

Taking Children's Resistance Seriously

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H1Abstract

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In this chapter, the authors explore the topic of children's resistance to violence and adversity. They discuss how children have been cast in the psychological literature as passive and "witnesses" to violence when they actually take active, agentive roles and positions in relation to violent situations. Children's responses exist within a larger landscape of context and tend to provide rich information about the child's values, beliefs and relationships to family members. Richardson and Bonnah discuss the implications for healing, recovery, practice and well-being based on their resistance. They suggest that practitioners may find that more accurate accounts of child behavior emerge from an interactional analysis of events and responses to them. As well, they discuss the importance of accurate representations as part of a broader positive social response to young people who have experienced violence.

H2 Questions this chapter will address:

1. In what ways are children active agents and “stance-taking entities?” How is it that psychological professions depict children as being passive witnesses?
2. How do children’s accounts, stories and autobiographies bring to life children’s resistance to adversity and mistreatment? Why do children’s authors depict children’s agency more accurately than psychological professionals?
3. How is dignity related to recovery and social justice?
4. How might practices of cultural safety and cultural supervision improve social work interactions for Indigenous families?

H1 Introduction

In this chapter, the authors explore children’s responses and resistance to violence with a **DRAFT - DO NOT CIRCULATE BEYOND THIS COURSE** view to guiding interventions for recovery. This paper highlights some of the ways that children, particularly Indigenous children in Canada, are treated in relation to this topic. It is informed by various literatures including psychological, violence-recovery, developmental, children’s literature and with some inclusion of accounts of resistance in relation to the oppression of children, Indigenous and people of colour in society over time.

In terms of contextualizing the work, it has been said that “history is one of our greatest teachers about resistance and the innate human capacity to defend dignity.” (Knight, 2006). Regretfully, Canada has been slow to acknowledge the institutionalized violence and torture that was inflicted upon Indigenous children in this country for several generations. Internment in child prison camps for First Nations, Metis and

Indigenous children has indeed meant there is a universe of stories of children's resistance that inform us of both the horrors of colonialism and the resilience of the human spirit. However, these stories have not yet been used to inform systemic processes, such as child welfare or psychology, and we have been left with flat and uninspiring accounts of deficit and passivity in descriptions of Indigenous populations. These descriptions have been used to further deprive and deplete the resources of Indigenous communities and maintain the stereotype that says passive people are not worthy of managing their own land, resources and children.

In reviewing the psychological literature, it became apparent that children have been cast as relatively passive in relation to violence. And, as mentioned previously, there are virtually no accounts of the violence towards Aboriginal children in the former British empire in the developmental literature pertaining to children. Surely this cover-up leads to great distortions about the behavior and motivation of children. If you depict children as passive, you are not obliged to document their histories of resistance. And, despite being spirited beings exercising influence over their lives and situations, they are discussed as merely witnessing events or being exposed to violence (Fantuzzo and Lindquist, 1989; Jaffe et al., 1990).

Most typically, children are discussed in psychological terms as being "impacted" or "affected" by violence, even when they have been agentive actors in the social interaction (Edleson, Nguyen, and Kimball, 2011; Wade, 2014). Overlien and Hyden state that most of the literature refers to children as "exposed to" violence (Overlien & Hyden, 2009, p. 4). These studies show, among other things, that domestic violence is not something that

children witness in the sense that they watch it passively from a distance and their responses have been largely overlooked in research and practice.

Over the past few hundred years, little attention was paid to the lasting suffering of children in relation to violence, perhaps because many societies were dealing with global war and primary issues of survival. Sometimes children were thought to be unscarred by violence for developmental reasons (e.g. they won't remember). Sigmund Freud was one of the first psychologists to discuss the ramifications of childhood abuse and mistreatment introducing the concept of neurosis and/or psychosis in later life. He believed that early experiences had a profound impact on adolescent and adult behavior as well as on future tendencies towards aggression (Englander, 2007; Bartol, 2002). A number of theories talk about how children will mimic and repeat the violence they see around them in a deterministic fashion; moral theorists (e.g. Kohlberg, 1969) believe that **DRAFT - DO NOT CIRCULATE BEYOND THIS COURSE** whether a child will use violence depends on their stage of morality (with no contextual discussion related to child oppression or violence towards them) while cognitive theories (e.g. Piaget, 1932) say that a child's reasoning and the resultant behavior unfolds in an orderly, predictable and logical fashion, regardless of context. Many of these theories did not consider issues of social class, racism, sexism and the ubiquitous violence against women and mothers and the ubiquitous presence of racism and classism in most societies.

It is important to consider social factors such as colonialism, patriarchy and social prejudice related to the fact that life has not been not benign for certain populations of children and their families. Discrimination and hate have been based on class, race, gender, able-bodiedism, sexual orientation and such qualities that perhaps deviate than mainstream norms (Crenshaw, 1995; Reynolds, 2014, 2008; Richardson & Wade, 2008).

