

Chapter 3

Discursive Psychology and Domestic Violence



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This chapter explores ways in which discursive psychology sheds light on how language justifies, conceals, and works to produce the dominance of men in intimate relationships. We demonstrate two ways language can be deployed to achieve these effects. First, the close examination of discourses about violence can reveal much about the way violence against women is justified, minimized and ignored. Second, attention to rhetorical devices deployed in these discourses, such as metaphor, ambiguity, and marking strategies, can help in understanding how they are anchored and reinforced in everyday conversations. These forms of discursive enquiry, and other possibilities, open up ways of better understanding the dynamics of men's violence against women and opportunities for intervention to produce more equitable practices.

Our work in this area has been concerned with informing population-based interventions that would assist in the primary prevention of domestic violence thereby producing a more gender conscious and socially just society. Within this model, violence prevention is understood to occur at three levels: primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary prevention (Wolfe & Jaffe, 1999). Primary prevention involves developing the socio-cultural environment that would stop violence before it starts. For example, promoting gender equity is known to be one way to effectively prevent men's domestic violence towards women (World Health Organization, 2004) and requires the development of critical reflection on gender practices. Secondary prevention involves working with those people at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of violence in the future, through, for example, good parenting programs or ensuring that the environment where they are raised is free of violence. Tertiary prevention involves intervening to ensure the safety and recovery of the victims of such violence and that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions and given the opportunity to change.

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The ecological model has been used to explain the prevention of domestic violence (World Health Organization, 2004) and resonates with models described in peace psychology. In the ecological model, interventions are possible at the individual level (challenging gendered beliefs), at the interpersonal level (couple and family therapy), at the social and community level (e.g., community development), and at the societal level (e.g., addressing norms). Primary prevention of domestic violence is predominantly concerned with the social and community level and societal level interventions.

This model of prevention is consistent with the model of peace psychology described by Christie, Tint, Wagner, and Winter (2008), particularly their description of positive peace, in which the socio-cultural context is understood to be pivotal to the promotion of peace. In their three-stage model, negative peace is described as addressing existing conflicts through nonviolent peace management prior to the eruption of any incident, de-escalating violence once it occurs, and then peace building after the violence. Positive peace is described as follows:

We use the term positive peace to refer to transformations within and across institutions that rectify structural inequities. Positive peace is promoted when political structures become more inclusive and give voice to those who have been marginalized in matters that affect their well-being. Economic structures become transformed when those who have been exploited gain more equitable access to material resources that satisfy their basic needs (Galtung, 1996). Culturally violent narratives that support structural violence are transformed when, for example, “just world thinking” (M.J. Lerner, 1980) is replaced with “conscientization,” or an awakening of a critical consciousness, a shared subjective state in which the powerless begin to critically analyze and challenge the oppressive narratives of the powerful (Freire, 1970).

(Christie et al., 2008, p. 547)

Such transformations are consistent with those required in the primary prevention of violence against women and discursive psychology has an important role here.

Critical discursive psychology brings greater awareness to the language that supports men’s domestic violence against women and silences women’s talk of such violence, thereby marginalizing them. As language is pivotal to socio-cultural understandings, raising awareness of the language that supports such violence provides victims, advocates, and others with the linguistic and socio-cultural resources that assist with the mobilization of action towards socio-cultural and political change. Such research can be used to challenge and counter the commonsense language and socio-cultural norms, which work against gender equity, and assists with promoting more inclusive political structures, gender consciousness, and equity.

Critical Discursive Psychology’s Unique Contribution

The discipline of psychology is a broad church with many sub-disciplines drawing on a variety of academic traditions. At the center is a desire to better understand why we think, feel, and behave in the ways we do. Such a focus naturally foregrounds us as discrete individuals and this leads, understandably, to calling on concepts that characterize what is going on for us as individuals; concepts such as attitudes,

motivations, cognitions, and mental sets. What this risks doing, however, is confining psychological understandings to what is going on in terms of individuals, almost as though each of us are discrete particles behaving in absolute space. But individuals are never behaving in absolute space. We are at all times surrounded by our relationships to others: other objects, other people, and the discourses and social systems in which we move.

We could reduce a study of men who engage in violence against women to focusing on aspects of them as individuals and concentrate our efforts on the psychological dynamics that contribute to that behavior: the violence is explained in terms of the beliefs, cognitions, attitudes, emotions, and motivations that he carries. Such an orientation provides a limited understanding of the psychology involved. A broader focus that includes a man's understanding and experiences of gender, men and women, the role of men and women in his world and his ideals, dilemmas, and concerns might yield a greater connection of his actions with the broader and/or localized socio-cultural context and the associated collective of men. Moreover, when the focus is widened to the socio-political context, one type of behavior can be seen as interacting with other types of behavior.

