

INTERVIEWS

Dignity Is the Opposite of Violence: An Interview With Allan Wade

Mark McKergow^a, Anton Stellamans^{1b}, Cecil Walker^{2c}

¹ Il Faro, ² Solution Focused Universe

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Allan Wade, C.M., Ph.D. is co-founder of Response-Based Practice, an approach to therapy and other forms of direct service with adults and children, people who have been harmed by violence or who have committed violence, and their loved ones and community members. Allan is perhaps best known in Solution Focused circles for his article *Small Acts Of Living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and Other Forms of Oppression* (Wade, 1997). He was a keynote speaker at the EBTA 2025 conference in Roskilde, Denmark where his work was enthusiastically received. Allan was appointed to the Order of the Medal of Canada – one of the country’s highest civilian honours – in 2024.

In this interview we explore his background, his connections with Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg, Janet Bavelas and others familiar (and not so familiar) in the solution focused world, and his work in helping recognise the fundamental role of everyday resistance to violence.

Mark: How did you get into the family therapy scene?

Allan: I had been a special education teacher in the north of Canada, and I fell into youth work. I met these folks who were working with young people who’d been kicked out of school, who were fantastic. I loved the way they thought about the young people and related to them. Around the same time, I had a situation come up with a young fella (18 or 19) who I learned had been sexually abusing younger children. It was just beyond my skill set, so I called up the local mental health centre and asked if I could talk to one of the psychiatrists. (This is probably not the decision I would make today!)

It turned out we had a new psychiatrist in town, a guy called Robin Routledge, who had trained with the Milan team. He was good buddies with Luigi Boscolo and Gianfranco Cecchin. He had moved to the Cowichan Valley, the traditional unceded territory of Quw’utzun First Nation, where I

^a Mark McKergow is director of the Centre for Solutions Focus at Work, Edinburgh, Scotland, and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*. Email mark@sfwork.com

^b Anton Stellamans works as a Solution-Focused coach, trainer and facilitator at Ilfaro, Belgium. He is a member of the SFIO board, and an editor at the *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*. Email anton.stellamans@ilfaro.be.

^c Cecil Walker is a solution focused researcher and practitioner in Atlanta, GA and has a private practice in Atlanta where he sees teens, young adults, and families. Email cecilrw@gmail.com.

live on Vancouver Island. I ended up talking to him about this situation, and I went away in a kind of a trance. Something interesting had happened, I had no idea what it was. I'm not so sure it was helpful with the matter at hand, but it certainly intrigued me. So I went back for a coffee with him, and then a couple of friends got involved, and Robin initiated a group in about 1983-84, which we ended up calling the Orcas Society.

We were studying systemic thinking and systemic practice. We became a non-profit society in British Columbia, and then over the next seven or eight years, we invited Luigi and Gianfranco came several times, and did week-long congressos on this remote ramshackle inn on Shawnigan Lake. The doors to the hotel rooms didn't even lock, which freaked some of the women from New York out! Lynn Hoffman came a couple of times, and Michael White, and Imelda McCarthy and Nollaig Byrne, and Alan Jenkins and Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, and Bonnie Burstow, a Canadian radical feminist therapist. We ended up having quite a number of really interesting people come over time to our tiny little town. It was a fantastic group of people, and still exists in an altered form 30-some years later.

The other thing that happened pretty quickly was I had just finished a master's degree in human development, and I'd become really interested in Antonio Ferreira's work and I did a thesis on family myths. And, at the end of that thesis in about 1990, I happened to meet a woman called Janet Beavin Bavelas, co-author of *Pragmatics of Human Communication*. I was in the library reading an article in *Family Process*, and I read at the bottom of the article that Dr. Bavelas was at the University of Victoria, which is where I was sitting! So, I walked over to the psychology department and knocked on her door, and it was her. And then a year later, I was in a PhD programme in microanalysis.

My colleague Dan McGee joined the same programme, so now suddenly we had a group of researchers studying social interaction from the standpoint of microanalysis, along with a group of people working as therapists and human service providers studying family therapy. So those things came together in a really interesting, creative way.

We invited people who came to do training to come and attend a research seminar at the University of Victoria. And so, in return for coming to our area to teach for a very low fee they also agreed, for no fee whatsoever, to come to our research training day, in which the students could talk about the research that they were doing, interactive gestures, close call stories, experimenter-subject interaction, and other projects. And then share their work with these extraordinary therapists. So that created a very rich context, thanks initially to the Orcas Society.

