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Introduction

Violence against women is a topic that has received considerable research attention, particularly during the last two decades of the twentieth century. In response to this literature, there has been an increased awareness of, and attempts to deal with, interpersonal and systemic violence within the universities. Security measures within universities have been increased. Sexual harassment policies have been developed, and complaint centres and race and ethnic relations offices have been established. Education now includes informing the university community about harassment issues. Gender equity committees and policies have been instituted. Notwithstanding these and other developments, as we move into the new millennium, violence against women on campus persists in many forms. New insights and actions are essential to eradicate violence on (and off) campus. Through deconstructing how talk in social interaction contributes to the perpetuation of ideologies around gendered power relations, my study breaks new ground in terms of its approach to the social problem of violence against women. The findings show that interpersonal discussions about violence against women continue to be characterized by dominant discourses which, for the most part, are not successfully contested in small group discussions. My research is on the edge, I would argue, when compared to the bulk of the research that has been done on violence against women (the *epistemological* edge) and in terms of its potential for insights that can further social and political action (the *cutting* edge).

Drawing on recent feminist theorizing in social psychology, in this study violence against women is conceptualized as a manifestation of gendered power relations, an historical

expression of male domination manifested within the family and currently reinforced by the institutions, economic arrangements, and sexist division of labour within capitalist society (Schechter 1991,209). My focus is on an understanding of social relations at a micro, social psychological level by considering how interpersonal interactions are structured by macro-level phenomena such as discourse and ideologies. The research is modelled after research that looks to postmodern literary theory and discourse analysis as a way in which to study gender and/or subjectivity (e.g., Henriques et al 1984; Wetherell 1986; Rossiter 1988; Gavey 1989; Unger 1990; Lather 1991). Also influential is the research that focuses on the reproduction of ideologies through discourse (e.g., Fowler 1979; Said 1979; Trew 1979; Potter et al 1984; Potter & Wetherell 1987; Wetherell et al 1987; Billig 1988; Hodge & Kress 1988). Finally, those who have attempted to apply both postmodern theory and discourse analysis (in some cases, to an understanding of gender and subjectivity) *within the group context* have offered important ground for thought (e.g., Kress & Fowler 1979; Fairclough 1989; Hollway 1989; Edwards & Potter 1992; Lovering 1995).

Guided by the postmodern literature, I came to question how gendered power relations get reproduced and/or challenged through discursive productions, or talk. Using the Small Groups Laboratory at York University, I involved undergraduate students in small group discussions which centered on forms of violence against women on campus - “chilly climate” (an uncomfortable, or hostile, environment), sexual harassment, and sexual assault. In the first phase of this research (1993), twelve groups were assembled - seven groups of women and five groups of men.¹ In both the women’s and men’s groups, I or my male colleague (respectively) encouraged participants to elaborate on their understandings of these topics, and we also

challenged them to explore dominant discourses and contradictions in talk. In the analysis which follows, I begin by highlighting the ideological content of individuals' discursive productions.³ Secondly, I analyze the links between individuals' investments in discourses and small group processes, because interactions represent an important social context that has largely been ignored in discourse analyses. Thirdly, I consider how liberal discourses are constructed so that they successfully function to perpetuate dominant ideologies.

Ideological Content

"Dominant discourses" are those that were deemed to support the status quo, and because these seem commonsensically 'true' to those who professed them, they are particularly powerful. As Gavey notes: "[Dominant] discourses, which support and perpetuate existing power relations, tend to constitute the subjectivity of most of the people most of the time" (1989,464). Although I had anticipated that my sample of students would be more invested in critical discourses that challenge existing social arrangements (given what I believed to be their exposure to critical analyses within the university), the marginality and absence of participants' positioning in critical discourses was a notable finding. Furthermore, both the women's and men's groups were similarly invested in dominant discourses.

In all of the groups, the liberal ideology of individualism was frequently expressed through discourse that represents social problems as produced by individuals (Rossiter 1988,147), such that the broader social and ideological processes are ignored (Potter et al 1984,61). From this perspective, an individual is often presented as possessing the power to control whether or not violence is experienced, hence it is at the level of the individual that change is conceptualized.

