Victims or Survivors?
Empowerment through Language and Positive Action

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Aim

Exploring the role that language plays in:

- Building identity
- Reinforcing stereotypes
- Community domain
- Service partnerships
About Jewish Care

Caring for the Jewish Community

• Est. 1848
• Based throughout Melbourne, in Victoria
• Impacting over 5,000 lives per year
• Supporting people
  • of all ages
  • who are survivors of trauma
  • with disabilities
  • in poverty
Why Language?

- Power, knowledge and discourse (Theory of M Foucault)
- Persuasion and racism
- Can unite or separate people (Glenister & Tilley, 1996)
- Critical to self, and other, concepts of worth as a moral and responsible agent (Glenister & Tilley, 1996)
- Helps position agents in relation to power struggles (Glenister & Tilley, 1996)
- “Words define a person’s world, body and (dis)abilities. They thus define the way in which this world can (or cannot) be changed through political action and by creating a group.” (Winance, 2007)


Victims or Survivors?

Common Conception of These Terms
Victims or Survivors?

Definitions

• Self as *victim* v Self as *survivor* (Ladrido-Ignacio and Perlas, 1995-6)
  • Victim → “passive and dependent”
  • Survivor → “in control of the situation”

• ‘Victim’ → dictionary meaning: individual who is attacked or harmed
  Etymology: “L. *victima*: person or animal killed as a sacrifice.”

• ‘Survivor’ → to ‘remain’ after an event
  Etymology: “L. *supervivere*: live longer than, super live.”

• Medical usage: ‘survivors’ as individuals “who have had a life-threatening disease but have remained disease free for a minimum of 5 years.”

Victims or Survivors?

Legal Ramifications

Representing Survivors and Crime Victims

Abuse Survivors and Crime Victims:

No matter what the result of a criminal prosecution might be, or even if there was no prosecution commenced at all, crime victims and abuse survivors can file civil lawsuits against offenders and other responsible parties.

A civil case is separate from a criminal case and civil courts attempt to ascertain whether an offender or a third party is liable for the injuries sustained as a result of the crime. If defendants are found civilly liable, courts may order them to pay monetary damages to victims. While money awarded in civil lawsuits can never fully compensate a victim for the trauma of victimization or the loss of a loved one, it can be a valuable resource to help crime victims rebuild their lives. Moreover, the exposure to civil liability is a powerful incentive for landlords, businesses, and other proprietors to enact the security measures necessary to prevent future victimizations.

A significant difference between the criminal and civil court systems is that in a civil case the victim controls essential decisions shaping the case. It is the victim who decides whether to sue, accept a settlement offer, or go to trial.

There are other significant differences between criminal and civil cases:

The criminal justice process begins after a crime has been committed and investigated by law enforcement. An arrest may be made and then charges filed against the offender to commence a prosecution. In a criminal prosecution, crimes are considered to be crimes against the peace and dignity of the state. The victim’s role is primarily defined as a witness for the prosecution. Although the prosecuting attorney will likely be very helpful to the victim and the victim’s family, the prosecutor ultimately represents the interests of the state, not the victim. The criminal justice process judges the guilt or innocence of accused offenders, and when offenders are found guilty they are sentenced by a judge in an effort to punish, rehabilitate and protect the public from them.

The civil justice system does not attempt to determine the innocence or guilt of an offender. Offenders are also not put in prison. Rather, civil courts attempt to determine whether an offender or a third party is liable for the injuries sustained as a result of the crime. A civil court finding of liability usually means that the defendant must pay the victim, or the victim’s family, monetary damages. The civil justice system can provide victims with monetary resources necessary to rebuild their lives. Furthermore, the civil justice system often provides victims and their families with a sense of justice that criminal courts may fail to provide. Rather than holding defendants accountable for their crimes against the peace and dignity of the state, the civil justice system holds defendants directly accountable to their victims.

Challenging Labels

- Concept of ‘survivor’ not accepted by all:
  - Association with terror and crime
  - Assumptions re trauma (Bell & Ristovski-Slijepcevic, 2013)
  - People who have heart attacks “not called heart attack survivors” (Bell & Ristovski-Slijepcevic, 2013)
  - Emphasis on “mere existence” removed from notions of quality of life (Bell & Ristovski-Slijepcevic, 2013)

Language of Victims

Case Study #1: ‘Boat People’

A Google search on ‘boat people’ has returned 108,000,000 results
Language of Victims

Case Study #1: ‘ Boat People’

• A search on the British National Corpus → 100 million word repository of written and spoken language - http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/
Immigration officials off the north coast of Australia have stepped up their efforts to intercept boat people arriving from Vietnam. In the late seventies, the authorities allowed many refugees did not offer to take any refugees. Vietnam's acute poverty, which the boat people are trying to escape from, is a legacy of the war the Vietnamese refugees and said it would deport as many as necessary to convince thousands more would-be boat people not to seek refuge in Hong Kong next spring. As a sop to Britain and took a swipe at foreign critics by urging them to help accommodate the boat people. Such criticism included a US call for an end to forced repatriation.