Context is important for developing a solid analysis of a child's actions. Overlien and Hyden write:

Contrary to most research in this field, this study on children experiencing domestic violence has a child-centred approach to the violence. In line with the “new social studies of childhood” (Hutchby 2005, Hutchby & Moran-Ellis 1998, James & Prout 1990), we argue that children need to be taken seriously as social agents and as active constructors of their own social worlds. This means that we are interested in the child's own actions/absence of actions during the violent episode, their interpretations of the violence and what meaning these interpretations have in their lives (Hydén, 1994. p. 3).

We concur with this position. This interactional, agentive view is more aligned with the study of social interaction (e.g. Goffman, 1963) and the systemic studies in the field of family therapy (Carr, 2009; McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008). We would argue that “coping with violence” is not equivalent to “responding to violence.” The much quoted definition of coping talks about how to “manage specific external and/or internal demands” (Lazarus & Folkman 1984: 141). Similarly, recent discourses on resilience do not acknowledge that resistance is ubiquitous and that the child actually responds to it and to the social responses surrounding it. We believe that a child is doing much more than merely coping when he/she is assessing safety, making decisions on appropriate action based on context and predicting what will happen afterwards to guide decision-making.

In life and death situations, a child may be looking out for the best outcome for a mother and siblings as well as himself both during and after violence. For example, a

child may experience paternal violence in the home but then when this violence comes to the attention of authorities, the child may have to negotiate the interaction with child protection workers, doctors, lawyers, family, friends and school teachers, alongside and separate from his mother. That child will also likely receive negative feedback in relation to his suffering. If that child is now distracted in class, forgets his lunch, has little interest in play-dates and is short-tempered, these symptoms of living with violence will likely be recast as personal negative attributes for which he may experience punitive responses and perhaps receive a mental health diagnosis.

Children who experience violence in their homes experience it with all their senses. They hear it, see it, and experience the aftermath (Edleson, 1999, McGee, 1997, Överlien & Hydén, 2007). Current research now shows that children often intervene in domestic violence, typically to influence the outcome. Their intent is often to maximize safety and they are less likely to be merely witnessing events but playing an active part in directing the outcome, depending upon their age and actions. Richardson and Bonnah have been studying this agentic view through response-based applications to children as well as presenting some of the current understandings on children's experiences and what they need to recover from violence-related incidents (Richardson, Richardson & Wade, 2010, Bonnah, 2008).

H2 A Response-Based View of Children

Recognition of children as victims of domestic violence emerged at a time when attention was drawn to the rights of children after the United Nations 1989 Convention on the

Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). The Convention spawned international interest in the concept of children’s participation rights and is considered a significant influence on ‘the sociology of childhood’ (Mayall, 1994; Qvortrup, 1991) – a discourse of child-hood and children in research that emerged in the late 1980s across a range of disciplines (Morris, Hegarty, & Humphreys, 2012). The notion of rights pre-supposes that children are spirited, agentic and are deserving of recognition for their place in society as actors and not merely wards. The existence of child protection services also indicates that society believes that children are worthy of having rights. The movement towards more inclusion of children’ s perspectives in legal decision-making would also point to this conclusion.

Children are agentic, interactive, spirited beings who engage with the world and respond to violence and mistreatment. Our earlier work in relation to the medicine wheel of responses provides examples of how any response that comes from inside the person, such as sadness, despair, longing, hope are “responses to” something, not “effects of” or “symptoms of” an a contextualized event. Much of the developmental literature has been focused on “benign world” understandings and does not explore children’s responses to adversity and violence (Richardson & Wade, 2008, Pacini-Ketchebaw & Berikoff, 2008). Developmental psychology has produced a wide variety of accepted measurements describing what children do, should do, and what they will do next. In contrast to learning about children through observation and interaction, developmental models take individualist perspectives that lend themselves more to focusing on the adequacy of mothering than the development of the child (Burman, 2008). However, there are other realms outside psychology where children are recognized for the spirited beings that they

are. In addition to learning about children through observation, we have a window into their activity and imagination through children's literature, even though much of the writing is done by adults reflecting upon their earlier life experience. We can learn about children through observation. As well, the activity and life force of children is vividly depicted in the world of literature, where characters are often thinly disguised representations of the author herself, or aspects of his/her experiences, commitments, loves and fears.

Emilie Kaidi, a four year old girl in Algeria, Emilie Kaidi, was buried in the rubble of an earthquake that killed 1400 Algerians. Her picture was in the San Francisco Chronicle. She survived because she called for her mother for two days. "It was her cries that let these volunteers from Spain locate her." She refused to desist from her tears until she was reunited with her mother. (Solnit, 2006:6).