For example, during a discussion of “chilly climate,” this participant's talk focussed on the personal control that she has over her experience. The repeated use of the pronoun “I” in this excerpt signals her positioning within a ‘personal power’ discourse:

I think I want to speak when I want to speak, I know that women do have some disadvantages over men, but myself personally, if I know I'm at a disadvantage, I'll make the best to be at an advantage. I don't, I don't listen to that. I have a mind of my own, and if I find I'm at fault, I'm at fault, if I can do anything to benefit myself over what a man can possibly get, I mean I'm strong-willed, I don't believe in that. I don't know if that's from upbringing or anything, but my parents always told me, "You can be whatever you want to be, and no man is better than you" (Alida).

This quote illustrates how a personal power discourse is closely tied to meritocracy discourse. The idea is that if an individual puts his or her mind to it, and works hard, s/he will achieve whatever goal is sought. Again, it is the individual who is seen to be in control of the social situation. For example, the participant indicates that her successes or failures are due to her efforts alone. This view runs contrary to an understanding of individual achievement as attributable, to a large extent, to social conditions.

The ideology of individualism was also contextualized through talk that attributes chilly climate to psychological factors. For example, this participant commented on feeling alienated in lecture when her science professor said that “women are stupid:”

...(T)hat was just the...(professors') personality... professor-wise they were just ignorant, it wasn't to do with the gender issue I don't think (Sabrina).

Here, the individual professor’s personality is cited as the problem, even though during the discussion, a number of similar examples served to illustrate the ways in which this view of women is shared and perpetuated by various lecturers.

Rooted in the ideology of individualism is the ideology of equality, and this was a

prevalent theme in the groups. To illustrate: The assumption behind meritocracy discourse (which conveys the ideology of individualism) is that both men and women have equal opportunities to succeed in the world, such that the outcome rests on their individual efforts to succeed. These notions of equality work to conceal actual social relations of inequality between men and women (and racial groups, and social classes, and age groups, etc.). The next excerpt is typical of how participants argued that men and women experience chilly climate to the same extent:

I think it goes both ways basically....you cannot say a chilly climate towards one gender and not towards the other (Pamela).

Our probes about chilly climate were often met with silence until a probe similar to the following was put forth:

Some feel that it is feminists on campus who make a big deal about women feeling less comfortable on campus, when, actually, both men and women, regardless of racial background feel the same on campus. What is your view on this?

Overwhelmingly, this probe led to discussions similar to the following:

Gina: Often times I feel uncomfortable because of the people at the university, not to offend any feminists here, who are real feminists, and who make such a big deal out of it. And I take the flack for it...with all of the sexual harassment, that's a real problem, and I realize that, but sometimes it's taken too far. A lot of people look, a lot of men on campus look at the instances that have gone too far. They look at women as all being like that, as all looking at everything going too far....I can't think of a specific example, but there's some, some feminists that you know, like one, a man or something will say one slightly maybe, maybe slightly sexist comment, and they blow it totally out of proportion and try to get the guy fired, and try and dig into his past and destroy his career and that happens, maybe not so much at York...

Leanne: I think there are situations, I had, one of my classes in first year, one of the guys was doing a woman's study course...and he had a female professor that was a very radical feminist, and he felt that he was getting kind of, the reverse extreme of that, that he was getting a bad experience. And from what he was describing to me, and I believed him, he was getting a prejudiced, a reversed

prejudice...

Gina: Well I know that happens....I've had a lot of men that treat me badly because I'm a woman on a feminist campus....And they look down on me because of that, and I'm not a feminist. And I don't want to be looked at as one.

This excerpt illustrates the way in which feminists are blamed for fabricating a chilly climate problem.

When sexual harassment was the topic, discussions centred on difficulties around defining sexual harassment. Some narrowly defined what constitutes an instance of sexual harassment, often stipulating that inappropriate touching (at the very minimum) must have occurred:

I have my own definition of sexual harassment....I consider when someone touched me in the wrong places, I call that sexual harassment (Alida).

When you get into the actual like physical stage of like touching and things...then adjust the problem. But I mean, things are going to go overboard when they keep breaking things down (Keri).

Here there is a failure to acknowledge that sexually harassing behaviours occur also through verbal and non-verbal interactions.

Those who advocated a narrow definition argued that broader definitions distract attention away from "real" instances of sexual harassment. In the following excerpt, Evi argues that a broad definition allows for a debate about what constitutes sexual harassment, and as a result fuels a position that minimizes sexual harassment.

