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Langauge and Violence: Analysis of Four Discursive Operations

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Abstract The Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance is a framework for critical analysis and research, prevention and intervention that takes into account the conditions that enable personalized violence, the actions of perpetrators and victims, and the language used in representing those actions. Using this analytic framework, we analyzed five accounts of personalized violence, one each from a perpetrator, a psychiatrist, a judge, a government minister, and a therapist. Our results demonstrate the scope and the ubiquity with which diverse accounts locally accomplish four-discursive-operations; namely, the concealing of violence, obfuscating of perpetrators' responsibility, concealing of victims' resistance, and blaming and pathologizing of victims. We examine the specific linguistic devices that combine to accomplish the four-discursive-operations in each case. These data suggest that the problem of violence is inextricably linked to the problem of representation.

Keywords Language · Violence · Four-discursive-operations · Victim blaming · Resistance · Responsibility

The strategic use of language is indispensable to the acquisition and exercise of power, even power that is acquired democratically (Fairclough 1989; Foucault 1980).

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In democratic societies, political power is linked to the management of information and the power of rhetoric. The ability of any group to advance its interests hinges in part on the group's ability to publicize its perspectives as more truthful or reasonable than others. For example, those who access public discursive space often use linguistic representations of persons, events and social relations to formulate profound differences in status, influence, standard of living and social security as natural and necessary (Coates and Johnson 2001; Tavris 1992). Significantly, access to the means of publication, such as the broadcast media, academic journals or talk at meetings is distributed unequally. Professionals, academics, celebrities, corporate leaders, government officials, candidates for political office, and men are typically more able than others to circulate their own views and influence the extent to which competing views are aired. Speech may be free but the means of making one's self heard and having one's position given credence are not equally available to all.

Key institutions (e.g., education, medicine, law enforcement, criminal justice, military, corporate, electoral) publicize their ideologies, policies, and objectives as guidelines for social practice. However, it is individuals in specific positions within institutions who must realize these abstract concepts locally through discursive actions in writing and face-to-face conversation. These individuals are not mindless automatons or puppets of the state, but social agents whose discursive actions variously reflect or depart from institutional policies. Individuals must freshly justify their use of institutional power in each case by linking their actions to institutional ideologies, polices, or objectives. This is true even when administrative power is used for the greater social good, as in the arrest and incarceration of dangerous criminals or the protection of abused children. Nevertheless, institutional policies, objectives and ideolo-

gies are used to conceal negative, even horrific acts, conducted under the cover of the institution.

Consequently, questions about how professionals, elected officials, and other authorities exercise their social power cannot be answered by examining the institution's ideology, policies, or objectives. It is only through analysis of individuals' specific social and discursive actions that we can see how power is used and how abstract policy is interpreted and applied. The extent to which individual judges follow the criminal code in sentencing convicted violent offenders or social workers follow policy in protecting abused children can be ascertained only by examining specific instances of talk or text in situ. Thus, even in comparatively safe and civil circumstances, language is far from a neutral medium of exchange: The practice of everyday life, from the most mundane to the most elevated pursuits, requires that all individuals participate to some degree in the "politics of representation."

Where military, administrative, or economic power is used on a large scale, such as war, genocide, or political repression, representational practices akin to those employed in Orwell's "ministry of truth" (Orwell 1966) are always at work. As a general rule, the more strident the abuse of power the more effectively it must be justified or concealed by perpetrators and their supporters. In colonial discourse, for example, European atrocities against aboriginal peoples were justified on the basis of the presumed natural deficiencies of the aboriginals and the God given superiorities of Europeans. The atrocities were concealed to the maximum extent possible in accounts of civilization and progress that valorised the pioneer-missionary and omitted mention of genocide, ethnocide, and administrative abuses by successive governments and church hierarchies (Bhabha 1990; Churchill 1993; Churchill 1994, 1996; Said 1979, 1993; Wade 1995; White 1986). Perhaps the defining characteristic of colonial discourse, and the point at which its influence in the human service professions is most apparent, is the elaborate network of discursive practices used to misrepresent "others" as deficient and therefore as in need of assistance from proficient authorities (Todd and Wade 1994; Wade 1997).

Misrepresentation is commonplace in diverse forms of personalized violence such as sexualized assault[1] and abuse, wife-assault, physical assault, verbal abuse, and workplace harassment (Bavelas and Coates 2001; Berns 2001; Coates 1997, 2003, 2004; Coates et al. 1994, 2004; Coates and Wade 2004; Henley et al. 1995; Lamb 1991; Lamb and Keon 1995; Penelope 1990; Ridley and Coates

2003; West 2003; West and Coates 2004). Both perpetrators and victims tend to misrepresent themselves at least some of the time, though for very different reasons (Scott 1990). Perpetrators use language strategically in combination with physical or authority-based power to manipulate public appearances, promote their accounts in public discursive space, entrap victims, conceal violence, and avoid responsibility. These strategies typically are used to compromise victim safety (Coates 2000b; Wade 2000). Thus, extreme violence can continue undetected for many years while the perpetrator builds a reputation as a model citizen. Where this occurs professionals, family members, and friends who want only to help, unknowingly base their interventions and advice on incomplete and inaccurate information. Faced with these circumstances, victims use language tactically to escape or reduce violence, conceal all or part of their ongoing resistance, retain maximum control of their circumstances, and avoid condemnation and social pressure from third parties. In short, victims use misrepresentation to resist violence and increase their safety.