Then I found my way into private practice doing family therapy, holding hands with my good friend Dan McGee - both of us underqualified and completely terrified!

Anton: You mentioned that you made the decision to see a psychiatrist,

and you also said you wouldn't do that now.

Allan: Now I might seek out Imelda McCarthy, or I might seek out my colleagues Shelly Dean, or Cathy Richardson, who have family therapy backgrounds. And at the time, I knew I had a really serious problem on my hands, a serious matter that I needed to manage in a good way, and my thinking was that the people who know the most about this are psychiatrists. That's what I assumed at the time, and I wouldn't make the same assumption now, particularly when you're considering the problem of violence.

So I started to get involved in cases of violence. I worked then in child protection briefly, I worked in an addictions clinic, and in each of those kinds of situations, you see people who, if you get to know them, will talk to you about different experiences of violence that they've faced. So that became more and more a part of my working context.

When I had been working as a special education teacher in the north of Canada, on the northwest coast, on Haida and Tsimshian First Nations territories, all of the kids in my class were indigenous kids. And I had no idea who they were. I was completely unprepared. I had no idea who I was to them. I had no idea that all of their parents had been abducted from their families and put into prison camps that we euphemistically called 'residential schools'. I had really no idea about the colonial context, or my role in what Orwell called 'the dirty work of empire'.

And then, coming back down to the south on Vancouver Island, where I now live, and then meeting more indigenous people as colleagues, who kindly took me under their wing, and then seeing indigenous families as clients, I began to learn a lot more about the connections between the many different forms of interpersonal violence, and try to come to terms with the colonial context in which I work and live, then and now. And, the role of psychiatry and psychotherapy as an instrument of colonial practice.

So my colleague Nick Todd and I wrote a paper about this in 1994 called *Domination, Deficiency and Psychotherapy* (Todd & Wade, 1994) in which we talked about "The Colonial Code of Relationship": Part one: I am proficient, white, heterosexual, male, wealthy, educated, European. Part two, you are deficient, non-white, female, queer, poor, indigenous, etc, etc. Therefore, part three, I have the right to perform certain operations upon you - diagnosis, prescription, education, theft of your children, theft of your land... for your own good.

I became very curious, how is it that I could be this kind of white middle-class, educated dude in the north of Canada with a whole bunch of indigenous kids in my class, and I have no clue. Not a clue. So, I went back to my high school history textbook to try to learn a little bit more about how my quite impressive ignorance had been produced.

I began to see that I was the product of a highly successful colonial education. And that took me into Edward Said and critical discourse analysis, family therapy, social interaction from an inductive point of view, and also

then trying to understand violence in the colonial context. I think I was bouncing around with all of these things, and talking to all my buddies in the Orcas society, and then trying to figure out how to do therapy with these sensibilities in the background, so to speak.

Mark: This is moving us towards your *Small Acts Of Living* paper (Wade, 1997). Could you tell us a bit how that paper came about, please?

Allan: My colleague Dan McGee and I had met Steve de Shazer, because Steve used to live in Victoria, which is very close to where I live, for a period of time, before he moved to the States. We contacted him wondering if he would want to do a training with us up here. Dan and I met him in our town, Duncan, and walked around Cowichan Bay with him, and he said in his inimitable way (*does SdS voice*) “yeah, yeah, you know, I could do a show for you”. We were so put off by that kind of way of talking, because we were so earnest and so sincere, and... “do a show”? What? That just seemed so flippant! So we ended up not inviting him.

And then, a couple years later, we invited Insoo. She agreed and then, a week before she came, she said “Would it be okay if Steve came?”. It was like, you know, you invited Joni Mitchell to do a concert, and she said, do you mind if Neil Young comes along? So then they both came, and they did a really a great conference, very well attended. And then after that, we invited them to the research seminar that I mentioned earlier.

I did a 15-minute talk on resistance, and what I was learning about how people resist violence of various kinds, and trying to integrate that in my practice of therapy. After the talk, Steve said (*SdS voice*) “Well, that’s kind of interesting”. Which I learned later was high praise, coming from him. And then a week later, I got a call from Insoo. She said, “there’s a conference called Therapeutic Conversations 3 happening in Denver, Colorado, and I’ve put you on the agenda”.