Labour's' moral bankruptcy.' But in last night's debate on the boat people, Labour's junior foreign affairs spokesman, Mr George Foulkes, denounced compulsory
Language of Victims

Case Study #2: Depiction of Disability

Female

Male

TOILET
Language of Victims

Case Study #2: Depiction of Disability

- People with disabilities or ‘the disabled’? (Winance 2007)
- ‘People with learning difficulties’ → “suggests a social process of exclusion. It indicates a standard for our society... people referred to in this way are those who have been excluded by a given educational system because they did not meet the standards of that system.” (Winance 2007)
- Individual versus social labelling → attributing causes: attributing responsibility (Winance 2007)

Case Study #3: Holocaust Survivors in Residential Care

- Est. population of 3,350 in Victoria
- Jewish Care has assisted over 1,200 Holocaust Survivors
- Supports available:
  - Home and personal care
  - Medical and dental assistance
  - Aids and equipment
  - Minor home modifications
  - Case management
  - Food and transport
  - Others...
Language of Victims

Case Study #3: Holocaust Survivors in Residential Care

- Resistance to accessing residential ‘institutional’ care → traumatic triggers
- Inherent imbalance of power relations in residential care at play → residents assumed to be ‘weak’ and ‘dependent’ (Mok & Mui, 2008)
  - Risk of reinforcing low self-esteem

“Immediately after the war, we were ‘liberated prisoners’; in subsequent years we were included in the term ‘DPs’ or ‘displaced persons’ ... In the US we were sometimes generously called ‘new Americans.’ Then for a long time ... there was a good chance that we, as a group, might go nameless. But one day I noticed that I had been reclassified as a ‘survivor.’”

Victims or Survivors?

Case Study #3: Holocaust Survivors and ‘Guilt’

- Guilt → a type of responsibility
- ‘Survivor guilt’:
  
  “We know [that] the best of us did not return”
  [V Frankel in Nutkiewicz, 2003]

- Influenced by: [Jaffe, 1970]
  - ‘Selection’
  - Loss of relatives
  - Awareness of dehumanisation attempts
- Most guilt emerged post liberation upon adaptation to ‘normal’ life [Jaffe, 1970] → they persist and increase with time
- cf. ‘survivor guilt’ with ‘victim guilt’ – are these similar? – Hypothesis:
  
  Victim guilt → shame about event in relation to oneself.
  Survivor guilt → shame about survival post event due to others not having survived.


Glenister & Tilley (1996) identify 6 types of discourses to end social exclusion:

1. **Medical** → education about personal medical disabilities – all vulnerable to them
2. **Social Disablement** → locating the barriers to social integration in the environment
3. **Spiritual** → ethical basis for establishing difference; advocacy role of religious bodies
4. **Human Rights** → legal measures for the protection of individuals
5. **Humanistic** → individuals’ own understanding of their basic needs. Making basic needs explicit → “being people first”
6. **Consumerism** → free market and service user
‘Survivor’ is a more empowering notion than ‘victim’
‘Survivor’ recognises inherent strengths in the individual
Empowerment is critical to notions of self, and other, worth
How to empower:
• Being involved in one’s own care and direction of life
• Psychological (away from powerlessness) and political (oppression and power relationships) (Mok & Mui, 2008)
• Two forms of empowerment (Taylor in Mok & Mui, 2008):
  • Freedom of movement (staying or leaving as a customer)
  • Having a ‘voice’

Changing Perspectives

Language as Partner in Service Provision

• Ask people to self define terms
• Empowerment as a “project” in which staff and clients “work together to challenge discourses and systems of domination which oppress them all.” (Glenister & Tilley, 1996)
• Participation → proof of empowerment
• Empowerment may mean relinquishing some power but increasing other forms of power (Mok & Mui, 2008)
• We must examine the discourses we use in order to identify if they serve to foment inclusiveness or exclusion → presenting new opportunities for partnership (Glenister & Tilley, 1996)


An effort to revamp the icon that's long symbolized accessibility on everything from parking lot signs to bathrooms is gaining traction with New York City agreeing to adopt a new look.

An updated version of the seemingly ubiquitous blue and white "handicapped" symbol will soon be plastered across New York.

Rather than depict a static person in a wheelchair, the new icon displays an active, in-motion version of life with a physical disability.

"It's such a forward-moving thing," Victor Calise, commissioner of the New York mayor's Office for People With Disabilities, told The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Backers of the new icon, which was spearheaded by a philosophy professor at Gordon College in Massachusetts, say they hope that adoption by the nation's largest city will lead to more widespread acceptance of the design.

Bibliography


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