For the above reasons (i.e., access to public discursive space, the exercise of power, the link between policy and practice, the widespread use of misrepresentation, and the differential use of misrepresentation by professionals, perpetrators and victims), the question of how victims and perpetrators are represented by third parties is of crucial importance. The accounts put forth by professionals, academics, and journalists cannot be taken as objective or impartial reflections of events: Rather, they must be treated as representations that vary in accuracy. Such fundamental constructs as the nature of violent acts (e.g., unilateral vs. mutual; violent vs. sexual; deliberate vs. unintentional), the character of the offender (e.g., bad vs. good; dangerous vs. harmless), and the character of the victim (passive vs. active; compliant vs. resistant; self-destructive vs. self-assertive) are constructed within accounts (Coates 1997; Coates and Wade 2004; Ridley and Coates 2003; Todd and Wade 2003; West 2003; West and Coates 2004). Speakers and writers use the constructive power of language strategically to promote particular versions of persons and events over other versions in order to influence key decisions, such as the legal sentencing of the perpetrator.

In this paper, we present a fundamentally new analytic framework for understanding personalized violence (The Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance). We state the six tenets of our analytic framework; discuss the first three in detail; and then apply the framework to five passages about personalized violence to demonstrate how language is used to (a) conceal violence, (b) mitigate perpetrators' responsibility, (c) conceal victims' resistance, and (d) blame or pathologize victims. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of our framework for critical analysis, research, and social action.

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[1] The term sexualized assault is used here instead of the legal term sexual assault because the later term implies that these assaults are sexual acts. The authors do not accept this assumption.

In this article, we use the terms victim and perpetrator to refer to individuals' actions in specific interactions, not as identity terms or as totalizing descriptions. That is, the extent to which an individual can be described as a victim or perpetrator depends entirely on the nature of their conduct in specific instances. An individual who is a victim of violence in one instance can be a perpetrator of violence in another. While we reject the use of the terms victim and perpetrator as totalizing, identity terms, we believe it is imperative to maintain this distinction. The word victim refers to a person who has been wrongly harmed. Perpetrators often try to conceal or avoid responsibility for their actions by obscuring the distinction between victim and perpetrator, for instance, by portraying their unilateral, violent actions as mutual.

The Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance

Interaction

1. *Violence is social and unilateral*: Violent behaviour is both social, in that it occurs in specific interactions comprised of at least two people, and unilateral, in that it entails actions by one individual against the will and well-being of another.
2. *Violence is deliberate*: The perpetrators of violence anticipate resistance from their victims and take specific steps to suppress and conceal it. Virtually all forms of violence and systems of oppression entail strategies designed specifically for the suppression of overt and covert resistance.
3. *Resistance is ubiquitous*: Whenever individuals are subjected to violence, they resist. Along side each history of violence, there runs a parallel history of resistance. Victims of violence face the threat of further violence, from mild censure to extreme brutality, for any act of open defiance. Consequently, open defiance is the least common form of resistance (Scott 1990).

Social Discourse

4. *Misrepresentation*: Misrepresentation is an ever-present feature of asymmetrical power relations (Scott 1990) and personalized violence. In cases of violence, public appearances are often highly misleading and the risk of inadvertent collusion with the offender is high.
5. *Fitting words to deeds*: There are no impartial accounts. All accounts of violence influence the perception and treatment of victims and offenders. Where there is violence, the question of which words are fitted to which deeds is crucial (Danet 1980, p. 189).

6. *Four discursive operations*: Language can be used to conceal violence, obscure and mitigate offenders' responsibility,[2] conceal victims' resistance, and blame and pathologize victims. Alternatively, language can be used to expose violence, clarify offenders' responsibility, elucidate and honor victims' resistance, and contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims.

Violence is Both Social and Unilateral

Violence is social in that it occurs within an interpersonal interaction that is comprised of at least two people (the perpetrator and the victim). Like other forms of social conduct (Bavelas et al. 2002; Brenneis and Lein 1977; Coates and Johnson 2001; Goodwin 1981; Kendon 1985; Kraut and Johnston 1979; Linell 1982, 1988; Rosenthal 1982), violent behavior is most accurately understood when it is examined in context, that is, when we consider both the offender's actions and the victim's immediate responses to those actions. It then becomes apparent that perpetrators anticipate certain responses by victims and modify their actions as those or other responses do or do not occur (Wade 2000). For example, a rapist who anticipates that the victim will cry out for help pre-emptively covers her mouth or isolates her so that she cannot be heard.

Also, when we examine the *details* of perpetrators' actions in *context* it becomes apparent that victims invariably find ways to oppose or resist the violence. For example, Wade (1997) reported the case of a child who regularly took 2 h to walk two blocks home from school to avoid being alone with his father, who would assault him before his mother returned home from work. This response was initially treated as a symptom of a psychological disorder (i.e., ADHD), but became intelligible as a form of resistance when the circumstances faced by the child were taken into consideration. The disparity between events as they actually occur and accounts of those events is exposed only when individuals' actions and the immediate circumstances are examined in detail.

Contextual analysis also shows that while violent behaviour is inherently social, it is unilateral rather than mutual in that it entails actions by one individual against the will and well-being of another (Coates 2000b; 2001, 2002a, b, 2004; Coates and Wade 2004; West and Coates

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[2] Our use of the term responsibility has at least three logically connected meanings: When an individual commits or "causes" a violent act, he is responsible. If he is responsible, it follows that he should be held up as responsible, through careful presentation of clear accounts and social sanctions that fit the nature of the crime. Furthermore, it follows that he should take responsibility, for example, by acknowledging that his actions were his own and not the result of provocation by the victim. Indeed, this is a priority in many treatment and other rehabilitation programs.

