

# Some reflections on naming, language and framings

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# Back to basics: The meaning of violence

- *I develop and defend a view of the self as fundamentally relational – capable of being undone by violence, but also of being remade in connection with others* (Susan Brison, 2001, pxi)
- Violence removes women's agency and freedom to control their bodies, minds and lives,
- Feminist practice has been to restore control, expand 'space for action' /freedom
- If we begin from the self as relational we ask how violence has changed a woman's life, sense of self and relations to others – material and social consequences not just psychological impacts
- Just one of the ways VAWG has been individualised, disconnected from women's oppression

# Language and naming

- What/who is naming for?
  - To provide women and children (**victim-survivors**) and practitioners with words to name what happened- to locate themselves, locate the perpetrator, to make patterns visible
  - To challenge normalisation
    - ‘groping’, ‘sex pest’, ‘incompetent suitor’
  - To recognise harm
  - For clarity and distinction
  - To locate within policy and legal frameworks
- **How far have we moved from the first four to the fifth?**

# The elephant(s) in the room

- Shifts in language, notable following #MeToo and Epstein which fail to name what happened and who is responsible
- ‘Sexual misconduct’ and ‘inappropriate behaviour’ – preferred by organisations including Office for Students and UUK
  - described as “numbingly vague” concepts, which avoid naming – and even could be said to unname
- In stark contrast to the graphic sexually violent language online directed at women who refused to be silent, who named the abuse and the abusers
- What is our responsibility as researchers in terms how we use language, how we name?

# Whose zooming who?

- Deborah Cameron argues there is commonality across media and institutions of ‘linguistic misrepresentation of sexual violence’
- She demanded that we think deeply about who and what this protects – eg the shift from perpetrators to persons who harm
- It is at the cost of language which validates/recognises victim-survivors and creates what Jo Wilson calls spaces to speak
- Not silencing so much as shifting ways things are said so that it fails to name who is doing what to whom

# ‘Pedophile’: A weasel word

- Piece in *Trouble & Strife* in 1996 (<http://www.troubleandstrife.org>) lamenting the ‘return of the pedophile’
  - Literal meaning is ‘lover of children’, traditional clinical definition ‘an adult who is sexually attracted to pre-pubescent children’
- Conflates a supposed sexual orientation with the commission of abusive and often criminal acts
- Otherises and monsterises – hiding the fact that most perpetrators are known, familiar to children,
  - Catholic Church use of it as a ‘weasel word’ – policy document in 1996 that abusive priests were ‘sick’, to be sent for treatment rather than held to account
- Why do we/the media use the term?

# Changing words and meanings

- VAW or GBV → ‘hate crime’, ‘interpersonal violence’
  - Loss of the gender and power analysis
- Discrimination/inequalities → ‘disadvantage’ or ‘vulnerability’
  - Loss of continuum in women’s lives and intersectional analysis
- Telling/speaking → ‘disclosure’
  - Shifts focus from agency of women to agency response
- Victimisation → ‘victimhood’
  - From a material reality to a stigmatised identity
  - For professionals being a survivor is no longer a resource but a weakness

Language changes not just what we say but what we know/recognise

Is there an ethics of language for researchers?

# The conundrum of victimisation and agency

- Victimisation is relational – it involves a victim and perpetrator
  - It removes control and autonomy from the victim-survivor, but there is still some space for action
- Women and children are not passive
  - They resist, find resources that help them cope and survive, and some seek justice
  - How do we and other organisations speak about them as women, children, victims, survivors, victim-survivors, service users, clients?
  - What difference does each of those make to how they are seen, how they are treated, how they are encouraged see themselves and their capacities?



# Incidentalism

- Jeff Hearn: when we treat violence as isolated events we reproduce perpetrator discourse: 'the incident/episode'
- Losing the patterns in course of conduct offences and the behaviours of serial perpetrators
- 'Real' violence limited to that which causes or is likely to cause visible or lasting injury (see also Susan Estrich on 'real rape'), but we know the harm of repeated everyday intrusions can be profound and long-lasting
- Cambridge Harm Index, risk assessments and intervention thresholds all reproduce these framings
- Case management systems and recording rules mean the history is hard to retrieve
- Do we have a responsibility to continually join up the dots?

# CONDUCTIVE CONTEXTS for VAWG

- Family and intimate relationships
- Communities/neighbourhoods
- Workplace, college, school
- Public space
- Institutions (including being in custody)
- Night time economies, including sex industries
- Conflict, displacement and transitions
- Colonialism
- Migration
- Online

# What makes a context conducive?

- Convergence of layers of power and authority
  - Institutionalised gendered power relations
  - Entitlement and limited external challenge/accountability
- Where usual hierarchies of sex/gender are in flux, jeopardy or transition
  - Conflict, migration, economic transition
  - Localised geo-political gender orders
- Being located at an intersection, in a matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 2000)
- Do we contextualise violences?

# Outcomes: how survivors define success

- US study by Fullframe Initiative (2014)
- Involved 150 survivors and 185 practitioners
- Prompted by perceived disconnect between survivors, policymakers , practitioners and funders
- Success for survivors linked to their networks, what created new value and worth in their lives – everyday moments of achievement, connections and personal accomplishment beyond abuse
- Practitioners emphasised movement out of the role of ‘victim’ – reflecting on in phase 2 of the project this was linked to funding emphasising safety and crisis
- Can we argue for measures of success that are survivor defined, including enhancing social networks and community resources?

# Debbie Cameron

*[We need to] to name sexual violence and those who perpetrate it without equivocation, euphemism and overt or covert victim-blaming*