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In the Yukon, a small boy is teased in front of his family and friends. In indignation he tosses a bowl of moose stew through the air. Bits of meat, potatoes and gravy descend onto the clothing of community members. It is clear he is responding to the sting of humiliation. Indigenous children interned in the institutions euphemistically referred to as "residential school" resist the imposed separation and degradation. At Kuper Island, the children resisted misrepresentation by calling it "Alcatraz" (2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_uVBE6AXs4).

Children find ways to meet with their siblings, even though it was forbidden. Some try to escape like Delmar Johnny who tried to flee his captors at the Kuper Island institution (Welsh, 1997). Children have a history of hiding siblings to protect them from the sounds of violence in the home. Older siblings often put on music and headphones to

protect smaller children. They often run to a neighbour's house, or take a phone to dial 911 to elicit help during the assault of their mother.

Such examples of tactics in children's responses are found throughout children's literature depicting agency and resistance in the face of suffering. In fact, the writing may constitute a deliberate honouring of children's spirit and action. A celebration of resistance, achieved with imagination, creativity and humour, is in itself an antidote to children's suffering. Astrid Lingren said "If I have managed to brighten up even one gloomy child – then I'm satisfied. There has been some academic acknowledgement of the oppression of children and the efforts to capture their resistance in literature.

In "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature", Nodelman writes:
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Child psychology and children's literature can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with childhood—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, child psychology and children's literature as an adult style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over childhood. (Nodelman, 1992).

Nodelman cautions us, adults and writers, to not speak for children when they are capable of speaking for themselves. Nodelman applies the principles of orientalism to the way children are often treated in the adult world, as if they are incapable of speaking. From a

children's rights perspective and response-based perspective, we can bring forth the voice of the child in legal and therapeutic contexts and make sure we are not replicating system dominance upon them. This means we must seek to provide decolonizing opportunities in our work to end child oppression, adult-centrism, and to create spaces where children's voices can be heard. This includes ensuring that mechanisms are in place to hear the voices of children in all government-run programming that is in place to educate, protect and provide care for young people.

17-year-old Justin had grown up in foster homes, group homes, and the juvenile justice system. At the time that I met him, I was a senior administrator for a social service agency providing a 24 hour staffed resource for him. I knew Justin quite well, because his behaviour was so challenging that it was difficult to maintain staff to work with him for longer than a few weeks at a time, and they would often call in the middle of the night and saying,

“how soon can you get here, because I'm leaving”.

It was a morning following one of these nights, and I was making Justin breakfast.

As we ate pancakes, I said,

“I don't think I'm doing a very good job for you. I keep hiring people...and they're good people, but they don't seem to be the right for you, because I seem to be here a lot lately”.

Justin didn't break a stride in eating. He simply stated,

“You're right. You're doing a terrible job”.

As we made eye contact and shared a brief smile, I knew that I had an invitation to continue.

“Here’s the thing, Justin. I have another interview for a new staff member tomorrow, and I think that I must be asking the wrong kind of questions. Do you have any idea what I should be asking?”

Justin didn’t even hesitate. Immediately, he responded with,

“You should ask them what they will do when a kid gets mad. Like...how are they going to stop themselves from getting mad back?”

I only paused for a second while I stared at Justin, and then I said

“hang on...I need to get a piece of paper and a pen”.

I quickly wrote down his question with a #1 beside it and then looked up at him

expectantly and said,

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“what else?”

Again, without hesitation he responded,

“you should ask them what they are going to do when they want a kid to do something, and the kid doesn’t want to do it. How are they going to try and make him?”

Again, I wrote his question word for word and looked at him with my pen poised beside #3. In a quiet voice, he said,

“how long are they going to stick around”.

At that point, Justin got up from the table with his plate and I knew we had reached the end of his interview questions.

“Justin, I can ask your questions. But I’ve interviewed many people and I know that some are really good at interviews. I might not be able to tell the difference between someone who really means what they’re saying and someone who doesn’t. But you...I have a feeling that you would be able to tell the difference in a second. Would you consider being on the interview panel with me and one other person? The final decision about who we hire will be yours”.

Justin looked me in the eye.

“Yes”.

Although Justin didn’t typically shower regularly or wear clean clothes, he arrived at the office at 8:45 the following morning showered, and wearing clothes that had clearly been washed. I didn’t say a word about his early arrival or his

appearance, but simply explained the interview process to him, which he appeared to fully concentrate on. We were interviewing an Aboriginal man who had

experience working with youth. We went through our standard questions first while Justin observed, and it was a less than impressive interview. In fact, Ben wouldn’t have passed. Once we had concluded, I said,

“Justin just has a few questions for you”, and with more professionalism than I could have imagined, Justin leaned forward, looked Ben straight in the eye, and said,

“Ben...what will you do when a kid gets mad, and how will you stop yourself from getting mad back?”