...I think a lot of times when...[sexual harassment is] actually real, it's not going to receive the attention it deserves because then everything's going to be sexual harassment. So when it really is....it's going to be just dismissed, "Oh yea, you know, you were drunk, blah, blah, blah..."(Evi).

Similarly, Shannon opposes a broad definition of sexual harassment:

(Feminists)...probably shouldn't be defining what sexual harassment is. They shouldn't be saying that it includes sitting too close together, and you know, that's what it seems to be. It's gone from making someone feel uncomfortable, or, I don't know where it started, sexual advances, and now it's including, well you name it. You take any situation and you can manipulate it to think someone's harassing you (Shannon).

This latter quote illustrates the way in which the "feminists have gone too far" theme discussed earlier was often embodied in criticisms of broad definitions:

Contrary to those who advocate narrow definitions, some participants rendered a definition so vague that sexual harassment becomes virtually unidentifiable. For these participants, a definition can only be individualistic because personal perceptions differ as to what sexual harassment is. For example:

Walter: I don't know, I think the criteria is so much, like you can't define it. You cannot possibly define it because what a woman might think a man is doing, as far as like a gaze, something like a gaze, it might be innocent, and it might not be innocent. How can you possibly define that? How can someone file a complaint, say with the police, and say "This man was gazing at me improperly." And what's he supposed to come back and say? "No I wasn't." ...(H)ow can you define the line where it's right and it's wrong? It's not possible, something like that.

Nick: Everybody's got their own scale.

Such talk dismisses the existence, or the possibility, of a standardized definition and code of conduct for all individuals. The impression gained is that if you can't define sexual harassment, it exists only in the minds of some.

Improved communication between individual men and women was frequently posited as the way in which to deal with the dilemma of defining sexual harassment:

...(I)t all boils down to communication. If you say what you're going to do, and you do what you're going to say. You know, I mean, that's what it basically boils down to: People aren't communicating. If a guy takes a woman's behaviour wrongly, you know, it takes two to tango, it's both their fault because they're both not talking (Peter).

Again, this discourse negates the social, political, and ideological nature of sexual harassment, and reduces it to an isolated problem that exists between individuals.

As with chilly climate talk, individualistic ideologies were joined with ideologies of equality when sexual harassment was the topic. To demonstrate that men's experience is equal to women's, talk turned to stories about cases where men have been victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault. The result is that the equality theme led to a characterization of men as the most victimized. While both women's and men's groups incorporated this discursive theme of "guys-are-victims-too," the content and function of the discourse generally differed between women's and men's groups. In the women's groups, the guys-are-victims-too talk arose in response to critical questions or comments which suggested that it is overwhelmingly *women* who are typically the victims of violence. In response, the point was stressed that both women and men are both subject to violence:

It's not chilly just for females. I know some males too who would find it chilly...so it's not just a feminist thing (Kyla).

A friend of mine was attacked right outside, a man, right outside the doors....so, it goes both ways, I think.... (Tanya).

When the male groups talked about how guys-are-victims-too, men's victimization was not characterized as being the same (i.e., circumstantially) as women's victimization. Instead, men were represented as the victims of women, in that women were blamed for the rise in critical talk which challenges men's positions of power within the society. Most of the men focussed on themselves as persecuted, not only by feminists, but rather by women in general. In addition to explicit references that characterized women as men's enemy, in the men's groups, the misogynist talk implicitly blamed the critiques that challenge gendered power relationships. The

following comment portrays men as victims of the current critical climate:

...(J)ust to be safe yourself, as a male in this climate, you have to ensure that there's no way you can get yourself in danger. If you're seen following a woman, and a police officer stops you, the police state-class-climate if you want to call it that is you're guilty until proven innocent no matter what it is, sexual harassment, sexual assault, it's almost like you're in Mexico or another state where it's guilt, guilty until proven innocent instead of innocent until proven guilty.... (Vince)

This produces the impression that critical, or counter, ideologies are in fact dominant ideologies.

The result is that the men's group discussions portray men as being the 'real' victims, the members of society who are marginal and subject to women's power. The men's groups' guys-are-victims-too message works to divert attention away from the argument that women are overwhelmingly the victims of violence on university campuses. The focus instead is shifted to men who are cast as victims of counter ideologies and critical talk which seeks to challenge men's power within society. Women in general are blamed for the proliferation of critical discourses. As was mentioned earlier, the majority of the women disavowed an association with feminism and feminists because feminists 'gave women a bad name.' The men-as-persecuted theme in the male group discussions suggests that formalized feminism has, in fact, given women 'a bad name.' Even though relatively few women are invested in feminist positions, women in general are blamed for the (alleged) impact of feminist discourse.

