene. While being lifted into the ambulance, she exclaimed, “Being hit on the head with a frying pan is not what I call cooking!”

Bill was arrested and released. He stated, “I feel very bad about what has happened. Cooking has always been a strain on our relationship. We come home tired and hungry and just can’t communicate.” Due to family of origin issues, Bill was triggered by Sue’s basil cream sauce and lost his temper. Said Bill, “I can’t allow Sue’s cooking to affect me in this way”. The couple plan to attend a new evidence-based program, offered by the Ottawa Family Therapy Centre, for couples caught in the cycle of culinary conflict.

To conclude . . .

- Research shows that false/distorted accounts are common in criminal justice and human service settings.
- These accounts are not random or haphazard: Rather, they involve the consistent use of specific linguistic devices.
- They consistently harm victims and benefit perpetrators: In this sense, they are systematic and prejudicial.
- Distorted accounts violate the rights of victims to equal protection under the law.
- Further, they continue to foster unjust and ineffective social responses to violence in all forms.

Finally . . .

- We have found that building more accurate and just accounts is a straight forward process that is of immediate benefit to victims . . . and offenders.
- Our role, in part, is to:
 - reveal violence, broadly defined
 - clarify offender responsibility
 - elucidate victims' responses and resistance
 - contest the blaming, pathologizing of victims
- This is not the province of experts: It is a human rights “witnessing” practice that we are all qualified to perform and already do at coffee shops and kitchen tables.

Thank you!

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Upcoming Training Event

Mind the Gap:
Introduction to Response-Based Practice
May 12 – 14, 2010, Kamloops B.C. Canada

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