I said, how am I gonna get to Denver? I don’t have any money, I’ve got five kids, I’m doing a PhD, my wife’s working full-time, I’m broke. She said, “well, you’re gonna have to find the money, because if you don’t, I’m gonna have to lend it to you, and you don’t want that”.

So she put me on the agenda, and she informed a lot of really interesting people that I would be doing this training. The way that the building was set up, they had these really beautiful big rooms up top where all of the well-known presenters would present, and then they had rooms in the basement - you know, where you hide the canned goods and all that kind of stuff. So that’s where I was. But she packed the room, and one of the people that came along was Imelda McCarthy, whose work I’d always really admired.

Imelda came up to me at the end of the talk, we had a great conversation about it. It turned out that Imelda had just 2-3 months earlier, been held captive in her house in Dublin by a guy who broke in, a drug user. And he held her captive on her own, her partner was out. And, this, of course,

had been really troubling her, so she attended the talk with her buddy Ernst Salomon, the Swedish family therapist. They went to the bar later, they had a drink, and Ernst interviewed her along the lines I suggested. And then a couple of years later or so, she invited me to Dublin, and I did that again in Dublin in front of her students. She said it just really changed her whole experience of the event in a very useful way. She wrote a paper about it (McCarthy, 2010).

So, the talk at TC3 went really well, and then after that Insoo and Steve got in touch and told me that I was doing a paper for Contemporary Family Therapy. So I said “Oh, okay.” So that became *Small Acts of Living*. And one of the nice things about that was that Harry Korman wrote a paper that I love for the same issue of the journal (Korman, 1997) in which he, gave the example of the tailor, trying to fit the person to the suit instead of the other way around. That analogy has always stayed with me. Anyway, beautiful paper, and that was my introduction to Harry’s work.

The next thing that happened after that was, I got an invitation to come to Bruges, to the 1997 EBTA conference. I had a chance to talk about *Small Acts of Living* and what I was trying to do. It was really the first time I had the sense of meeting the broader solution-focused community, which was absolutely wonderful. I was really impressed by the community vibe. And I met Brian Cade, and hung out a little bit with Steve and Insoo and Harry and Michael Durrant, and all kinds of interesting people.

So Steve and Insoo really opened a whole set of possibilities for me that would not have opened otherwise. And one of the wonderful things about it is for that, they expected no loyalty. There was no quid pro quo expected. It was just “we think this is interesting and useful, so we want to try to create a space for you to go out and...”, so I wasn’t expected to be loyal or join a community or a fan club, or anything like that. Which I also really respected and appreciated.

Mark: Could you say a little bit about what these small acts of living are about, and how they’re important please? For new readers...

Allan: Well, I’ve always been a fan of sociologist Erving Goffman, and when I was doing microanalysis, micro-sociology, you’re trying to look at social interaction from an inductive point of view, which I think is very consistent with solution-focused practice, in my humble opinion. Anyway, I came across a book called *Asylums* (Goffman, 1961).

The book that phrase, “the extreme situations have a great deal to teach us, not so much as regards the grander forms of loyalty and treachery, as regards the small acts of living”. His book is essentially, an ethnography of incarcerated mental patient’s responses to the conditions of their incarceration. In the context of a mental hospital, was just the right thing to read at that moment. He really highlighted the significance of small actions.

So, for me, studying social interaction inductively, microanalysis, is based on the same set of assumptions, about small actions in a particular context. In a context of ongoing violence, incarceration, for Indigenous people, it could be in the context of the residential schools. Or if you're held up in an armed robbery or a rape, small actions in the context of ongoing violence often have tremendous importance. And, you know, when you have a gun pointed at your chest, where you look, what you say with your eyes could be the difference between life and death.

And so, small actions mean a great deal. So I took that very seriously, and then because I was doing therapy at the time, when I was meeting with people who were talking about violence, I just started asking different questions. I was grappling with the distinction between cause and effect. Much of therapy, as you know, was really about helping people overcome the effects or the impacts of violence. And I began to see that as a highly deterministic language that presupposed the person was passive in relation to the violence itself.