The majority of the discussions around sexual assault contained patriarchal ideologies - beliefs about gender relations which reinforce and maintain the authoritative positioning of men, and the oppressive situations of women. Patriarchal ideologies naturalize social processes - that is, it is taken for granted that incidents that qualify as social events are, instead, inevitable events of nature. The theme of "violence is natural" is supported by participants' essentialist descriptions which took the form of definitive statements either about what "girls are" or "guys

are." Hare-Mustin and Maracek point to the way in which biological sexual differences are typically viewed as synonymous with gender differences:

...[There is a] pervasive cultural belief that we have not created gender, but that gender is natural and largely explained by the biological differences of males and females. When we associate gender merely with sexual differences, gender itself becomes construed as difference, and gender differences are therefore also seen as natural (1990,188).

The following example from the data illustrates this notion of biological pre-determination:

I think (sexual assault) is part of a larger problem...especially...if you look at it biologically: men's hormones fluctuate daily, their testosterone levels rise and fall all day. Women fluctuate monthly, so I mean, come on. That's got to tell you something right there. And I mean the statistics on how many times men think about sex daily as opposed to how many times women think of it (Emlene).

The participants' views of sexual assault espoused patriarchal ideology, specifically "paternalism," "a concept of power which combines the element of benevolence with the elements of dominance and subordination" (Davis 1988,23). Paternalism involves both a relationship of asymmetry and a relationship wherein the person in authority restricts and coerces the freedom of another for that other's own good (Davis 1988,23). In the discussions, men are repeatedly described as taking care of women in a way that renders women "the weaker sex." The aforementioned ideological themes of naturalism and biological determinism reinforce paternalism - because men are seen as naturally stronger than women, they should therefore protect women. In almost every group, it was noted that the women could call on some of the guys they knew to escort them from one place to another on campus, typically after dark.

...[T]here would be a group of guys each night who were free, and if you had to walk somewhere you'd call them and they would walk you. We'd have our own security within our building. And they're people you'd know, and people you'd trust (Tanya).

In this example, the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between the women and the men is

clear - the women's freedom is restricted by the availability and willingness of the men to come and escort them. Although they have benevolent intentions, the men are in a position of power.

Commensurate with this guys-as-protectors theme was talk about security measures which also proceeds from the assumption that violence is a naturally-occurring phenomenon within our society. Security measures are (naturally) in place to combat violence. While both the women's and men's groups produced examples of the guys-as-protectors theme, the security talk was evidenced primarily among the women - they viewed security measures as holding the promise of a solution to violence. These security measures included both formal security guard surveillance as well as individual strategies such as scheduling classes during the daytime, walking with keys ready to scratch an assailant's face, and walking with others to one's car. The women tended to talk about *how* to be secure as if knowing how to do this solves the problem of being at risk as a woman. Security talk reflects paternalism in that security measures are indicative of a power imbalance wherein the freedom of women is curtailed and the power of those in authority is bolstered.

“Fear of sexual assault” was another prevalent theme within the women's groups. The following excerpt is one example:

Tanya: ...I think that (rape) would be the worst thing that could ever happen to me. I think and it sounds really extreme and really bad and everything. But I feel that if, not necessarily with date rape or something, but if a gentleman had, I shouldn't call him a gentleman, if a guy had a gun to my head and he's going to rape me, I'm sorry, I'd rather be shot, like it's just so, it's just something that's so personal, and I don't think that I could live through it.

Alida: You give me the goosebumps.

Tanya: I'm sorry. But I think, it's just, it's just a personal issue. It has nothing to do with, you know, with any of the feminism or the, you know, the campus or anything.

This discourse is best understood within the context of the guys-as-protectors and the security talk. The paternalistic nature of "fear" talk explains why I held contradictory feelings during these segments of the discussions. I felt sympathetic towards the women when they talked about how the fear of sexual assault frightened them. I also felt humiliated because of the way in which they perpetuated their status as victims through the fear of sexual assault discourse (the tone of the discussion is one of helpless surrender); the guys-as-protectors discourse; and the security discourse.