By broadening the focus, discursive psychology offers a way of integrating the psychology of the individual with the intertwined dynamics of the socio-political context. For example, the key beliefs that enable violence are not only located within the individual but also located in the discursive environment in which the individual is participating. By including ways of speaking, discursive psychology offers the opportunity to examine what is happening for individuals in the context of the broader social and political milieu.

Men's domestic violence against women is understood as a reflection of the gendered power relationships between men and women, which is supported by power practices performed and endorsed in social norms and perpetuated in interpersonal conversations, local and national political discourses and structures. Gendered power practices are scripted into commonsense language and understandings that are accepted as normal. Accordingly, unpacking how language is deployed around domestic violence opens up a vantage point for exposing the gendered power practices that contribute to such violence.

We have used critical discursive psychology informed by feminist post-structuralism and Foucault's understandings of power in our qualitative research on men's domestic violence against women. When this methodology was developed in the early 1990s, we were part of the inaugural Discourse Research Unit at the Psychology Department of the University of Auckland, whose members also included Nicola Gavey, Timothy McCreanor, and Raymond Nairn. Tim McCreanor and Ray Nairn had for years been concerned with the ways media represented the aspirations of indigenous Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand, requiring their research to move beyond the standard quantitative methodologies endorsed by university psychology departments at the time into the ways language was employed to trivialize, disempower, and immobilize Māori from raising matters to do with social justice and the impact of colonization (e.g., Nairn & McCreanor, 1990, 1991). Nicola Gavey was involved in the exploration of qualitative methodologies and feminist approaches to understanding sexual coercion. Her work on feminist post-structuralism (e.g.,

Gavey, 1989, 2005) was pivotal to the methodologies we subsequently used in our research on domestic violence. The early influences she described in articulating this approach (Gavey, 2011) were also those that influenced us:

feminist poststructuralist scholarship requires (careful and wise) theoretical impurity; it requires us to work simultaneously with two theoretically contradictory understandings of language – as descriptive on one hand and constitutive on the other
(Gavey, 2011, p. 187, italics in original)

When listening to and reading women’s accounts of the violence they have experienced, we understand these to be describing their experienced reality, whereas when seeking the socio-cultural understandings that inform violent practices we turn to the language that enables those practices to be performed.

Foucault’s writings on power practices and how they work discursively have played a key role in developing the methods we have used to try to make sense of men’s violence against women (Foucault, 1977, 1982, 1988, 1991). He argued that power did not reside within individuals but rather in the relations people had with each other. Power would not exist without someone on whom to practice power. He highlighted how power practices were evident in the overarching discourses present in everyday conversations, language, media representations, official and judicial documentation, and texts of government policies as well as practices. Such discourses are often difficult to identify from within the socio-cultural context. Discourses may be understood to be the rhetoric, metaphors, maxims, and statements that coalesce around a particular meaning.

Foucault (1980) argued that certain discourses become dominant through governance practices that favor some discourses over others. These discourses are written into policy documents and institutional practices as if commonsense. People regulate their behavior depending on how they are positioned by these socio-cultural discourses leading Foucault to describe power practices associated with language as “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988). Identifying the language that supports these power mechanisms allows people to resist or disrupt and transform the discourses and socio-cultural norms that are harmful to them, promoting alternative discourses and governance practices. Our work has been concerned with identifying the socio-cultural discourses that are embedded in everyday language and employed by men and others to justify and excuse domestic violence and silence talk of it with a view to resisting and challenging these influences. Always at the center of our work are women’s lived experiences of such violence and associated coercive control.

Why Is the Prevention of Domestic Violence Important to Peace?

Violence against women by a heterosexual partner or ex-partner accounts for a disproportionate number of culpable homicides of women in many countries and impacts on their ability to be able to contribute to society. In New Zealand, for

example, approximately half of all murders have been found to be “family violence” related, with most victims being women and children, with indigenous Māori women and children over-represented (FVDRC, 2015; Martin & Pritchard, 2010). In the United Kingdom, 44% of all women killed through homicide in the year ending March 2015 were killed by a partner or ex-partner (Office for National Statistics, 2017). In the USA, 62% of female homicide victims were killed by intimate partners or ex-partners in 2013 (VPC, 2016).