This was the beginning of a 20-minute conversation between Ben and Justin about mutual respect, and I’m sure that neither of them was aware of anyone else in the

room. Justin's 2 remaining questions prompted similar dialogue, and the entire interview lasted for nearly 2 hours. As it concluded, I asked Ben if he would mind waiting in the lobby for a few minutes.

As the door closed behind him, Justin turned to me with a broad grin and said, "that's my man".

I asked him how he knew, and he said

"didn't you see the look in his eye? He's so kind, and he meant everything he said. He won't hurt me."

I agreed with him, and said,

"Ok Justin, go offer him the job then".

"What?"

"Yup. You picked him. You go hire him."

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Justin walked out to the waiting room, extended his hand for a handshake, and said, "Ben, I'd like to offer you a job working for me".

Ben stood up with tears in his eyes, and shook Justin's hand.

"I accept".

Bringing forth the voice of a child has to be more than a token gesture. If we take the rights of children seriously and believe that what they know and what they say is important, then we will develop the structural mechanisms to include them in the important aspects of decision-making and safety planning, as much as possible.

Cultural Safety for Children

As a society, we recognize increasingly that children have specific needs related to their situation and development. As a group, children have things in common that provide us with a ground from which to theorize about them. Although the notion of “childhood” is a recent cultural construction from an adult perspective, (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Kessler, 1991; Burman, 1994) we generally acknowledge that there are things we can do to improve the condition of children on the planet. The term “cultural safety”¹ may be a helpful construct in considering the (small “c”) culture of children and the relatively few child-friendly spaces in society. There is a critical lack of attention to free and accessible social spaces designed specifically for children and their caregivers (Cunningham & Jones, 1999). New Zealand practitioners Ana Su’a-Hawkins and Tracie Mafile’o (2004) advocate for the use of “cultural supervisors”, particularly when non-Indigenous social workers are involved with Indigenous families. Such a practice is recommended to avoid offering services which are culturally unsafe or incongruent.

Overlooking the needs of children on a societal level is one symptom of the “adultism” that exists today. Canada has chosen to not fully implement the United Nations Rights of the Indigenous Child, nor the more universal Rights of the Child, which makes it easier to violate the rights of children in Canada. Perhaps one of the explanations for high rates of violence against children is that perpetrators know they are likely to get away with it. And, as Coates and Wade (2008) explain, recasting unilateral violence against children in mutual terms, as if they gave consent, means it is seen as less serious in courts. Misleading terms such as child sex tourism, child prostitution and even

¹ The term “cultural safety” which was developed in the Aoteroan Maori nursing community, serves an antidote to Euro-centric or structurally racist policies (Papps & Ramsden, 1996; McDonald, 2001).

child poverty give the impression that the child is in some way responsible, and therefore at least partially to blame, for these activities. It is important to develop an analysis that transcends adult perspectives on social, political, legal and human service issues and contests misrepresentations that violate the rights of children.

There are unhelpful things we do that distract from the real issues and tend to separate children out from their parents in really unhelpful ways. In child welfare settings, mothers who have been battered by their partners tend to be blamed and children are often removed from them under “failure to protect” policies (Richardson & Wade, 2010; Strega et al, 2013). In court cases, children’s views are not consistently considered although babies as young as six months are seen showing preference for one parent over the other (Thomas, 2014). We talk about “child poverty” as if the child should have arrived with money of their own, outside of the economy of the parents. There is a paradoxical view that we should save children because they are seen as being “more worthy” than their (“dysfunctional”) parents while simultaneously applying deterministic “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” psychological theories. Poor or Indigenous/minority parents tend to be stigmatized (Goffman, 1963; Strega et al, 2011?). In child welfare settings, this pro-child/anti-adult position gives rise to a “save the children” approach separate from the greater needs of the family. Child welfare systems often apply a “sinking boat” approach, metaphorically letting parents drown while the child is separated from them left to navigate the world more or less alone, or with a series of temporary caregivers along the way (Dallaire, 2014)². We know from our research

² Rachele Dallaire (2014) wrote her Masters thesis on Indigenous girls’ experience of sexualized abuse whilst in the care of child welfare. She states that in some cases

that once children are moved into the foster system, they commonly report feeling virtually “unclaimed” and “unloved” by any adult in their lives (Bonnah, 2008, 2012). In such a case, could a child’s expression of wanting to be cared for by a non-violent parent contribute to an enhanced outcome for that child? Children’s experiences are often misrepresented through language in ways that remove blame from a violent perpetrator (Coates & Wade, 2008, 2007; Wade, 2014).

At the same time, we use language to misrepresent other kinds of activities that cast children as willing participants in adult-generated violence. The term “child prostitution”, although used frequently, is both legally and practically impossible as children cannot offer consent and do not have sex to sell (see newscast with Kevin Newman); “child soldiering” represents killing by children as a career choice rather than an inevitability in the face of their kidnapping, coercion, and serious threats against them and their loved ones. Part of the goal of response-based practice is to prompt accurate language use, which upholds the rights and dignity of children and those harmed by violence.