A theme of individualism also recurred during discussions of sexual assault. In the following example, Marianne expressed her determination to deal with the threat of violence:

...I take karate, and like I have alarms, like everything in my bag. Because I'm not going to stop my life 'cause of this kind of stuff, because if I have to take a class from 6:00 to 9:00, because that's the only time I can take the class, then I'm going to take the class....I rely on myself...I feel like, why should I have to do that? That's not fair to me....You do have to take it on yourself.

The woman is also seen as responsible for sexual assault when it happens. This "blame the victim" theme was manifest in a number of ways. At times, participants pointed to communication problems as contributing to sexual assault, the woman being the one who is unclear about her wishes around sexual activity:

Bruce: Well, if women want, if you want to have sex, be honest about it, don't be coy.

Vince: If ...[women are] going to use the word No, mean it, because too many guys hear No, and think "Okay, try harder..."

Scott: I guess women don't want to be classed as easy.

Vince: Exactly. A woman has to play the game because if she's not, she's considered a tramp or whatever

Scott: Or a slut,

Vince: So the women play...that little game, so a lot of guys, unfortunately, when they hear that little word, No, still have this, "Okay, she's playing coy with me." And I'm sure that in a lot of cases that No is a real No, but they continue anyways because they're so used to the coy No.

Bruce: Well the problem too is that they say No, to be coy, and the guy, "Okay..." and you keep on making out, and eventually they don't say anything when you try the second time, and that's consent, or is it? The problem comes when she said No at the beginning of the night when you tried to grab her tit, and then she didn't say a word when you were pulling off her panties and going down on her, except to moan a lot, and is that date rape? Is that date rape?

On other occasions, women are portrayed as 'asking for it' (i.e., sexual assault) because of flirtatious signs that are communicated through behaviour or appearance:

Santina...(Y)ou're always going to have those women who are there, like, they're going to tease, and especially you know, there's a problem on like, pub night sort of stuff like that when everyone's drinking, and a lot of the girls they do lead the guys on, and they flirt around, and stuff, and I'm not saying

Rachel: But if they're drunk they won't be aware of what they're doing.

Santina: I'm not saying they're asking for it like,

Rachel: Yea, no one is asking for it,

Santina: Just because they're flirting, but, but sometimes they do let things happen

Kyla: They're putting themselves in a vulnerable situation.

Typical in discussions like this is the use of a disclaimer which notes that the victims are not to blame, followed by talk which then blames the victim, a construction which works to legitimize dominant discourse.

Talk about sexual assault provides a good example of how various discursive themes are interconnected in discussions and work to perpetuate dominant ideologies. As already noted, the view that violence is natural provides the foundation for guys-as-protectors talk and fear talk,

these in turn supporting an acceptance of security measures as necessary. These themes are all rooted in ideologies of individualism and paternalism: the onus is on the individual to take care of herself, through a variety of security precautions which benevolently exist to calm her fears and to help her. The participants' concern with security overrides more critical themes (if they even get introduced), and the women talk about security strategies with great enthusiasm. It is these kinds of interrelationships among discourses and ideologies and participants' investments in them that make them so difficult to contest successfully, or to deconstruct.

Further complicating matters is the way in which discourses are not characterized by unitary or consistent themes, but are instead made-up of themes that are frequently in opposition. Often critical comments were embedded in what was for the most part dominant discourse. That is, it was more typical for participants to make 'the odd' critical comment during what was otherwise dominant discourse. In the following excerpt, the participant deliberates about whether or not a particular type of woman is targeted for a violent attack:

....If I was the type of person that wanted to come after somebody, what type of person would I come after? So I'm not going to be that type of person. Like you know how they have, like there's no set hard and fast rules about only certain types of girls get attacked. But, there are certain type girls, if, you're not prepared, you have more chances of being attacked (Marianne).

Initially, this participant suggests that there is a particular type of person who gets attacked in that she says: *"I'm not going to be that type of person."* Here she individualizes the problem of violence, and places responsibility on the victim to prevent violence by being a particular type of individual. In the next sentence, she states that there are not particular types who get attacked: *"there's no set hard and fast rules about only certain types of girls who get attacked"* thus removing the responsibility from the victim. In the subsequent sentence she returns to her earlier

positioning within an ideology of individualism by acknowledging that: *"there are certain type girls, if, you're not prepared, you have more chances of being attacked."* These kinds of contradictions in talk are evident throughout the group discussions.