Internationally, around 30% of women are expected to experience physical or sexual violence from a partner at some time in their partnered lifetime. In a World Health Organization (WHO) survey of 24,097 women in ten countries between 2000 and 2003 (Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand, and the United Republic of Tanzania), Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, and Watts (2006) found that life-time prevalence rates of such violence varied from 15 to 75%, with two countries having less than 25%, seven between 25 and 50% and six more than 50%. Lifetime prevalence in 33 OECD countries of physical and sexual violence ranged from 6% in Canada to 47% in Mexico. Lifetime prevalence in Anglo-western countries was 36% for the USA, 29% for the United Kingdom, 25% for Australia, and 33% for New Zealand. Prevalence rates vary between ethnic groups within countries possibly reflecting the marginalization of certain groups. In New Zealand, for example, Fanslow, Robinson, Crengle, and Perese (2010), using the same methodology as the WHO study, found life-time prevalence of physical and sexual violence experienced was 34% for women of European ethnicity, 58% for women of Māori ethnicity, 32% for women of Pasifika ethnicity, and 12% for women of Asian ethnicity.

A consistent finding across countries is that those women who had experienced domestic violence had partners who were more controlling than those who had not experienced such violence (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006). Stark (2007) described coercive control as the pervasive daily experience of women who lived with a violent partner, with physical violence often minor but sufficient to maintain the man’s control of the woman and limit her agency. Such violence impedes the woman’s ability to act independently through the man’s enforcement of gender-based rules, surveillance of the woman to ensure her compliance (Hand, Chung, & Peter, 2009), restriction of her movements, and isolation of the woman from her supportive family and community. Punishment of the woman for transgressions can involve limitations on the essentials of life (such as food, drink, and sleep), and various other forms of emotional, physical, or sexual violence perpetrated against her and her children.

Men’s domestic violence against women has substantial health impacts and economic costs to communities and nations. Physical and sexual violence can result in external and internal injuries to women, while the emotional violence experienced can affect women’s mental health. Physical injuries range from minor injuries such as burst ear-drums or bruises, which may prevent women from leaving the home, to permanent disabilities, brain injuries, and death (Black, 2011). Many women do not seek help fearing further violence but of those who do most had received blunt force trauma to the head, face, or neck. Injuries to the facial bones in women have been attributed to domestic violence (Zeitler, 2007) raising the question of intentional

facial disfigurement. Brain injuries and strangulation, both extremely dangerous, are often missed in medical settings (Glass et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2002). The primary mental health impact on women is through traumatic stress symptoms or disorders, suicidality, anxiety, depression, and alcohol and drug use (Briere & Jordan, 2004; Dutton et al., 2006; Ellsberg, Jansen, Heise, Watts, & Garcia-Moreno, 2008; Ludermir, Schraiber, D'Oliveira, Franca-Junior, & Jansen, 2008; Taft, Murphy, King, Dedy, & Musser, 2005). Mental health effects continue long after the violence has ended (Bergman & Brismar, 1991).

The violence can impact on women's sexual health, their pregnancy and their children. Sexual violence can result in genital injuries, chronic pelvic pain, pelvic inflammatory disease, and pain during menstruation and intercourse (Black, 2011). Reproductive control—involving control of whether the woman has contraception resulting in unintended pregnancies and whether she has or does not have an abortion—has also been documented (de Bocanegra, Rostovtseva, Khera, & Godhwani, 2010). Pregnancy outcomes such as low birth weight, preterm delivery, and premature labor have been attributed to domestic violence, as have the loss and death of the fetus, and induced abortions (Alio, Nana, & Salihu, 2009; Fanslow, Silva, Whitehead, & Robinson, 2008; Garcia-Moreno, 2009). Longitudinal studies of children, such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences studies have shown the poor outcomes for children of exposure to such traumatic events, these children being much more susceptible to social and cognitive difficulties, chronic diseases later in life and premature death.

The economic cost of such violence is not only to the women and their children but also to communities and to society. Homelessness can result when women attempt to leave their violent partners, and such homelessness can result in a downward spiral of poverty and hardship (Breckenridge, Hamer, Newton, & Valentine, 2013; Towns, 2014; Tutty, Ogden, Giurgiu, & Weaver-Dunlop, 2013). Women's employment ability, their education, and their training is affected by domestic violence, as the abuser attempts to confine them to the house and prevent contact with others thereby silencing talk of such violence (Lloyd & Taluc, 1999; Swanberg & Logan, 2005; Towns, 2014). The economic cost to nations of such violence has been put at billions of dollars annually (Snively, 1995). Some children exposed to such violence are likely to go on to harm their partners (Ehrensaft et al., 2003) and be responsible for violent crime, setting the stage for community and societal violence (World Health Organization, 2002). Interrupting such violence and constituting gender equitable and peaceful relationships as normative will assist in producing the climate that is required for peaceful societies.