2004). However, in previous analyses of legal judgments and media articles, we found sexualized violence and spousal assaults were frequently represented as mutual even though Canadian law defines sexual assault as inherently violent (Bavelas and Coates 2001; Coates 2004; Coates et al. 1994; Coates and Wade 2004; West and Coates 2004). For example, in descriptions of sexualized assault, an offender forcing his tongue into the victim's mouth was reformulated as "they [had] French kissed," rape was reformulated as "intercourse" or "unwanted sex," and violating physical contact was reformulated as "fondling." In spousal assault, verbal abuse was reformulated as "a disagreement," rape was reformulated as a "turbulent relationship," and the physical assault of and self defence by the victim were reformulated as "exchanging blows." None of these accounts reflect the unilateral nature of violent acts or the victim's experience of those acts (Bavelas and Coates 2001; Coates 2002b, 2004; Coates and Johnson 2001; Coates and Wade 2004; West and Coates 2004). Language that mutualizes violent behaviour implies that the victim is at least partly to blame and inevitably conceals the fact that violent behaviour is unilateral and solely the responsibility of the offender.

Violence is Deliberate

The deliberateness of violent acts is demonstrated by the fact that perpetrators anticipate resistance from victims and take specific steps to suppress and conceal it (Coates and Wade 2004; Kelly 1988; Scott 1990; Wade 1997). Totalitarian states and abusive workplaces are defined in part by elaborate systems of inducement and repression designed to maintain secrecy and eliminate dissent. Bullies consistently attack those individuals whom they can expect to overpower (e.g., physically smaller or socially marginalized). Robbers and thieves predict that the "mark" will resist and therefore must be overpowered by force or threat. For this reason, bank robbers bring weapons to threaten tellers, purse snatchers target smaller and less mobile victims, and home-invasion style robbers tend to avoid biker hang-outs.

The perpetrators of diverse forms of personalized violence (e.g., sexualized violence, wife-assault, physical assault, and workplace harassment) employ a number of strategies before (e.g., isolation of the victim, ingratiating behaviour, lies), during (e.g., physical violence, threats, interrogation, humiliation), and after assaults (e.g., concealing or denying the violence, minimizing the victim's injuries, blaming the victim, refusing to accept responsibility) to suppress or overpower the victim's resistance. These strategies cannot be explained reasonably by the notion that perpetrators lack control of their behaviour or awareness of its consequences. The very existence of these strategies,

and the precise manner in which they are enacted, shows that violent behaviour is with rare exceptions best conceptualized as deliberate.

Resistance is Ubiquitous

Contextual analysis also reveals that victims invariably resist violence and other forms of abuse (Burstow and Weitz 1988; Coates et al. 2003; Haig-Brown 1988). That is, alongside each history of violence there runs a parallel history of prudent, determined, and often creative resistance (Wade 1997). The manner in which victims resist depends on the unique combination of dangers and opportunities present in their particular circumstances. Victims typically take into account that perpetrators will become even more violent for any act of defiance. Consequently, open defiance by victims is the least common form of resistance (Burstow and Weitz 1988; Kelly 1988; Scott 1990). In extreme circumstances the only possibility for resistance may be in the privacy afforded by the mind.

Too frequently (e.g., Coates 2004), victims' resistance is recognized or treated as significant only when it is successful in stopping or preventing the perpetrators' violence. We maintain that this is an entirely inappropriate criterion. Victims resist in a myriad of ways that are not successful in stopping the violence but nevertheless are profoundly important as expressions of dignity and self-respect.

Analysis of the Four-discursive-operations

Our focus in this paper is to illustrate how the four-discursive-operations are used by people to produce inaccurate accounts. We will analyze the use of the four-discursive-operations as they are locally accomplished in five diverse accounts from a perpetrator (Davis and Troupe 1990), a psychiatrist, a judge, a government minister (Stewart 1998), and a psycho-therapist (Herman 1984).

Account 1: A Perpetrator's Account

The following is noted jazz musician, Miles Davis' account of the first time he assaulted his wife, Frances (Davis and Troupe 1990).

> I loved Frances so much that for the first time in my life I found myself jealous. I remember I hit her once when she came home and told me some shit about Quincy Jones being handsome. Before I realized what had happened, I had knocked her down... I told her not to ever mention Quincy Jones' name to me again, and she never did... Every time I hit her, I felt bad because a lot of it really wasn't her fault but had to do with me being temperamental and jealous. I mean, I never

thought I was jealous until I was with Frances. Before, I didn't care what a woman did; it didn't matter to me because I was so into my music. Now it did and it was something that was new for me, hard for me to understand (p. 228).

In this passage, Davis *mitigates his responsibility* by attributing his violent behaviour to overwhelming emotions that were "new" for him and "hard... to understand." He presents his violence as "jealousy" and "temperamental" behavior that arose from and reflected his love ("I loved Frances so much that..."). Davis denies any deliberation or intent to commit violence by stating that he "found" himself jealous thereby omitting from the account his decisions to respond to Frances' comments by being "jealous" and attacking her. He also obfuscates any intent to harm Frances when he states that he "knocked her down" before he was aware of his actions ("before [he] realized what had happened").