Investments in Discourse and Group Process

To this point I have been talking about the groups as a collection of individuals; my focus now shifts to a discussion of the group discourse overall. The interactional context of a group of individuals calls into question how the dynamics of the group relate to the content of the talk. Since discourse analyses are premised on the belief that people produce particular kinds of talk according to the situation (i.e., there is no one true state of affairs awaiting discovery through research), the value of a group analysis lies not in the increased validity of the data. Rather, the group is interesting because it is the usual venue for talk, and, in group settings, participants have the potential to influence one another's talk. While experiences pre-exist language, a description of them does not. I believe that many of the participants have experienced, in some way, situations on campus that I would describe as instances of chilly climate, sexual harassment, and even sexual assault. This is the position of Kelly who maintains that in their lifetime, most women experience some form of "sexual violence" a general term which covers all forms of abuse, coercion or force from men (1987,46&59). It could be that the majority of these women and men did not have access to, and are therefore not familiar with, more critical bodies of thought on the topics presented. It could also be that they chose not to position themselves critically in talk. As Gavey notes, "systems of meaning such as feminism are currently limited in their power because they are marginalized and unavailable yet as subject positions...." (1989,464). If it is the case that some of the participants have been exposed to, but show little or

no investment in, critical discourses, then the question arises as to why this is the case.

A consideration of group process offers some answers to these questions. First, there is a tendency for group participants to exhibit a high degree of consensus (Gilbert and Mulkey 1984,189) on topics early in discussions. Because liberal and patriarchal ideologies dominated the discursive productions of these groups, it follows that a movement toward a consensus would discourage critical talk. In the majority of the groups, there was one participant whose talk was largely critical in nature, but who still indicated some affiliation with dominant ideologies. At times, this 'lone critic' wavered in his/her critical position, such that s/he came to express a mixture of critical and dominant views. In other instances, the lone critic withdrew from the discussion altogether, typically during the first half of the discussion.

Secondly, as is clear from my study, the supposed normalcy of the dominant discourses in these groups makes anyone who challenges them risk being stigmatized as deviant, this working to silence critical talk. For example it could be that most of the women in this study avoided identification as a victim of sexual harassment because of the stigmatized status of being a victim. Kitzinger & Thomas discuss how women choose to adopt the label of victim according to whether it would be in their best interests to do so in the situation. They state:

The term 'sexual harassment' describes female subordination. When women say, to themselves or to other people, 'I am *not* being sexually harassed,' one of the things they are saying is, 'I am *not* a victim. I am not a subordinated person' (1995,35).

For similar reasons, the women in the groups were unlikely to identify as feminists because of the anti-feminist sentiments which are perpetuated in dominant discourses. The men, because they tend to be targeted in critical discourses on gender, avoided talk that might lead to their being stigmatized either as perpetrators of violence, or as discussed earlier, supporters of

feminist ideologies. Hence, the avoidance of stigma may explain, in part, participants' reluctance to invest in critical positions within the groups. Understanding that participants tried to avoid stigma also helps to explain the scarcity of talk about dimensions of difference other than gender; when the topic of racial difference was raised, for example, frequently the ideology of equality was espoused. As discussed previously, the difficulty in publicly positioning oneself in critical discourse stems from a fear of being stigmatized as "one of those" who is deviant from the norm (e.g., black, lower class, homosexual, older, physically or mentally challenged, etc.) and (unjustifiably) defiant. Regardless of whether the differentiating feature of identity is apparent, the oppressed also experience fluctuating investments in critical discourse (Young & Majury 1995,352), and they fear being labelled "a troublemaker."

Thirdly, the participants who espoused critical discourse (typically one per group) did so at great length, in a way that suggested they saw themselves as "experts" on the topics of discussion. The presence of "an expert" appeared to annoy the other participants, and "the functioning of the group as a whole can easily be disrupted by friendship pairs, 'experts,' or uncooperative participants" (Morgan 1993,44). Regardless of the investments of the others in the group, the expert's participation served to alienate others in the group such that an 'us against the expert' alliance formed among group participants. The result is that those 'other' participants became united around dominant ideologies seemingly in opposition to the expert, perhaps more so than might otherwise have been the case.