In the following, we will describe two discourses that are employed to justify men's domestic violence against women and the rhetorical devices utilized to this end in men's accounts of their violence. These discourses support the continued dominance of men over women and their entitlement to privileges, enabling the subordination of women and the continued harm towards them through men's domestic violence. They reinforce male dominance through various rhetorical devices, some of which we will describe here. The discourses we discuss are "colonizing discourses" and "natural order discourses".

Colonizing Discourses

Colonizing discourses suggest that there is a correct way of acting in the world, that others need to understand this way and act accordingly and that any problems in the relationship are a product of others not understanding or acting according to the colonizer's particular worldview. The colonizer's task becomes to educate others to behave according to his right way of being.

In these colonizing discourses, the man works to re-educate the woman into his view of the world and she is successfully subjugated when she comes to believe his constitution of the world or is silenced from questioning it and acts accordingly. Cahill (2015) described this process as the "derivitization" of a woman's experience because how she must be in the world is derived from a man's worldview. Stark (2007, p. 274) used the terms "micromanagement" and "microregulation" of the woman to articulate the minutiae of coercive control practices employed by the man to control the woman. Adams (2012) used the term "masculine empire" and described the colonizing discourses men employed to conceal their violence and to construct their controlling practices towards the woman as normative or commonsense.

We have previously written about the rhetorical devices used to justify and support the colonizing effects of domestic violence (Adams, Towns, & Gavey, 1995; Towns, Adams, & Gavey, 2003; Towns & Adams, 2009; Towns & Adams, 2016). For example, we have explored the use of pronouns, particularly the use of the second person plural ("we" and "us") to absorb and appropriate the experience of female partners ("we shouldn't be arguing"). We have also examined how marking strategies (such as terms like "it's a fact of life", "that's it pure and simple") are employed to set boundaries on what a partner can legitimately talk about ("women should know their place, that's the way it is"). However, out of an available toolkit of many different rhetorical devices, we have found metaphors to be the most commonly employed rhetorical device to bolster the colonizing practices associated with violence.

Our research has identified the common use of a wide range of metaphors. Some help in justifying silence ("don't air your dirty washing in public"), others are used to justify violent behavior ("pressure just builds and I explode"), and some help in repositioning abuse as some form of equal combat ("she provoked me", "she hurts me just as much with her words as I do to her with my fists"). But at the heart of any colonizing enterprise lies a strong belief that the colonizer's way of looking at the world is superior to that of the colonized (Adams, 2012). Accordingly, it is those social metaphors that position women as occupying inferior positions to those of men that play a key role in establishing the entitlement to colonize. Such metaphors include: women as childlike ("over-emotional", "unable to see the broader picture"), women as military subordinates ("keeping her in line", "obeying orders"), women as less educated ("irrational", "not in touch"), and women as employees ("needing direction", "complying with procedures").

In the following, we look at one example of a social metaphor of inferiority and explore some of its complexities. By portraying a female partner in the role of a child, a man is then able to weave in ways of speaking that highlights why it is important for women to conform to what her male partner sees as the correct order of things. In the excerpt below, Peter Adams asks “Grant”, a New Zealand man of European descent, about his violence towards his partner. Prior to this excerpt he had explained that some of his violence had occurred following disputes with his partner over finances. Both he and his partner worked and contributed to the household finances:

- Peter: You said that “there’s a part of me that connects with that”, women are like children.
- Grant: Yeah. Um.
- Peter: Can you explain that?
- Grant: I think males grown up that if you did something wrong there was um, there was punishment of some type. Whether it was a smack or if you did something in the schoolyard, you got punched or- you know, and we’ve learnt wrong and right. Whereas I don’t think [women] have a good grasp of wrong and right. ...
- Peter: ... how do you see that?
- Grant: ... I think the sort of things like, um, men are sort of expected to be able to cook, vacuum clean, do the washing, mow the lawns, ah look after children, provide- fix cars, you know do all of the sort of man things- I think men have a greater grasp of ah skills than a lot of women. You know, women aren’t expected to be able to repair a car or clean a fish, or you know, do sort of what you term male things. Whereas males are expected to do women things, and I think males can- most men can do, you know- are very- a lot more versatile. Um sort of getting a little bit back about the feminism thing, um, with females perhaps not knowing- having such a good grasp of right and wrong, they now have been put in a position where they’re getting a lot more power, um, and I don’t know if they have the capabilities of grasping this power. Um, the, I’m sure the money thing, you wouldn’t be so much of an issue if women were still living in the regime where you got marr ... you got married, had a child sort of within the first year of the marriage. The wife stayed at home, um I think you know, the money thing would be quite a bit different. Um with women out there working now they’ve-
- Peter: ... I was wondering how that [money] was... linked to yourself to um- in your guts, get the feeling that women perhaps don’t have as good an understanding of right or wrong or as good as a connection with that (Grant: Yeah, yeah) basically.
- Grant: The money thing, I’m perhaps a bit unorthodox to mainstream thinking with the way I (unclear) handle money. Um, but it works for me and I do it quite well. So that’s sort of- is something that I’m not intending to be like that for the rest of my life. I’m just doing it for this period. I’m accumulating as much as I can so I can draw out later. I don’t want to work all my life, and I think that’s one that- ...
- Peter: Did she feel that you controlled a lot of these things in the relationship at all? Did you have a sense of that?
- Grant: Yeah I think that she probably did. Um, it got to the stage with um, basically when I started- I paid ... Sue’s debt ... She had more money in her bank account, um, and I would have liked to have seen that money then being put into more debt clearing. But Sue took it that it was spending money. Um I would not have cleared those debts in the first place if I had known that that money was then going to become frivolous spend money (Peter: Mmmm) ... Sue, from my side of the fence, Sue seemed to want all the um, all the benefits of having money, but didn’t want to take the responsibility or the hard work of getting it there. She just wanted to- you know obviously that’s probably quite a generalization, you know, um there’s a lot more involved in that than just what I’ve said, but overall that was sort of the picture that I was getting out of it.

Peter: That was like, you would say about a child.

Grant: Yes.

Peter: Talking that way?

Grant: Yeah, it's um- give a child a box of lollies, um, some of them will eat the whole lot, others will um, eat half of them and put half aside, and you know, and then you sort of, then you get into the money sort of thing, um some will blow the whole lot and others will um put some of it aside.

Here Grant describes having a particular way of managing the finances in the home that “works” for him. Although the full details of the criticisms he had of his partner Sue’s managing of their finances are not provided here, he represents his way of managing money as superior and indicating his preference for executive control of any spending by constituting Sue as financially irresponsible. He constantly speaks in ways that position Sue as childlike, enabling him to conceptualize his controlling behavior as acceptable and aimed at helping Sue recognize the way things ought to operate. Moreover, the metaphor also enables him to link the common practices of disciplining children and educating children as normal and understandable ways of managing home environments.

Colonizing discourses contribute to the man’s control of material resources in the home: his control of labor, finances, food, clothing, and other essentials of living. By accessing such discourses the man is able to justify and excuse his violence, coercive control, and dominance of the woman. Women who had experienced men’s domestic violence described the use of such rhetorical devices that support colonizing discourses as follows:

They’re [men who use violence against women] the ones who are right, their behavior is okay, their reasons for their behavior are the true reasons behind whatever it was that created that behavior, whatever situation it was, whatever the argument was or what will- I mean there’s not even arguments all the time. They are right, they have a right to be right, they have a right to have what they want- nothing else comes into it. (Casie)

I was starting to get so frustrated. I couldn’t get this man to even hear what I was saying. It was just simply his way and that was it and so the frustration started building in me. (Liz)

There is no room for diversity or difference in these colonizing discourses. The construction these women survivors portray is of a man who sets up a world of binaries, where he is right and all others are wrong, and where any challenges will not be met with negotiation or reflection but with conflict and aggression. The phrase “their behavior is okay” suggests the man constitutes his practices as normative or acceptable within the local community and therefore unable to be challenged. The use of phrases such as “nothing else comes into it” and “it was just simply his way *and that was it*” (emphasis added) enabled the women to highlight the man’s colonizing practices.

Foucault (1980) considered that a singular monolithic construction of the world was the avenue to sovereign power: totalitarian power exercised through top down practices and reinforced with violence if necessary. He was interested in identifying these power practices with a view to interrupting those designed to subjugate or oppress. Colonizing discourses may be understood as a mechanism of power, as a means to conceal violence by impressing on the victim of such violence (and others) that the abuser’s way is the right way, that there is a correct way of being, that there

is no other way, and that his abusive practices are normal and acceptable. Resistance would require challenging these discursive practices at all levels from the individual to the relational to the societal.