Davis' account also *conceals* the extent of his *violence* against Frances. The word "hit" and the phrase "knocked her down" lack sufficient detail to accurately convey the degree of force exerted in his attack. How did he hit her and knock her down? The phrase "what had happened," an agentless and existential construction, obscures exactly what did happen and who did what to whom. The phrase "every time I hit her, I felt bad" emphasizes Davis' powerful emotions, in this case the arguably appropriate emotion of remorse, but displaces consideration of Frances' physical and emotional well-being and safety. An alternative description, such as "every time I hit her, she felt fear and terrible pain," would more adequately convey the extent and harmfulness of his violent actions.

Davis also *blames* and implicitly *pathologizes* Frances. The phrase "a lot of it really wasn't her fault" suggests that some of Davis' violence was Francis' fault. Presumably, Davis would have readers believe that Frances provoked him when she "told [him] some shit about Quincy Jones being handsome." The phrase "I never thought I was jealous until I was with Frances" suggests that Frances herself was the unique element, the catalyst that caused his violence.

Finally, Davis *conceals* Frances' *resistance*. A woman in Frances' position might resist in part by expressing the fear and emotional pain she feels. But, as mentioned, Davis displaces any consideration of Frances' feelings and responses by describing his own. In fact, he does not mention how Frances responded to his violent behaviour except to suggest that she obeyed his command by "never" mentioning Quincy Jones' name again. However, far from obedience, not mentioning Quincy Jones' name might well have been one way in which Frances denied Davis a pretext for further violence. Moreover, for Frances, the act of

mentioning Quincy Jones' name in the first place, in the face of Davis' "jealous" and "temperamental" behaviour, might itself represent a form of resistance.

In short, Davis would have us believe that he hit Frances because he was overwhelmed and confused by the powerful love triggered by this unique woman who both provoked him to violence and returned his love by obeying his commands. This version of events simultaneously mitigates Davis' responsibility (he is responsible for the emotion of love, not deliberate violence), blames the victim (she provokes him and causes Davis' experience of overwhelming love), conceals the violence (he commits acts of love, not violence) and conceals any resistance by Frances (she does not need to defend herself against actions of love). Hence the four-discursive-operations work to construct an account in which the nature of the act, the actions of the perpetrator, the actions of the victim, and the perpetrator's actions are misrepresented.

Account 2: A Psychiatrist's Account

An acknowledged expert in the field, Dr. John Bradford, wrote the following passage about crimes of sexualized violence against children.

> The causes [of paedophilia] are *vague*, but biological abnormalities, generally ascribed to genetics or a brain dysfunction, *may play a role*. What remains clear is that *paedophilia is not a deliberate choice* made by an individual: it is the *product of a disordered but inescapable sex drive that targets children*. Unlike other psychiatric disorders, paedophiles are typically rational and competent, able to function productively on a day-to-day basis in everything but their compulsive urge to engage sexually with pre-pubescent children (The Globe and Mail, Monday, November 20, 2000, p. A 19; emphasis added).

The most striking feature of this passage is the manner in which Bradford *mitigates* the *responsibility* of adults who assault children in sexualized ways. The highly qualified tone of the first sentence, in which it is suggested that the causes of paedophilia are "vague" and that biological factors "may play a role," stands in contrast to the definitive tone of the second sentence, in which paedophilia is characterized emphatically as unintentional (i.e., "not a deliberate choice"). But if the causes are indeed "vague," how can we be at all sure that it is not deliberate? In the same sentence, responsibility is shifted from the offender to "a disordered but inescapable sex drive." Bradford externalizes and personifies (Coates and Wade 1997; White 1995; White and Epston 1989) the "inescapable sex drive" and gives it the capacity for volition independent of its possessor: It is the "sex drive"—not the offender—that

"targets" children. The concept of "paedophilia" constructs deliberate violence against children as an illness, specifically, a "psychiatric disorder" due possibly to "biological abnormalities" stemming from a "genetic" cause or from a "brain dysfunction." Obviously, the perpetrator cannot be held responsible for having an illness or for the symptom (i.e., behaviour) it causes. Indeed, because the offender is in all other respects "rational," "competent" and "productive," Bradford suggests that a "paedophile" is not the sort of person who would assault children if he had a choice.

Bradford *conceals* the real nature of the *violence* in at least two ways. First, the idea that the violence stems from a "compulsive urge" obscures the strategic and predatory nature of the behaviour entailed in the entrapment and violation of children (e.g., stalking, isolation, ingratiating behaviors, coercion, threats). Second, Bradford conflates sex with violence. The phrase "engage sexually *with... children*" clearly implies mutuality and consent. In conflating sex and violence, Bradford also *conceals* victims' *resistance*. If it were true that perpetrators wanted to "engage sexually *with*" children, they would stop as soon as they encountered resistance. Because the perpetrators did not stop, it is assumed that they encountered no resistance from the children. Bradford supports this view by omitting any mention of perpetrators' efforts to overwhelm and suppress that resistance.

Finally, Bradford *blames* and *pathologizes* victims by representing them in two contradictory ways: They are both passive objects (i.e., "targets") who are unable or unwilling to resist, and simultaneously compliant or willing partners in "disordered" *sex with adults*. Thus, Bradford effectively misrepresents severe violence against children through a variety of devices that locally accomplish the four-discursive-operations.

Account 3: A Judge's Account

Previously, we examined how judges in sexual assault trials used psychological attributions to construct the nature and extent of perpetrators' responsibility (Coates 1997; Coates and Wade 1994, 2004). In one case, the perpetrator had repeatedly assaulted his step-son over a two-and-one-half year period and attacked him twice more between being charged and sentenced. The judge referred to the repeated attacks as an "isolated incident."