Upholding the Dignity of Children

Through our therapeutic, community-based and familial interaction with children, it is clear that children are orientated to dignity, protective of self and others, and strive for belonging in their relationships and life at home. Young ones are attuned to fairness and justice in adult decisions and seek to have their perspectives heard. They are purposeful

children are knowingly put into homes with sexual perpetrators because other homes are not available.

in their actions in relation to their goals and aspirations, whether immediate or longer term. Children seek connection and would like adults to listen to them with full attention.

Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography “Long Walk to Freedom” shared the following story which illustrates his orientation to preserving dignity:

I learned my lesson one day from an unruly donkey,” he recounted. “We had been taking turns climbing up and down its back and when my chance came I jumped on and the donkey bolted into a nearby thornbush. It bent its head, trying to unseat me, which it did, but not before the thorns had pricked and scratched my face, embarrassing me in front of my friends. Like the people of the East, Africans have a highly developed sense of dignity, or what the Chinese call ‘face.’ I had lost face among my friends. Even though it was a donkey that unseated me, I learned that to humiliate another person is to make him suffer an unnecessarily cruel fate. Even as a boy, I defeated my opponents without dishonoring them.” (1994:10)

There is something poignant about a child’s orientation to dignity. Many victims of violence have stated they made particular commitments about how they would be in the world after experiencing the degradation of violence. And, it is clear that those harmed by violence appreciate receiving positive social responses, such receiving kindness, swift effective services and being believed, after disclosing violence (Richardson & Wade, 2008). Upholding the dignity of the person is a crucial ingredient when responding to disclosures of violence.

Almqvist & Broberg (1999) have illustrated the importance for well-being of positive social responses after experiencing earlier violence. They write:

refugee children's adaptation is the result of a complex process involving several interacting risk and protective factors. For many refugee children, current life circumstances in receiving host countries, such as peer relationships and exposure to bullying, are of equal or greater importance than previous exposure to organized violence" (1999: 723).

Positive social responses are related to dignity and often to the social justice and acceptance found in the social world. As an organizing principle for human service work, dignity is often found in the literature of human rights and end of life care but seldom is it seen in the writings of psychological, social work and psychiatric professions. Dignity relates to spirit, sovereignty and the ability to choose and to self-govern. It relates to allotting someone the maximum personal freedom within the bounds of their needs for care. We can attend to the dignity of the person across the lifespan, **DRAFT - DO NOT CIRCULATE BEYOND THIS COURSE** paying attention to the needs of the person at particular moments in their life trajectory. Within an Indigenous perspective, dignity relates to respect and refraining from telling other people what to do (Brant, 1999). It is a holistic concept (See Richardson, the medicine wheel of responses and resistance) involving the mind/intellect, the body, feelings/emotions, and spirit. In various non-western cultures and spiritual traditions, paying attention to the heart as the centre of love is prioritized over attention to the brain, which is currently popular in the psychological fields. At the centre of response-based practice lies the understanding that when dignity is affronted, it constitutes a humiliation that must be restored, and preferably in the same context/situation where the affront took place. Colonialism is the possibly the greatest humiliation of an entire people and, therefore, most of human service work in Canada should be organized around addressing

this gross humiliation of Indigenous people by the Canadian government, churches and by helping professionals. (See Islands of Safety, Richardson & Wade, 2010).

Children who are affronted, humiliated, singled out, publically reprimanded tend to respond in fulsome ways. A temper tantrum can be seen as a form of civil disobedience, with the child refusing to participate in the adult's plan or pace. Social responses to mothers and children in public places are often negative and this awareness on the part of the child often creates stress for the child as they participate in the social world. Stores (corporate capitalism) tempt small children with sweets, sugar, non-food products, both through placing them at eye-level in stores and through advertising campaigns aimed at children as consumers. Many children do not have the social power to negotiate these forces; humiliated parents are often pressured to capitulate to capitalism and leave a store quickly when a distressed child makes other adults uncomfortable. Children often feel disconnected from practices that make no sense and respond to them with the entirety of their being. We will discuss children's resistance to violence and various forms of oppression or mistreatment, but first present an overview of a response-based framework.

Kayla was only 6 years old, but she described clearly knowing “what to do”.

There was danger in her house, and her “first job” was to find her younger sister and tuck her safely under the bed with some toys to keep her distracted. Kayla intentionally found toys that made a lot of noise, so that her sister wouldn't hear the sounds coming from the rest of the house. Then, bravely, Kayla headed straight for the danger. She describes this as her ‘2nd job’. It wasn't the first time she saw her dad choking her mom right there in the kitchen, and screaming in her face. Kayla stood in the doorway and started to sing the familiar song from

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‘Barney’ that she knew could save her mom...”I love you, you love me, we’re a happy family...”. Her dad let go of her mom’s throat and crumbled into a heap on the floor. Kayla took her crying mom’s hand and led her to the bedroom with her sister. Subsequently, on a referral form for counselling Kayla was listed as a “child who witnessed violence”.