In those communities that actively accept diversity or gender equity promoting a man's singular view of the world is likely to be more difficult. In Sweden, for example, sustaining the discursive construction of the man's dominance and control of the woman as normal and commonsense is difficult because gender equity is accepted and is valued by men and women, and violence against women is considered to be shameful (Gottzen, 2016). Constituting coercively controlling male practices as normative and acceptable would be more readily subjected to challenge than in those countries or communities where gender equity is not well established or accepted.

In the long excerpt above Grant contributes again to colonizing discourses by employing the rhetoric of moral authority to endorse the "rightful" leadership of men:

Um sort of getting a little bit back about the feminism thing, um, with females perhaps not knowing- having such a good grasp of right and wrong, they now have been put in a position where they're getting a lot more power, um, and I don't know if they have the capabilities of grasping this power.

Earlier Grant had argued that men are punished physically more than girls and therefore learn right from wrong at an early age in a way girls do not. Having laid the ground for men's greater moral authority, he uses this reasoning in the above excerpt to argue against feminist aspirations for women's leadership. By positioning men as having greater moral authority, Grant is then able to argue that women do not have the "capabilities of grasping this power". Control of the finances is a source of power in the home and by dismissing women's ability to lead he is able to justify his "better" financial management and to position Sue's financial management as like that of a child.

Maintaining moral authority in the face of an immoral act is difficult, but men who employ violence against women use discursive strategies to promote their moral authority in these circumstances. Our research has revealed the work language accomplishes to allow the man to shift responsibility for his violence and maintain his moral authority in the face of his violence. Ambiguity was employed to obfuscate the man's responsibility, conceal his violence, and to shift focus to the woman's responsibility (Towns & Adams, 2016). We described the various socio-cultural influences that were drawn on to create ambiguity and contribute to confusion around responsibility for violence. Commonly these socio-cultural influences were highly gendered and had very old historical roots. For example, Christian beliefs of Eve bringing evil into the world by eating the forbidden fruit and of Pandora opening the locked box and releasing evil in the world are evocative of women holding lesser moral authority than men. These very old Western narratives form part of the socio-cultural landscape that supports the accounts of men who use violence: that women do not have the moral authority that men have and that they should therefore not hold equivalency in any decision-making.

LeCouteur and Oxlad (2011) used a discursive analysis and found that men from South Australia, who either denied or did not deny violence towards their partners, constructed their woman victims as having breached the gendered normative moral order to justify their violence. Using identity categorization to analyze their data, they stated:

when men were asked to describe their abused female partners, they regularly drew on categorizations that highlighted her exclusion from the commonsense, moral order of proper gendered behaviour. (LeCouteur & Oxlad, 2011, p. 11)

Ultimately these colonizing discourses, and the rhetorical devices that support them, contribute to the socio-cultural landscape that allows men to justify their physical violence against women. Countering these mechanisms of power by clearly placing the culpability for men's domestic violence against women with the man is a way to resist ambiguity and associated shifts in responsibility.

Natural Order Discourses

Deep within colonizing discourses lies a belief in the natural superiority of men with respect to women and how that is part of the natural order of things. Sometimes, this is religiously referenced by talking of it as part of God's grand design ("it's the way men are created"); sometimes, it is supported with reference to biology or evolution ("men are stronger than women"); sometimes, appeal is also made to the need for social order ("without men in charge everything would be chaotic"). But for many men the belief in natural order is a given, something intrinsic to the fabric of the world that does not need to be discussed, questioned, or analyzed. Men in charge is simply part of the natural order of what it means to be human. Consider, for example, the following passage from the interview with Grant:

they [women] now have been put in a position where they're getting a lot more power, um, and I don't know if they have the capabilities of grasping this power...

Grant draws from natural order discourses to question women's capabilities to lead and in doing so portrays a highly gendered notion of who has entitlement to positions of power, privileging men. Such discourses are also apparent in our interviews with women, such as in the following account:

They say that it's god's rule that the man rules the house... I used to hear that from my husband although he wasn't a religious person. "I am the head of this house, that is god's rule". (Michelle)

In this extract, Michele illustrates her husband's positioning as "ruler" of the house with the use of active voicing in which she reconstructs the words of her husband in order to lend weight to her account.