The term "isolated incident" *conceals* the *violence* in a number of ways. The nominalization "incident," rather than "action," obscures the fact that one person took action against another. There are many different incidents in the world, only a few of which entail deliberate action. The singular form "incident," rather than the plural "incidents," misrepresents the repeated attacks as one. By not using an equally short but far more accurate summary phrase, such as

"these violent acts" or "these assaults," the judge concealed the violence inflicted upon the boy for over 2 years. Later in the judgment, the judge opined that there was "no suggestion of force or brutality" against the young boy.

The same phrase ("an isolated incident") allowed the judge to *mitigate* the perpetrator's *responsibility*. If the perpetrator committed "an isolated incident" rather than repeated and deliberate acts of violence, there is very little for which he can be held responsible. The term "isolated" suggests that the perpetrator's actions were atypical and therefore not reflections of his "real" character. The separation of the offender from deliberate violence was further accomplished by the use of the term "incident" which does not convey deliberateness. In keeping with these discursive reformulations, the judge opined that "there is no suggestion, or very little suggestion, that he is a threat or will continue to be a threat to others." The plausibility of this conclusion hinges on the judge's previous representations of the repeated assaults as a non-violent, a non-deliberate, and an atypical incident. The judge concluded: "I propose on imposing as short of sentences as I think I can." Although the sentence was not consistent with the facts of the case, it appeared reasonable because it was consistent with the judge's account of the assaults.

The judge did not directly *conceal* the boy's *resistance* or blame him for the assaults. However, the judge's account implicitly defines a range of appropriate responses by the boy and provides a basis for misinterpreting his actual responses. If the assaults were in fact "isolated," if the boy was subjected to "no...force or brutality," if the perpetrator was a man of good character, and if "there [was] no suggestion, or very little suggestion, that [the perpetrator was] a threat," the boy's family and teachers might well expect him to "get over" the "incident," "deal with his anger," and cooperate with the perpetrator, who is, after all, his step-father. If the boy refuses, for example, by showing anger and defiance at home and school, he might well be defined as the person with the problem and subjected to various judgments and social controls. To the extent that this occurs, the boy's resistance to the repeated assaults (and the downplaying of those assaults and the pressure to "get over it") is concealed and recast as a psychological problem. By concealing the violence and mitigating the responsibility of the perpetrator, the judge concealed the information necessary to adequately understand the boy's responses and put in place an official version of events that could be used to *blame* and *pathologize* the boy and conceal his resistance. In this manner, the boy became more, rather than less vulnerable to further violence or abuse.

Account 4: A Politician's Statement

On June 7, 1998, the Honorable Jane Stewart, then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for the

Canadian government, held a news conference at which she read a prepared statement titled "Statement of Reconciliation: Learning From the Past." The purpose of the statement, according to Stewart, was to "deal with the legacies of the past" in order to "move forward in a process of renewal." The following passages are taken verbatim from the text of the statement.

> Sadly, our history with respect to the treatment of Aboriginal people is not something in which we can take pride. Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of Aboriginal culture and values. As a country, we are burdened by past actions... One aspect of our relationship with Aboriginal people over this period that requires particular attention is the Residential School system. This system separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their languages and from learning about their heritage and culture. In the worst cases, it left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in Aboriginal communities to this day. Tragically, some children were the victims of physical and sexual abuse.

Stewart *conceals* the extent and nature of state and church sponsored *violence* against Aboriginal peoples, particularly the children, in several ways. The word "reconciliation" comes from the Latin "reconciliaire," which means, "to restore to wholeness." This word wrongly embeds the position that a pre-existing wholeness or positive relationship which existed between Europeans and Aboriginal people was shattered by the residential school system. Moreover, the term is mutualizing in that it proffers the image of two parties who share responsibility for their relationship problem and have therefore come together to make amends. In fact, European violence against Aboriginal people did not stem from a relationship problem, nor did it destroy a previously harmonious relationship. Rather, it entailed the unilateral and deliberate use of force and social power by one party against the will and well being of the other (Coates 1996a, 2000a; Coates and Wade 2004). In cases of unilateral wrongdoing the appropriate response from the offending party is one of reparation or restoration. Stewart's use of the term reconciliation retroactively defines the violence as relational and shifts a significant portion of responsibility to Aboriginal people.

Similarly, the phrase "learning from the past," which in the title is linked to the mutualizing term reconciliation, suggests that both parties made mistakes and are therefore equally responsible for learning the lessons. The phrase also implies that the oppression of Aboriginal people in Canada is limited to the past, or strictly a matter of history. This neatly denies the Canadian government's current racist policies toward Aboriginal people as manifested in the Indian Act, in the failure of the federal government to denounce the overtly racist referendum on Aboriginal land claims and self-governance held in British Columbia (a province in Canada), in the insultingly low offers of compensation to individuals who were assaulted (physical and sexualized) in residential schools, and in the often abusive legal process (known ironically as "discovery") which Aboriginal people who bring suit against the government and churches must endure.

The phrases "in the worst cases" and "some children" further conceal the violence by suggesting that only a minority of the children were assaulted. In fact, research suggests that a majority of the over one million children who attended the residential schools were subjected to physical or sexualized violence (Chrisjohn and Belleau 1991; Chrisjohn and Young 1993). Moreover, Stewart omits mention of the humiliation of the children, through such practices as racist propaganda, public ridicule, and the forced removal of children from their families—a practice that was the source of so much grief. Finally, the colloquial phrase "to this day" implies that the violence is much further in the past than is the case. The last residential schools were closed as recently as the early 1970s: Many survivors and their families still struggle against the violence they endured.