Nick Todd and I wrote about this later on (Todd & Wade, 2003), and how the context of ongoing social interaction, humans are responsive to one another. So, I began to ask questions about, you know, "when you saw that he was getting crazy and yelling at you and your kids... In that moment, how did you respond? Do you remember? What did you do?" Just that simple question, and then I began to hear accounts that were radically different than what I had heard before and what I anticipated, and also radically different from what I was reading in the mental health field.

I began to try to get in touch with the literature of resistance. There's a wonderful book by Barbara Harlow (1987) called *Resistance Literature*, and I began to read, James Scott (1990), *Domination in the Arts of Resistance*, lots of other work, work by feminists, Liz Kelly, work by anti-colonial activists, work by Black American writers. Zora Neale Hurston became very important to me at that time, especially the short story "Sweat" (in *The Complete Stories of Zora Neale Hurston*, 2008). The Harlem and Caribbean resistance movements, Aime Cesaire, Franz Fanon, Claude McKay. Writers who were writing about resistance in different ways, different contexts, became very much my literature.

What I found was, when you created space in the context of therapy for a person to talk a little bit about how they responded, what they did, you began to see it's not that women learn to be helpless, it's that they learn they will not be helped. It's not that you don't have boundaries, it's that he didn't respect them. When you see resistance, these kind of cliché explanations we have of oppressed people, that are throughout psychology and psychiatry, and history, and even political studies . . . These kinds of cliché arguments we have or framings of oppressed people, they just begin to fall apart like a house of cards. And so I began to figure out how to take apart those kinds of explanations while talking with a person in very ordinary language.

Mark: When you were in Roskilde at the EBTA conference, you were

speaking about dignity. How do you use this concept in your work? It really struck me as important.

Allan: Initially, although Goffman and many other people wrote about dignity, it's not something that I picked up. One of my close colleagues, Dr. Cathy Richardson, who is a Metis scholar and activist and family therapist, would always stress the importance of understanding dignity. I suppose there's a number of different sides to it. One is that arguably, all forms of violence are a humiliation of dignity. The humiliation of the person, the humiliation of equal dignity. And so, responding to people who've been subjected to violence, it follows that one must pay attention to their basic human dignity, and work with them in such a way. And honestly, that's one of the things I love about solution-focused therapy, is that adopting practice based on the view that people actually already know quite a bit and already know quite a bit about what they want and how to get there. And they can tell you that, if you just ask good questions. I think that's a dignifying framework.

So it's not a psychoeducational approach, we're not assuming any sorts of deficits. We're assuming that people have certain capacities. And that we can locate those capacities actually quite directly and easily in context, has also helped a great deal over the years.

When I say dignity, I mean what we would call equal dignity. I don't mean the dignity of the Queen! I don't mean that sort of classist view of dignity, or the dignity accorded to really wealthy people when they pull up at the hotel, and people run out obsequiously to get the luggage. I don't mean they could have false dignity accorded on the basis of power. I mean the kind of equal dignity that everybody understands, you know? When someone says hello to you in the lineup at the coffee shop, and you don't quite know who they are, but they want to chat, well, you know, you have a chat, don't you? You don't just turn your back on people. And it's interesting to me that children understand. Children can experience humiliation at a very young age. So they understand dignity procedurally, as Emde and Harre (1991) would say, long before understanding it cognitively.

I understand dignity as a highly social achievement as well as a spiritual social principle. So our view is that we need to ask questions, work with people in a way that upholds their basic human dignity, and that includes people who've committed violence. So, the way in which we work with people who've committed violence also very much reflects a focus on equal dignity.

Mark: It strikes me that in SF we don't talk about dignity a great deal, but it is important. It's almost an underpinning thing.

Cecil: I think you're right, Mark, that it's there, and this seems to coagulated into a concept, which is really fascinating. Allan, having

studied microanalysis, is there a difference on the language level of a therapeutic approach like SF that captures that dignity? Is there something present there that you've observed that is different than other forms that might not have this underpinning of dignity?

Allan: Yeah, I think the basic approach of asking people what they want, assuming that they will have some ideas about what they want, and how they'll know they're getting there, and if, you know, being all the way there is a 10, where are you at now? I'm at a 4. OK, how did you get to 4? Asking questions about how people manage to achieve positive change, even in the tiniest bits. To me, all of those are dignifying questions, because they assume competence, capacity.