Adams et al. (1995) identified the rhetorical devices men who had used violence against women used to endorse men's dominance and entitlement including reference ambiguity (such as pronoun ambiguity), axiom markers (as discussed above),

synecdoche (a reference which substitutes a part for a whole or a whole for a part), metaphor and metonymy (substituting something that has become associated with the object). An example of reference ambiguity is “that is god’s rule” to justify male dominance or “it takes two to tango” to implicate the woman in the man’s violence; an example of metaphor is “she presses my buttons” to suggest provocation, or “I just exploded” to suggest a loss of control or responsibility for violence; an example of synecdoche is “it was just a bit of *push and shove*” when referring to physical violence; and an example of metonymy is “she is too *lippy*” to refer to what a woman says.

The commonsense use of rhetoric rendered these male discourses as simply part of the normative socio-cultural climate in New Zealand, making them resistant to challenge. The men who we interviewed drew on these discourses to justify and explain their violence and support their accounts that men were naturally dominant in heterosexual relationships. In their accounts, men’s entitlement to dominance was just part of the natural order and therefore unquestionable.

Grant employed natural order discourses to support his argument that men should be in control and in charge. He criticized “the feminism thing” and argued that money wouldn’t be an issue if “women were still living in the regime where you ... got married, had a child within the first year of the marriage. The wife stayed at home.” He draws on patriarchal values making nostalgic reference to traditional sex roles as a solution to having to navigate gender equitable practices.

Other discourse analysts have worked to uncover the language employed to justify and excuse men’s domestic violence against women thereby assisting the identification of the norms that support such violence (Towns, 2015). For example, Dragiewicz (2008) examined the antifeminist backlash rhetoric of USA fathers’ rights groups responding on web sites to the Violence Against Women Act. The primary themes she identified were demands for “formal equality” or gender obfuscating language in law, calls for the reaffirmation of patriarchy, and objections to women’s authority or voice. These themes were connected to child custody and support issues. Van Niekirk and Boonzaier (2016) found that South African men who had been violent to their partners employed masculinity discourses of male dominance and promoted the subordination of women.

A man’s enactment of natural order discourses creates ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988) for women. Towns and Adams (2009) explored the accounts of women who had been raised in a community that advocated women’s equity, has women in leadership roles, and encourages women to do anything. Women described being caught between ideologies of patriarchy—demonstrated through the man’s enforcement of male privilege—and feminist ideologies of gender equity. Intellectually, they might adhere to ideologies of gender equity, but their lived experience of their partner was of patriarchal practices, denigration, criticism, and punishment if they strayed beyond the boundaries of his expected traditional gendered roles. In this context, the woman can either remain silent, thereby being complicit with his patriarchal expectations, or be constructed by the man as “unlovable,” “ball-breaking,” or “man-hating” if she confronts him. In the face of this dilemma, many women remained silent.

Natural order discourses work by shaming the woman and wearing her down with criticism, which is typically gendered in its origins (Enander, 2010; Hyden, 2005). In commonsense understandings, the home is constituted as a place of love and happiness, consequently love is difficult to reconcile with violence and coercive control. Those men who use violence against women work to redefine this commonsense meaning of the love/violence distinction by exploiting gendered assumptions and traditional narratives and beliefs. Traditionally, women's role has been to promote the home as a loving environment for the man and their children and to selflessly ensure loving relationships. Her inability to manage this expectation in the context of the man's domestic violence is constituted by the man, her, and others as a failure on her part. The effect is to diminish the woman, and shame and silence her from talking of the violence.

Jack (1991) has described women as having a critical "over-eye" that maintains oversight of their actions and criticizes them according to whether they comply with expected gendered norms or were the "good woman." This critical gendered internal scrutiny was particularly harsh when the woman was in a relationship with a man who used violence against her. In her silencing theory of women's depression, she described the ways in which gendered norms influenced women to be silent and self-sacrificing rather than speak of the gendered matters that contributed to their depression. In Towns and Adams (2016), we elaborated more on this silencing theory in relation to men's domestic violence and described the rhetoric and associated gendered norms that contribute to the man's blaming of the woman and the obfuscation of his violence.

The results of the study showed how colonizing and natural order discourses were employed by men to shift the blame for the violence towards the woman and to justify and excuse their violence. The man depicts the woman as never meeting his exemplary gendered standards. The implication is that if she had met such standards he would not have needed to be violent. In these discourses, she is the one who needs to change and had she done so his violence would not have occurred. Women described working hard on housework, having the meals on time and keeping the children well behaved in order to comply with the man's expectations. For example, Ann described the expectations on her to carry out all the housework when she was also working:

The dynamics are: 'Okay if you're going to want to work, make sure that you still keep- you know, carry on the housework as well.' ... It's almost as if 'Well if I don't do it it's not going to get done and I don't want a hassle.' You know 'I don't want to create anymore hassle.' So they almost emotionally have us at odds, so that it just too much trouble to bother them.