The pronouns "our" (in the first sentence) and "we" (in the first and third sentences) obscure the identities of perpetrator and victim. In the first sentence, "our" and "we" refer only to non-Aboriginals. However, in the third sentence, it is not clear to whom the "we" (in "we are burdened by past actions") refers. If it refers to non-Aboriginals, the sentence suggests that non-Aboriginal Canadians are burdened by their predecessors' "past actions." This co-opts the position of victim, not unlike Davis did when he claimed that he felt bad every time he assaulted Frances. Far from being uniformly burdened by the atrocities against Aboriginals, non-Aboriginal Canadians have benefited handsomely (e.g., by being able to purchase land and natural resources from the government). If, on the other hand, "we" refers to all Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, the sentence suggests the equally bizarre view that non-Aboriginal Canadians are as burdened by the oppression of Aboriginal people as the Aboriginal people themselves. In either case the responsibility of the perpetrator is obscured. The phrases "attitudes of racial...," "this system separated...," and "it left legacies..." are agentless constructions that further conceal the identity of the perpetrator. According to these accounts, the real perpetrators are "attitudes" and "systems," not non-Aboriginals who decided to violate and debase Aboriginal people.

Stewart's statement also *conceals* the *resistance* of Aboriginal people, including the children who were held

captive in residential schools. To appreciate how this is accomplished, it is important to remember that residential schools were designed precisely to pre-empt the individual and collective resistance that would certainly have ensued had the children been in daily contact with their families. By omitting mention of this resistance, Stewart displaces consideration of the often-brutal methods the churches and successive governments used to suppress it. As in rape trials, the apparent lack of resistance is used as a pretext to suggest that the victim consented and is therefore partly responsible. Without having to mention it, Stewart exploits the common social misconception that serious violence would have incited open resistance. In this account, the omission of any mention of resistance suggests that the violence could not have been widespread or serious (Coates and Wade 2004).

The phrase "prevented them from speaking their languages and from learning about their heritage and culture" acknowledges some of the objectives of the oppression and the losses it wrought. However, it is equally important to recognize that these strategies were far from completely "successful." Many children retained connections to their families, communities, and traditional ways by running away, singing traditional songs, secretly speaking or remembering conversations in their language, playing traditional games, hiding mementos from home, remembering traditional teachings, caring for one another, telling stories, dreaming of home, gathering around newcomers to smell the smoke on their clothes, grieving their separation, and carrying on imaginary conversations with family members, to name but a few examples (Churchill 1993; Graveline 1998; Haig-Brown 1988).

Stewart *blames Aboriginal people* by implying that the oppression reflected a relationship problem for which the parties must share responsibility. Considered as a strategic political document and public performance, the statement enables the government to claim the moral high ground and, through this, to gain leverage in the high stakes negotiations over self-governance and control of land and natural resources. Aboriginal people are supposed to accept this "apology," forgive past abuses, reconcile, and move forward. Those who refuse are more easily branded as militants or radicals and excluded from the political process. After all, who but an unreasonable or unhealthy person could refuse an offer of reconciliation?

Account 5: A Therapist's Statement

The following passage by Herman (*Trauma and Recovery*, 1997) is about women who endured sexualized or other forms of violence in childhood.

> Almost inevitably, the survivor has great difficulty protecting herself in the context of intimate relationships. Her desperate longing for nurturance and care

makes it difficult to establish safe and appropriate boundaries with others. Her tendency to denigrate herself and to idealize those to whom she becomes attracted further clouds her judgment. Her empathic attunement to the wishes of others and her automatic, often unconscious habits of obedience also make her vulnerable to anyone in a position of power or authority. Her dissociative defensive style makes it difficult for her to form conscious and accurate assessments of danger. And her wish to relive the dangerous situation and make it come out right may lead her into re-enactments of the abuse (p.111).

Herman *conceals violence* by limiting the mention of violence and minimizing its severity. Only once, in line 10, does Herman directly refer to sexualized violence in this passage. The term "abuse" conveys the unilateral nature of the sexualized violence (see Coates and Wade 2004) but does not convey that the acts were not both unilateral and *violent* (West and Coates 2004). The term "abuse" means misuse, but misuse does not necessarily entail violence. One person can misuse another in a variety of ways, for example, by demanding that they work long hours. Only a few forms of abuse involve the deliberate administration of force and humiliation by one person against another. Herman's choice of the word "abuse" serves to minimize the severity of violence suffered by the women whose behaviour she purports to be explaining and trying to help. All other references to violence are so oblique that readers are left to infer its presence.

Herman *blames* and *pathologizes* female victims of violence by interpreting their behaviour out of context and proffering a series of psychological inferences that divert attention from the violence to the mind of the victim. The victim is constituted as having "difficulty protecting herself" (line 4), having "clouded judgment" (line 5), habitually and unconsciously obeying authority figures (line 6) and having a "dissociative defensive style" (line 7). These personal deficiencies are used to explain why the survivor apparently lacks "safe and appropriate boundaries" (line 3), is "vulnerable to anyone in a position of authority" (line 6–7), and cannot accurately assess danger (line 8). Based upon unwarranted psychological inferences, Herman displaces a contextualized analysis of victim's responses to perpetrators' acts of violence with a decontextualized account that blames and pathologizes victims.