Overlien and Hyden (2009) found: When Simon’s parents start “fighting about something”, Simon “close his ears”. When the therapists ask him to explain what that means, he says ” I try not to care”. Trying to distance oneself from the violence, for example by trying not to hear is a common strategy used by children who have experienced domestic violence (Lee, 2004, Ornduff & Monahan 1999). Turning on loud music could also be a way for Simon to distance himself from the violence. Such coping by avoidance is, in fact, one of the most common ways for people to deal with stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991).

Eva and Elsa can be described as choosing a problem-focused strategy, in spite of being extremely scared, and trying to find a safe place for their mother, i.e. the neighbors. Worrying about the mother and finding ways to help her to be safe were also common strategies used by the children in the study of Mullender et al. (2002). McGee (2000) states that one strategy used by the 54 children in her study was to intervene physically between the mother and the father; another was to find ways to protect their mother, their siblings and themselves. Using their own physical presence to stop the violence was a strategy also found by Hester & Radford (1996) in their qualitative research on children and domestic violence.

It isn't common for a 17-year-old boy to refer himself to counselling, wait for 6 weeks for an opening, and then walk through the doors alone for his first appointment. When Regan sat down, he spread himself across the couch and looked as if he was doing his best to look as dark and foreboding as possible. He spent the first part of our time together talking about school, his friends, and the apartment that he had recently moved into alone. I asked him about his reasons for making this appointment, waiting for so long for the day to arrive, and then taking 2 buses to get here; I told him that it must be important. Regan looked me in the eye and said, "I've attempted suicide 117 times". My response was not guided by his words or his dark appearance, but rather by the vibrancy in his eyes when he spoke. I replied, "What is it that makes you want to live so much"? At that point, his face lit up with a grin and he swung his legs off the couch, leaning forward to look at me even more closely. "You're looking at the product of joint custody gone bad. All my life, my parents have been fucking with me...one week here and one week there...I wasn't even allowed to take my own clothes back and forth, and they fought over me all the time. They would each literally grab one of my arms and pull. I've never wanted to die. The suicide attempts have been my way of fucking with them."

When children have a sense of injustice; they will resist. When they feel powerless in decisions that affect their lives; they will resist. When youth feel their dignity is threatened; they will resist (Bonnah, 2008). Once the construct of *depression* is reformulated as *oppression*, the corresponding behaviours can be viewed as understandable acts of resistance rather than symptoms of illness. Regan went on to describe his suicide attempts as his way of asking, and then shouting "STOP". As his attempts became more and more lethal and the oppression that he experienced continued,

Regan decided that his risk of dying had become too high. Resisting his circumstances had proven to be ineffective in changing them, and therefore he decided to find another way to survive. This led to his decision to work full-time hours while completing grade 12, and move into an apartment on his own. Regan was seeking counselling because now, on his terms, he wanted his parents back in his life. He loved them.

Background to Response-Based Ideas

Response-based ideas arose from direct service with people who had endured violence and mistreatment, including Indigenous women and men who were violated in the so-called residential schools (Coates, Todd and Wade 2000; Nelson and Richardson 2007; Wade 1997, 2000 and 2007). Response-based practitioners pay attention the ways that victims invariably resist violence and other forms of oppression, overtly or covertly, depending on the circumstances. (Coates, Todd and Wade 2004, 2003; Todd and Wade 1994; Wade 1997, 2000, Bannah, 2008). Engaging clients in conversations that elucidate and honour their resistance in context can be helpful in addressing a wide variety of concerns (Epston 1986; Kelly 1988; Richardson 2005; Todd and Wade 1994; Wade 1997 and 2000). This required a significant shift in theory and practice, however. Acts of resistance are *responses to violence*, not *effects* or *impacts of violence*. Focusing on victims' responses allowed us to better identify and construct accounts of their resistance. Accounts of resistance provide a basis in fact for contesting accounts of pathology and passivity, which are typically used to blame victims.

Coates (1996) integrated response-based practice with a program of critical analysis and research on the connection between violence and language (Coates and Wade 2007). Richardson (2003 2004 2005) applied response-based ideas to her work on

the development of Métis identity and developed the “Medicine Wheel of Resistance” as a framework for understanding Indigenous resistance to colonization, racism and oppression. And, we are currently developing and testing a model of child protection practice that integrates response-based ideas with Richardson’s research and direct service work and with other recent work in the field, such as the solution-focused Three Houses approach to talking with children (Weld & Greening 2004). We want to avoid replicating dominance, such as colonialism and various forms of structural violence that already cause great disruption for families in Canada.