Foucault's (1977) term "docile bodies" refers to the ways in which those subjected to power practices comply with the expectations of those exercising power, who are able to assert control whether present or not, due to unpredictable surveillance and punishment for non-compliance. Under such power practices, people become docile and compliant in order to avoid unpredictable punishment. Some women used language that suggested their self-regulation produced "docile bodies" of them: a consequence of the man's violence and coercive control and the women's attempts to

provide the perfect love that would comply with his natural order expectations. For example, some women described themselves as becoming “puppets” and “robots” manipulated and controlled by the man, who was never satisfied with the woman’s actions, decisions, and choices. In their accounts, the woman loses agency and becomes as if a tool of the man.

Conclusion

Discursive psychology has enabled a much more nuanced interpretation of the dynamics of domestic violence, situating the actions of men and women in this context within a broader socio-cultural, discursive, and ideological framework. Our work in this area suggests that men who use violence draw on commonsense understandings to silence talk of the violence, avoid responsibility, and shift the blame onto the woman. Men’s coercive control of women and intermittent violence is enabled by various discursive strategies, which allow men to maintain control over important resources in the home: financial and material resources, emotional resources, moral authority, and leadership. In these respects, men’s violence against women is not markedly different from violence in other contexts. Such discursive control, however, causes harm to women and children. Many men remain invested in such control and this investment is demonstrated by the prevalence of such violence towards women, their actions to attempt to obfuscate and degender such violence and by their inactions and therefore complicity with men’s violence against women.

The Canadian context stands out as different because of the substantially smaller prevalence of such violence in this country. Canadian men introduced the White Ribbon Day following the mass killing by Marc Lépine, who claimed to be fighting feminism prior to killing 14 women and injuring 10 other women and four men, then killing himself, at the École Polytechnique in Montreal on 6 December 1989. White Ribbon Day, which has spread internationally, provides an opportunity for men to commit to never using violence against a woman and to reflect on what sort of society they want, how they want the women in their lives to be treated and what future they want for their daughters. Canada has shown how men can collectively act to reduce such violence if they are prepared to look to the future for the women in their lives and enable women to access the same resources that they enjoy.

Cultural norms reinforced and produced through discursive strategies account for whether victims/survivors of men’s domestic violence can speak up publicly. In Sweden, Gottzen (2016) described gender equity as a value that both men and women were proud of and violence against women as transgressing this cultural value. He described men’s shame about their violence as a consequence of these cultural norms, which contributed to their concealment of their violence, but these cultural norms were also valuable in bringing about disclosure. In many countries, however, women are silenced from talking of such violence. Erez, Ibarra, and Gur (2015) described the ways cultural norms and structural inequities contributed to the

concealment of violence against women within minority Palestinian communities living in Israel. Some women from these Palestinian communities described violence against women as normative within their culture, and some preferred the local community response to this violence over the legal interventions of a state that they regarded as oppressive and prejudiced against them. Towns et al. (2003) described the ways language was employed to silence talk of such violence in New Zealand when the men who were violent towards their women partners knew that others were aware of their violence and when friends and family had knowledge of their violence.

Theismeyer (2003) described such silence and awareness as a “secret non-secret” enabled by the utilization of discursive resources. Outlining a discursive silencing theory she described the layers of concealment of gender-based violence from the discourses employed between individuals, to those discourses drawn on to support gender normative values and hide the violence within communities, to those used to conceal violence at the political level to ensure that the status quo remains and that changes that would stop the violence do not occur. Discourses and other linguistic resources may be understood to provide the “cultural scaffolding” for the concealment of gender-based violence against women (Gavey, 2005) as they articulate and inform the values and normative beliefs that contribute to the ways in which such violence is hidden, justified, and enabled.

However, as the Canadian and Swedish contexts show, by raising consciousness of the norms and discourses that support violence against women, by working against the discourses that silence women’s talk of such violence, and by acting to counter colonizing and natural order discourses, the normative climate that enables violence against women can be resisted, with the ultimate outcome being to reduce such violence. These transformative changes will happen more quickly when there is the political and societal will for change enabled by global movements towards gender equity.

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