Herman conceals resistance by placing victims in a single category and using a singular pronoun: "the survivor." She uses this term to create and underscore shared deficiencies among victims and to put forth her account as one that applies to all of these victims. However, because the social circumstances and precise details of violence varies considerably among victims, it is reasonable

to expect that women's behaviours before, during, and after the assaults also vary. Herman's use of the singular pronoun "the survivor" conceals this variability and with it victims' unique and situationally specific responses and resistance. Far from resisting, Herman proposes that women who have been subjected to violence "wish to relive the dangerous situation" (line 12) and "[re-enact] ...the abuse" (line 15). Here, she casts the "survivors" as responsible for the feat of single-handedly re-enacting the violence that was perpetrated against them even though violent actions require at least two people (the perpetrator and the victim). By constructing victims as members of a homogenous category who seek out violence, Herman negates the possibility of any resistance.

Herman's account completely *obfuscates* the perpetrator's *responsibility*. She refers to actual or prospective perpetrators as "others," "those to whom she becomes attracted," and people in positions of "power or authority." While we are given these neutral and even positive formulations of perpetrators of violence, we are not given any information about the precise strategies used by perpetrators to entrap women and suppress their resistance. Consequently, perpetrators are never connected to a description that would indicate the deliberateness and the full extent of the violence perpetrated against these women. Notably, the question Herman has framed and is answering in her account is not how perpetrators over-power women (Coates 2000a, 2002a; Coates 2003), but why women have "great difficulty protecting" themselves. Through this ill-conceived question, perpetrators are transformed into victims of "the survivors'" psychological deficiencies and dysfunctional behaviour: survivors' unfairly "idealize," excessively obey, and cannot "establish safe and appropriate boundaries" with perpetrators because they are deficient and even pathological. These deficiencies compel women to recruit perpetrators to violate them so that they can "relive" and re-enact the "abuse." In this way, Herman defines perpetrators and their actions as irrelevant and even normal. Simultaneously, she constructs the women and their actions as deviant and therefore requiring explanation (see also Coates and Johnson 2001; Tavris 1992).

Discussion

The passages we examined here do not comprise a random or representative sample of the massive discourse on personalized violence. We chose them because they represent diverse points of view and very different forms of violence, and yet locally accomplish the four-discursive-operations. They conceal violence by misrepresenting violent acts as mutual rather than unilateral, thereby misrepresenting the nature of social interactions in which

personalized violence is perpetrated. At times, for example in the passage by Herman, the nature of the interaction was misrepresented to such an extreme that the victim became the main actor in perpetrating the violence against herself. Violence was also concealed through the use of minimizing terms (e.g., "abuse"), casting the violence as limited to the past (e.g., "learning from the past"), and using causal attributions that misrepresented the cause or the agent of the assault (e.g., as "jealousy," "attitudes," "sexual urges"). All of the passages also proffered decontextualized accounts of perpetrators' and victims' actions. Once abstracted from the setting in which they occurred, both perpetrators' and victims' actions were misrepresented.

The passages also functioned to mitigate perpetrator's responsibility by representing violence as non-deliberate: Davis portrayed his own repeated assaults against his wife as the effects of jealousy and love; Stewart portrayed extreme violence by the Canadian government and churches against Aboriginal people, particularly children, as a relationship problem; a judge referred to repeated sexualized assaults against a child as "an isolated incident" that *merely* occurred; Bradford explicitly cast predatory sexualized assaults on children as non-intentional; and Herman represented victims as individuals who seek out and in fact perpetrate violence against themselves. Overall, violent acts were represented as effects of social, biological, or psychological forces that overwhelmed perpetrators and compelled them to perform violent acts (Coates and Wade 2004; Todd and Wade 2003). None of the passages acknowledged that the perpetrators anticipated and took deliberate steps to suppress victims' resistance.

The passages completely conceal victims' resistance and portray victims instead as passive or even willing participants in the violence. Such constructions inevitably call into question the credibility of the victim and the veracity of her account. After all, if the perpetrator's actions were as violent as the victim stated, would she really have failed to resist? Conversely, by her "failure" to resist, did she not implicitly consent or even encourage the perpetrator (cf. Herman 1997; Walker 1979)? Or does her implicit consent not suggest that she enjoyed or unconsciously desired the acts in question? Consistent with the assumptions underlying these questions, victims were portrayed as social agents only when their actions or apparent inactions could also be construed as negative or self-injurious. Such constructions of the passive or submissive victim exposes victims to that particularly ugly form of social contempt that is reserved for individuals who, when faced with adversity, appear to knuckle under and do nothing on their own behalf.

These passages also show how the four-discursive-operations are functionally linked. For example, an account that conceals a victim's resistance also conceals the nature and full extent of the violence and mitigates the perpe-

trator's responsibility. If the victim's resistance is concealed, the crucial question of how the perpetrator tried to suppress that resistance cannot be exposed and examined. Consequently, the more obviously deliberate aspects of the violence (e.g., the precise strategies the perpetrator used to isolate and threaten the victim before, during, and after specific assaults) remain hidden from view. It then appears that the perpetrator is responsible for an "isolated incident" during which he temporarily lost control and acted against the grain of his otherwise good character (Coates 1996 a, b; Coates and Wade 2004; Morgan and O'Neill 2001; O'Neill and Morgan 2001). A series of deliberate acts that comprise an assault are recast as a single, non-deliberate act caused by externalized forces (Coates 1997). Thus, the accounts of violence within these passages are profoundly emaciated and inaccurate in that they conceal violence, blame and pathologize victims, conceal resistance, and excuse perpetrators.