I see that as a core principle, and a core practice. It's the opposite of humiliation, so to speak, which is... to me, if you're suffering, and you sit down with someone, and they assume that you don't know what you're doing, and that you need to be told what to do. I find that quite humiliating. It's a deceptively important principle... and it's language we don't use very often, as you're pointing out, Mark, that we don't use the term dignity. It's kind of like the water the fish does not see. I mean, you don't really talk about it until it's gone. And then, of course, it means a great deal.

I'd also say that dignity is the opposite of violence, not peace. If you're looking to address the different forms of interpersonal violence, I think being mindful of the theme of dignity, and not only us acting in ways that are dignifying of other people, we hope, but noticing what the people we work for have already always been doing to preserve and reassert their own basic human dignity and the dignity of others.

So there's those two levels, I suppose. It concerns our practice, but the other, for me, possibly more important, concerns noticing what people have already been doing. Because even people who don't speak about dignity, act in accordance with what we might call dignity very effectively all the time. And it's kind of funny how the concept doesn't get talked about that much.

Anton: I was thinking of Steve's article, *The Death of Resistance* (De Shazer, 1984). It has a link with your work, but it's resistance in a different way. But there he stresses the importance of viewing solution-focused therapy as cooperation. He uses a beautiful image – you have to be on the same side of the net as your client. You're not telling them what to do, you're not diagnosing them. So, for me, there's the dignity in respecting the alterity of the other as the expert on their own lives.

Allan: Yeah, absolutely. I feel the same way about it. And also, there's the focus in solution-focused, and in our work as well, of using ordinary, everyday language, that people can understand. Try to work in a way that's free of mental health jargon as much as possible. You have to deal with that jargon when the client brings it in because they've been told they have certain types

of issues in a mental health jargony way. But, yeah, we try to use plain language so that our work is accessible to the most people possible – and to break down the classism that is too often found in professional service encounters.

Mark: You describe your work these days as Response-Based Practice, which I think is a social and contextual approach - like solution-focused. Could you just say a little bit about that for our readers?

Allan: Well, I tried to find a more confusing, obscure name for our practice, but I couldn't think of one, so I coined this phrase. I guess the distinction between the language of effects and the language of responses is key for us. I think that's kind of the core distinction.

It's also a distinction I don't think is made nearly clear enough in our collective work. It is discussed sometimes, like in your paper on the mereological fallacy, Mark (Dierolf & McKergow, 2009).

We'd also incorporated a lot of work on critical analysis on the connection between violence and language. So, for example, my colleague Linda Coates wrote about the distinction between mutual actions and unilateral actions (Coates & Wade, 2004, 2007). We essentially had created a set of basic tenets: where there is violence, people resist. Resistance is a response. Violence is unilateral, not mutual. Dignity is central to individual and collective well-being. Violence is with rare exceptions deliberate. I thought I needed to wrap some kind of term around those core tenets. And unfortunately, I chose response-based practice. (*Grins*)

When I was talking with Kate Alexander a few years ago, she was then the head of child protection for the state of New South Wales in Australia, which has a child protection jurisdiction of about 8.5 million people, one of the largest child protection jurisdictions in the world. She was talking about using response-based practice in their child protection system. I said, well, whatever you do, don't call it response-based practice. I mean, number one, that's a brand. Number two, it doesn't make any sense. So, she said, how about dignity-driven practice? I said, I like that phrase. It has something to offer. So, had I to do it again, that might be the phrase.

Kate has done some extraordinary work in promoting more contextual and dignified institutional responses to people who have faced violence, including an essay entitled "Sorry", which was published in the 2018 (Alexander, 2018).

Mark: You've worked with Indigenous people over a long period. Could you say a bit about what's important in that work for you?

Allan: Starting in 1985 or 1986 or so, I met with Indigenous women, largely colleagues, who were in leadership positions. I was interested in better understanding the context of the residential schools, the mechanics of colonialism in Canada and abroad. I would have conversations with

colleagues about their experiences, for example, in the ‘residential schools’. And at the same time, I began to meet with more clients, Indigenous people, who themselves or their parents had been abducted and placed in the residential schools, and suffered other forms of violence through Canadian public institutions. There’s a great deal of racism toward Indigenous people in the context of child protection practice in Canada. There are 13 times more Indigenous children are in care than is their representation in the general population in the country. Those were the first accounts of resistance that I really heard.