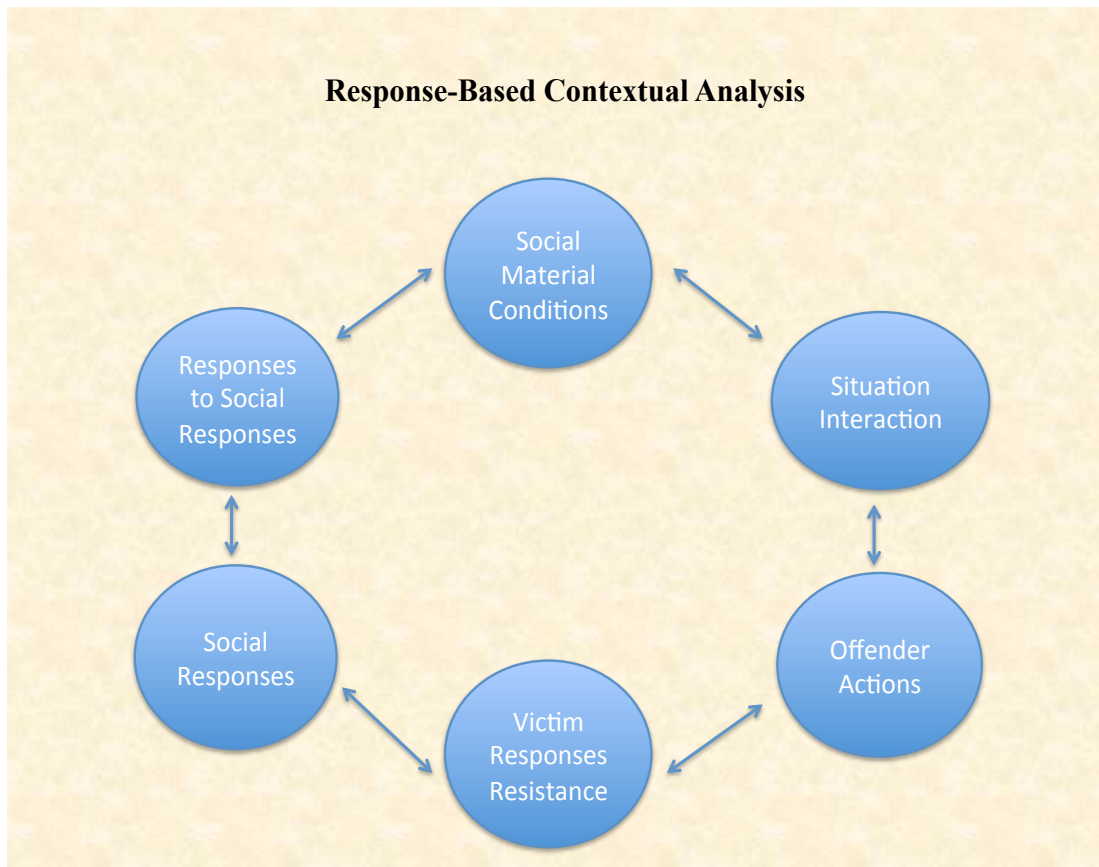
The European cultures that gave us the prison camps called residential schools and the other mechanisms of colonial domination also gave us the talking cure and the human service professions. Naturally, then, the discourses of colonialism and the helping professions would reflect common lines of thought and action. This is arguably most **DRAFT - DO NOT CIRCULATE BEYOND THIS COURSE** evident where the problem of violence is concerned. Many of the linguistic devices that make up colonial discourse, such as stereotypical images, euphemisms, passive and agentless grammatical forms, mutualizing terms, deterministic metaphors, appear widely in the discourses of the legal and human service professions, and serve similar functions (Coates and Wade 2007). Victims are represented as passive individuals who invite or unconsciously desire the violence they endure, while perpetrators are portrayed as hapless individuals who are compelled to violate others by forces they do not understand and cannot control. Unilateral acts of violence, from genocide to rape to wife-assault, are portrayed as mutual acts for which the victims are substantially to blame (Coates 1996). These misrepresentations promote a host of negative social responses to victims,

especially those who already face multiple forms of oppression (Andrews and Brewin 1990; Andrews, Brewin and Rose 2003; Justice Institute of BC 2007).