Because the discursive practices we examined here are so widespread it would be wrong to suggest a conspiracy, single out one professional group as the source of the problem, or treat the examples as simple reflections of the beliefs of a few isolated individuals. Our view is that the discursive practices in question are traditional in the sense that they are so fully integrated into everyday talk that they appear unproblematic until examined in detail and compared to the actions they are presumed to represent. Nevertheless, neither can we accept the view that the respective authors are beyond bias, above self-interest, or without responsibility: To take a position as a professional or politician in this area of profound social concern is to accept responsibility for careful and considered social and discursive action, including the consequences of one's actions.

Moreover, our research reveals that the linguistic devices that accomplish the four-discursive-operations are used selectively in a manner that reverses the positions of victim and offender. Notably, we have not found that misrepresentations favour victims some of the time and perpetrators some of the time, in anything like a roughly balanced or random fashion. On the contrary, the misrepresentations we identified invariably benefit perpetrators and disadvantage victims. In earlier studies of sexualized violence, we found that in describing violent acts, judges used passive and agentless grammatical constructions, causal attributions, and mutualizing terminology in a manner that obscured perpetrators' agency and responsibility. However, in constructing mitigating factors, the same judges used active and agentive grammatical constructions that highlighted perpetrators' responsibility for ostensibly positive acts such as having a job, possessing a "good character," and being of no on-going danger. Overall, offenders were represented as non-responsible for negative acts and highly responsible for positive acts (Coates and Wade 2004). The pattern of representation is reversed for victims who are formulated as

agentive and responsible only in relation to actions (or inactions) that signify passivity or some form of personal deficiency (Ridley and Coates 2003). The consistency of this pattern cannot be accounted for without considering the role of gender, class, race, and other power relations.

Neologisms such as "friendly fire" and "collateral damage" are sometimes used to conceal the nature and extent of violent acts. Typically, however, the linguistic devices used to accomplish the four-discursive-operations are highly conventional and used daily without apparent problems. That is, the most harmful and abhorrent acts of violence are represented in the most ordinary and benign terms. The conventionality of these terms endows violent acts with an air of acceptability and obscures their real nature from the victim's point of view. For instance, to represent sexualized violence as "sexual assault," "kissing," "fondling," or "having intercourse" places these acts within the realm of sexuality. Given the ubiquity of these and related terms, it is not surprising that judges and other professionals misrepresent violent acts. Without deliberate changes, they and others will continue to treat sexualized assaults not as violent acts that are categorically distinct from sexual acts, but as sexual acts gone wrong (Coates 1996b, 1997; Coates et al. 2004; West and Coates 2004).

While the question of which words are fitted to which deeds (Danet 1980) is vitally important, violence cannot be reduced to a problem of discourse, as any child who has witnessed or endured violence can attest. The notion that what counts as violence is simply a matter of social construction, for example, that the rape of a child can be referred to with equal validity as "sexual intercourse" or "forced vaginal penetration" or that the distinction between these terms are "merely semantic" belies an extreme intellectual distance that amounts to a form of collusion with offenders. Equally, the notion that crimes of violence can be prevented or reduced simply by changes in language use, without addressing the structural inequalities that afford one group privileged access to social power, discursive space and other social benefits, is to say the least, naïve. We take a critical realist position: violent acts and acts of resistance—not simply acts that are construed as violent or reframed as resistance—do take place. Resistance is no less real than violence. This position is not without problems. There are many grey areas that are not easily or finally resolved. However, our experience is that the grey areas often take on one shade or another when we examine the details of actual social interactions.

Further, in highlighting the power of language we want to avoid falling into the kind of discourse determinism that underlies some post-structural, social constructionist, and post-modern thought (e.g., Foucault 1972, 1980). Discourse determinism is the view that discourse constructs reality, marks the limits of thought (Bourdieu 1977), forms and

incarcerates the subject (e.g., Foucault 1972, 1980), and ultimately drives individual conduct (Eagleton 1991). No less than the many forms of biological, psychological, and social determinism, discourse determinism reduces individual conduct and subjective experience to the status of effects (Ridley and Coates 2003; Wade 1997, 2000). From this perspective there is little difference between psychoanalysis, biological psychiatry, socio-biology, and social constructivism. Debates about the real causes or determinants of individual conduct and experience are rather like arguments between competing factions of the same political party; their similarities far outweigh their differences. The debate itself conceals the deterministic assumptions that are quietly conserved.

We contend that the four-discursive-operations we have identified here impede effective interventions through education, victim advocacy, reportage, law enforcement, criminal justice, child protection, and counselling with perpetrators and victims. More research is needed to assess the extent to which the four-discursive-operations appear in professional, academic and public discourse and to assess the influence of these operations where they do appear. This research will further test the merits of the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance as a framework for critical analysis, research, and social action. Moreover, we have identified only four types of discursive operations: There are certainly others.

For these reasons we contend that any accounts of perpetrators and violent acts must take into account the six tenets of the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance as basic premises. Accordingly, in our work as professors, community activists, administrators, researchers, and therapists we attempt to (a) *expose violence* by using language that conveys its unilateral nature and, wherever possible, by including accounts of victims' responses, (b) *clarify offenders' responsibility* by avoiding language that portrays offenders as out-of-control and by highlighting the deliberate nature of violent acts, particularly offenders' strategic efforts to suppress victims' resistance, (c) *elucidate* and *honour victims' responses* and *resistance* by enquiring about victims' responses to specific acts of violence and oppression, and elucidating the situational logic by which some responses become intelligible as forms of resistance, and (d) *contest* the *blaming* and *pathologizing* of *victims* by obtaining accounts of victims' prudent, determined, and creative resistance. While language is a tool of domination, it is no less a tool of resistance.

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