So, for example, my colleague Ann Maje Raider, who is the Executive Director of the Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society in Yukon, Kaska Dena folks in the southeastern part of the Yukon, she tells the story of being a nine-year-old girl in the context of one of the prison camps, and how in the mornings the nuns would take the urine-soaked sheets of some of the girls who wet their bed and wrap them around the girls’ heads, and they would stay there all day, walking around with urine-soaked sheets around their heads. And then they would parade all the other girls past them. Ann says that, even at the time, she knew that this was their effort to get the rest of us to humiliate those girls. And it was a warning: “If you wet your bed, you see what’s gonna happen to you”. So she said that they understood that, even though they never talked about it. So what they did is they all refused to look at those girls, they just looked away.

So there she is, telling a story of how 8, 9-year-old girls protected the dignity of girls who were being publicly humiliated. To me, that’s an extraordinary kind of an account to hear. I asked Ann “Can you say a little bit more about how is it that 8-, 9-year-old girls know to do this?” Which I think is a very solution-focused question, in a way. And, she said, well, it’s our culture. It’s Dene Au’ Nazen. It’s what our ancestors gave us before we came here. It’s the equivalent of the word “dignity” in English, except that it’s much more comprehensive. It means the right relations between the land, the animals, the water, the stars, the earth, the ancestors, and six generations of grandchildren to come. It’s a much more comprehensive notion than the English term dignity. An analogy would be Mana for Maori in Aotearoa - New Zealand.

So she locates the origins of resistance, the understanding of dignity in culture and language, oddly not in a psychotherapy textbook. (*Grins*) So when you’re asking questions about how children know to do these things, you just hear these kinds of accounts. And when Ann told that story in public, another Indigenous elder called Shirley Lord spoke up, and she described how she’d never thought about it before, but when she was in the prison camp, they used to separate the siblings, so older siblings were not allowed to visit their younger siblings. And if they did, the church authorities would torture the younger siblings. She describes how they had doors that would slide shut between the dormitories, so her younger sister would be sleeping in one dormitory, she would be sleeping in another, and then how

in the middle of the night they would get up, and there was a little hole in the corner underneath one of the doors, and they would reach their arms through, and they would hold hands, and just be with each other. So again, that's understandable as a form of love, dignity, resistance . . . all of those things and so much more.

And then, you inquire about, how is it that they knew to do this? Where does this kind of thing come from? And where people then go is to talk about other ways in which they resisted violence, other ways in which they tried to be together. And now you're constructing an account of resistance to violence, not the effects or the impacts of violence, not pathologies or deficits, and the account of resistance, and this is a point I should stress more fully. Once you begin to develop an account of ongoing resistance, you also begin to see the violence much more clearly. Because all forms of violence are predicated on the assumption that the victim will resist.

So people who perpetrate armed robberies, gang beatings, purse snatchings, sexualized assaults, colonial violence, genocide, they anticipate, and work to suppress the ongoing resistance of the people they victimise. When you look closely, if you don't see resistance, you then also don't see the deliberate efforts made by the perpetrator to overcome and suppress that resistance. So, to conceal resistance, in a very real sense, is to conceal violence.

That's why for us, talking about resistance is not an effort to be strength-based, it's not an effort to reframe, it's an effort to be accurate - socially, materially, contextually accurate. When you begin to see resistance, you then see violence more clearly, and that provides a better basis from which to work with people who commit violence.

Cecil: I think that last statement is very profound, and shines a light on all movements of resistance, individual or larger social movements, so thank you for that.

Anton: I've been reading about your work and listening to podcasts, Allan, and indeed, the more you pay attention to it, the more obvious it is how widespread violence is, and how important it is to take heed of that, and, notice how violence is installed in a lot of our institutions, in schools, in psychiatric hospitals, in practices. What I like about your work is that, for me, it's an act of resistance itself, against a way of talking about psychotherapy and psychiatry. It fires me up, and I think we need to do more. Is that something that you might miss, maybe, in solution-focused literature? In the solution-focused community, we know that we need to respect dignity, but are we outspoken enough?

Allan: That's a really good question, and I don't know that I have a great answer for it, but I guess for me, at a certain point in time, going quite a way back now, I began to think that violence is a very particular kind of social problem. It requires specific interventions.

