

Abstract

I have found that when young people begin to acknowledge their own history of responses to, and resistance against violence an awareness of their pre-existing capacities takes precedence over a focus on deficiencies. There is liberation in the knowledge that they are active rather than passive agents, and did not ask for, nor deserve violence.

To neglect the full range of contextual and interactional details surrounding violence is to risk completely misunderstanding the child. Theories or assessments which do not take into account the context of a young person who has suffered, particularly violence of human design, will likely become part of the dominant discourse that blame and pathologize youths. The consequence of theories that assume the experience of violence is not important have a direct impact on the social responses that young people receive from professionals, family members, and their other important social relationships. Further, such omissions tend to benefit perpetrators and create less safety for young people over all. A more fulsome explanation of what this means will be provided throughout this thesis.

Another issue of concern when working with youth is that dominantly, professionals and members of society use language that minimizes violence and abuse. For example, we call harassment and assault “bullying” which minimizes the representation of violence as well as the harm done to the victim. We use language for sexualized assault such as “date-rape,” which presents the motive of rape as somehow connected to romance, as if it was a simple misunderstanding rather than a calculated attack. We mutualize beatings as “conflict,” which presents the victim as having a role in the conflict and being responsible for the conflict and the corresponding solution. Perpetrators of violence are often excused and victims blamed.

Through my narrative and discourse analysis of three accounts provided by young people who were victims of violence and adversity, I have demonstrated their ever-present resistance and capacities through their micro interactions with perpetrators. Victims of violence always respond and resist; at all ages (Coates & Wade, 2007; Wade, 1997). Violence is interactional—it requires at least one victim and offender. In order to understand what has occurred, a detailed account is required from each person, inclusive of the social responses that were received. This research challenges the dominant discourse of victim blaming and the secondary assault of pathology, while emphasizing the Response-based and social constructionist views of interaction.