Constructions of Liberal Discourse

A microscopic analysis of how talk is constructed serves to shed light on how liberal discourses successfully marginalize critical discourses within small group interactions. As was noted

earlier, the following excerpt illustrated the dominant discourse around how the problem of chilly climate has been created by feminists:

I can't think of a specific example, but there's some, some feminists that you know, like one, a man or something will say one slightly maybe, maybe slightly sexist comment, and they blow it totally out of proportion and try to get the guy fired, and try and dig into his past and destroy his career and that happens, maybe not so much at York.... (Gina)

Linguistic structures that incorporate conditional statements and contrast statements are very effective in producing convincing arguments for an audience (Potter and Wetherell 1987,47). In this excerpt, the use of conditional statement structures is evidenced by an "if this," "then that" construction. This technique can be highlighted by rearranging the discourse as follows:

A1 If [a man...will say one...slightly sexist comment]

A2 then [(some feminists) will blow it totally out of proportion and try to get the guy fired...and destroy his career]

Another persuasive aspect of the above-noted extract is what Pomerantz has called the "extreme case" formulation (Potter and Wetherell 1987,47). By using extremes, a more convincing argument is made. In this excerpt, a number of extreme statements strengthen an anti-feminist argument: a man only has to say *one* comment (the lowest possible number); this comment has only to be *slightly* sexist (as opposed to sexist); the result is that it will be blown *totally* out of proportion ("out of proportion" is an extreme phrase on its own, but with "totally" as a modifier, its extreme quality is magnified); the end result will be *firing* (the most extreme formal reprimand possible in the workplace) and a *destroyed* career (the man will *never* be able to work again in his chosen career). And finally, in this example, disclaimers serve to "ward off" statements which could be offensive (Hewitt & Stokes 1975, in Potter & Wetherell 1987,48) and which could result in embarrassment for the speaker. "*I can't think of a specific example*" is a

disclaimer which allows the speaker to construct a hypothetical scenario which cannot be factually verified. This allows for the use of extreme case formulations which may, in reality, not be the case (or very rarely be the case). The comment, "*maybe not so much at York*" similarly functions to remove the scenario from the context with which all those present, presumably, are most familiar. Therefore, it is more difficult to dispute the claims that are made if scenarios like this are occurring at universities other than York. Furthermore, this disclaimer serves to "ward off" any offense which might be experienced by one or more feminists that might be present in the group.

Concluding

My research addresses several gaps in the literature on violence against women. First, the study links macro- and micro-level analyses: it examines how macro-level ideologies and discourses work together through micro-level interactions, to help sustain violence against women. Secondly, most of the previous research on sexual assault and sexual harassment has addressed "what" questions, like: What is the prevalence of sexual assault? What definitions of sexual assault/harassment are employed by students? What factors are correlated with incidents of violence? This study raises new "what" questions: What discourses are most/least prevalent in the group discussions? What ideological themes are embodied in these discourses? Thirdly, in focusing on what students, *in the presence of others*, have to say about chilly climate, sexual harassment, and sexual assault, the analysis attends to the dynamic processes of discursive work through which discourses are reproduced/challenged. Attention to this context raises new "how" questions: How do the micro-level processes within the group operate to perpetuate and/or challenge discourses? How is talk constructed by the individual? How is talk constructed by the

group? How does talk work to achieve particular effects within the group? And lastly, and perhaps most importantly, this research is politically motivated; discourses are seen as having social consequences which the research process must work to change. That is, its purpose is not to investigate whether, or to what extent women are victimized, rather it is grounded in the assertion that women and other minority groups routinely experience violence on (and off) campus, a reality which necessitates a "passionately interested inquiry" (Gill 1995,169). By unraveling the ways in which talk works to perpetuate the taken-for-granted realities about gender relations - and, therefore, gender violence - we move closer to dealing with the question: How can dominant discourses be more successfully challenged, and alternative, critical ideologies effectively promoted? This line of inquiry, in combination with other measures, holds promise for us as we continue to work toward affecting changes in social relations, and in particular, social relations of power which perpetuate and reinforce male violence against women.

Footnote

1. My data collection began in 1993 for the purpose of completing my doctoral dissertation. For the past two years (1999-2001) I have continued to gather and analyze data through similar discourse analysis labs, this being one component of the third year course that I teach in the Department of Sociology, York University: "Classic and Contemporary Issues in Social Psychology." The more recent data and analysis are in keeping with what I found in the initial phase of the research.
2. Karl Henriques, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology at York, moderated the groups of men.
3. The examples that I use for this paper are drawn from the 1993 phase of the research. I have changed the participants' names to ensure confidentiality.

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