Violence is also powerfully concealed by everyday and professional public discourse. So, genocide is called settlement. Prison camps for indigenous children are called residential schools - nothing to do with residences, nothing to do with schools. I think that identifying and addressing the problem of violence requires some critical analysis of public discourse and professional discourse, and the ways in which our public institutions operate.

You know, we began to learn early on that a vast majority of the people we worked with who'd been subjected to violence, if that violence was disclosed to people in public institutions - child protection, police, or other public institutions, then many people reported to us that they had profoundly negative experiences when they disclosed the violence. They weren't believed, the perpetrator was excused, etc. They were treated in a racist fashion, they were told they needed to have better boundaries, they were asked why they pick guys like that. There were all kinds of ways in which people, when they come forward, they would describe being humiliated. There's a lot of literature on this topic, on what's called social responses, by Sarah Ullman (2024) and others, for example Charuvastra and Cloitre (2008), whose work I really appreciate, particularly on sexual assault survivors, that shows that sexual assault survivors are very mindful of the possibility of being further humiliated when they disclose the violence (Coates & Wade, 2016).

And so, they tend to be very careful about who they disclose to, what language they use. You might tell one thing to your mother, but you might tell something completely different to a police officer. And when you come forward to disclose rape, sexualized violence, you risk further humiliation.

I think, getting back to your question about solution-focused, I think there is room to be more critical. I don't mean negative, but I think there's more room for critical analysis of the ways in which public institutions respond to the problem of violence. That's why we began quite a while back to do as much work as we could directly in child protection, in relation to police, in victim services, in shelters, in family law. We are involved in a variety of public institutions trying to improve the way the institution functions around the problem of violence.

For instance, in child protection, while there's arguably a solution-focused, approach to child protection under the heading Signs of Safety, the model itself contains no detailed analysis of violence and resistance. That's a problem. I'm not aware of a child protection framework that contains an adequate theory. Then if you look at language, if you look at criminal codes internationally, the problem of sexualized violence against children is talked about in criminal codes as 'sex with children'. The sexualized violence against children in Canada in our criminal code, is called 'invitation to sexual touching'. There is no invitation, there's nothing sexual about it, and it's not touching. In New Zealand, they call it 'having a sexual connection with a minor'. Well, you can't have a sexual connection with a minor, that's called rape.

When you look at criminal codes, and I've looked at 15 of them so far, they all do the same thing. They transform violence *against* children into sex *with* children. And that is the central distortion of the porn industry. I think what we find when we look is there is a collusion between public institutions and organisations that contribute to the deliberate violation of children. And that's a problem. I think we need to be critical of that, and we need to call it out publicly. Otherwise, the laws won't change.

I actually thought the organisers at the EBTA conference in Roskilde were very mindful of that. They're wanting to bring more discussion of, say, colonial violence, what that means for how you practice therapy, the connection between violence and language. Emma Holton's wonderful presentation on feminist economics, what that means for how we look at economic discourse. I think they're trying to bring a social justice-oriented perspective, to use the cliché, into a more central focus in the solution-focused community. That's my understanding, and I think they did a great job of it.

Mark: Finally, what's next for you?

Allan: Good question! I'm trying to do some writing, and I continue to do training with my colleagues Shelly Dean and Cathy Richardson, around different applications of this practice. I'm doing some consulting to other people who are using this framework in their work. So, for example, Shelly and her colleagues do a lot of work in the family law arena now, where there has been domestic violence. I know that in Denmark and Sweden, they're starting to experience an uptick in really problematic discourse used to conceal violence and shift responsibilities onto women who are trying to escape men who've been violent - like 'parental alienation syndrome'. We've been doing analysis of psychological reports, and producing expert reports, testifying as experts in that arena for quite some time now, and I think that work is important and ongoing. Shelly has been working to develop a team of colleagues who can respond effectively in the family law arena.

Cathy is doing a lot of work around child protection and indigenous folks. So we're trying to combine these activities and continue to put one foot in front of the other and see where things lead. I have to say that I was so excited to come back to Roskilde and co come to a brief therapy conference, because it's a community that I really, really value. For me, having more opportunities to be more connected to that community is wonderful. So I hope that transpires. I hope we have the chance to talk further.

Mark: Thank you very much.



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