When the behaviour of children does not align with the expectations of adults, similar negative social responses can be observed. These expectations are largely formed from developmental psychology, which adopts a linear view to indicate ‘normal’ maturation and growth, social and personality development, moral development, language and cognition, and psychobiology. These models share the assumption of individual responsibility for development in a social world, aiming to predict, “what the child is, does and what it will do next” (Burman, 2008, p. 6). Absent from consideration is the context within which a child is responding to, the social responses he or she receives, and their cultural, historical and political circumstances. ‘Childhood’ becomes a subjective and ideological idea that is rooted in developmental psychology, and often preceded with the words ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’ as a way of making deficits show up as possible. When young people respond to, and resist violence or oppression, their actions defy the predictability of ‘child development’ models. Their physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual responses cannot be categorized as normal or abnormal; rather under careful scrutiny they become understandable. Frequently, what they do and think is not ‘child-like’ at all; in the absence of any other explanation, they are often described as a child with an ‘old soul’. Managing violent situations often draws on a child’s spiritual strength and orientation due to the serious nature of the task. When we explore the child’s actions in context, we get an increased sense of the intelligence, aplomb and wherewithal behind their responses. The following model maps the conceptual

framework used in response-based practice for understanding action, behavior and for guiding the information-gathering or therapeutic interview process.

Response-Based Contextual Analysis



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When considering how to assist a child in the context of the helping professions, it is important to pay attention to these influences: The Social Material Conditions, The Situation Interaction, Offender actions, Victim Responses and Resistance, the Social

responses and the Responses to the social responses. We will demonstrate this framework through the presentation of a case study below.

Positive Social Responses During and After Disclosure are Crucial

The social responses that children receive when they disclose violence are important and directly relevant for their well-being. A positive social response is a quick and effective response that stops the violence, makes the child safe, does not devastate the family, and restores the child's faith in adults/authority figures. This type of social response shows the child that they matter, that the world can be good. Researchers (Andrews, Brewin and Rose 2003; Andrews and Brewin 1990; Fromuth 1986) have documented that people who disclose violence often receive a negative social response from family, friends and professionals. Negative social responses are linked to long-term suffering, mental health diagnoses, depression, suicidal ideation, and are experienced more frequently by women than men. As helpers, we can orchestrate positive social responses to children who disclose violence.

It is important that we, as workers, take care of our own emotional well-being or "spiritual pain" caused by the lack of social justice in our communities. Creating teams for mutual support and witnessing each other's struggles promotes sustainability in the work. It is the stories of resistance and responses that energize us with their inspiration and insights to the human spirit. Children demonstrate great courage in dealing with situations that should be well beyond their years. Male intimate partner violence is often directed at the bond between the mother and child. Statistics show that the majority of violence in families is male to female and that women are more likely to be killed, hospitalized, seriously injured or to be diagnosed with a mental illness after experiencing

spousal violence. Women are also more likely to be sexually assaulted by their partners, along with being physically assaulted (this is not true for men). According to (METRAC Sexual Assault Statistic Sheet, 2002)

- 30 to 40 % of children who witness the violence/abuse towards their mom experience direct violence/abuse themselves.
- Children and youth accounted for 61% of sexualized assault cases reported to a subset of 94 police departments
- The rate of sexualized assault for girls and women with developmental disabilities is four times the national average (Razack, 1994)
- Over half of the women in British Columbia have experienced physical or sexualized violence since the age of 16. That is more than one million women in this province.

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Being an Ally to Children

Finally, in our work as social workers and therapists, we can be an ally to children. We can strive to work anti-oppressively which means becoming more attuned to the various forms of oppression against children and youth in our society. It means learning about the prison camps that contained Indigenous children and robbed their freedom so that we do not replicate similar practices in the context of education, child welfare or mental health services. Community activist and therapist Vikki Reynolds' (2008) has articulated a helpful process for "walking alongside" in an article "The Role of Allies in Anti-Violence Work. We can integrate an analysis of the oppression of children in such

models and honour their experience of responding to violence as evidence of their capacity to act, care and reflect as spirited beings.

Bios

Cathy Richardson is a Metis family therapist, researcher, child welfare advocate and activist. Her Cree name is Kinewesquao. She has been a faculty member at the University of Victoria in the School of Social Work and has recently begun her work as an Associate Professor at the University of Montreal. She has developed the “Islands of Safety” child and family safety planning model for Metis Community Services in Victoria, B.C. She writes about Metis identity, well-being and responses to violence and mistreatment. Cathy is the co-founder of the Centre for Response-Based practice and is interested in violence, resistance, language and restoration in contexts of social justice.

She works with Aboriginal survivors of residential child internment and community violence prevention in the north. She is currently exploring the ways that children resist adversity and the ways that workers can help children find a sense of connection and belonging in child welfare settings. She is an Associate Professor at the Université de Montréal and a mother of three children.

Shelly Bonnah, MA, is the Chief Operating Officer & Clinical Director for a multi-service organization in the Interior of British Columbia. Shelly is also a training consultant with the Centre for Response-Based Practice, and an instructor in the Master of Counselling Program with City University of Seattle. In addition to a strong organizational focus, her work includes direct client work with both victims and perpetrators of violence, including extensive work with children. She is the author of *Profiles of Resistance; A Response-Based Approach with Youth in Care* and has co-

written *Who Am I & Where Do I Belong? A Resource for Professionals Working in the Foster Care System* with former youth in care, Derek Clark.

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