Exceptionalising intersectionality: a corpus study of implied readership in guidance for survivors of domestic abuse

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Abstract

Groups who experience multiple marginalisation are more likely to experience domestic abuse, but appear to be the least represented in materials designed to support survivors. This paper uses corpus methods and feminist discourse analysis to examine a guidance text produced by a British organisation that supports women survivors of domestic abuse. The analysis examines the discursive practices used to construct solidarity between the implied reader, implied author and broader imagined community. While many of the practices employed in these texts to construct solidarity are exemplary – such as centring survivors' experiences and addressing survivors directly by using first- and second-person pronouns – the texts also construct multiply marginalised survivors as distal by using third-person pronouns in discourses which represent multiple marginalisation as 'exceptional'. The paper concludes by suggesting ways to improve guidance for survivors of domestic abuse.

KEYWORDS: CORPUS ANALYSIS; FEMINIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS; PRONOUNS; DOMESTIC ABUSE; INTERSECTIONALITY

Introduction

Demographic groups who are multiply disadvantaged are more likely to experience sexual and domestic violence (LGBT Youth Scotland 2011;

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National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2000), yet may face greater difficulties in having their experiences of abuse recognised as abuse, or in accessing support or redress (Thiara 2015). This paper examines a guidance document produced for survivors of domestic abuse by Women's Aid, a British organisation which supports women who experience abuse. I explore the discursive practices used by the text to provide that support, focusing on whether and how the text constructs solidarity and distance between the implied reader (Fairclough 2001; Talbot 1995), implied author and broader imagined communities (Anderson 2006), and whether the text constructs solidarity to the same extent and in the same ways with survivors who are from multiply marginalised backgrounds and survivors who are not.

This paper begins by exploring challenges faced by survivors in accessing support. Next, I give an overview of the data, and feminist discourse analysis and corpus approaches employed in this paper. I then show how the text centres survivors' experiences and perspectives using two key strategies. First, the text represents domestic abuse as hallmarked by a range of coercively controlling behaviours, including leveraging the fabric of women's relationships; and presents survivors of domestic abuse as actively and agentively taking steps to cope with abuse. Second, the text synthesises solidarity between the implied author and implied reader by using second-person pronouns to directly address survivors, or first-person pronouns in question–answer sequences which project experiences onto the implied reader, and position the implied reader within a sympathetic and supportive imagined community.

However, when talking about multiply marginalised women's experiences of abuse – for example, lesbian and bisexual survivors from ethnic minority or faith backgrounds – the text does not use first-person pronouns in discussions of how abuse may manifest and how women cope with and resist it. Instead, the text uses the third-person pronoun THEY in discourse which represents multiple marginalisation as a 'special circumstance'. I suggest that this discourse, while well intentioned in its effort to capture the lived experiences of multiply marginalised survivors, may unintentionally represent marginalised identities as 'the problem' and result in shifting responsibility for abuse from perpetrators to multiply marginalised communities. I conclude by making recommendations to improve support for survivors of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse and intersectionality

Recent decades have seen a shift in feminist understandings of domestic abuse, from seeing it as characterised by extrinsic forms of physical violence

such as battery, to placing greater emphasis on patterns of what Stark calls 'coercive control' (Stark 2007:5), that is, a pattern of controlling behaviour used as a strategy to manipulate, subordinate and dominate victims, and prevent them from exercising autonomy or freeing themselves from their abusers (Stark 2007). Abuse might include assaults, which may be recognised as criminal offences; but coercive control might also be exerted through psychological and other non-physical means such as through threats, controlling a person's access to money or other resources, and regulating their everyday actions such as who they see and talk to, how they parent their children, what they wear, or other restrictions on their autonomy. *Intersectionality* has played an important role in bringing about this shift in how abuse is understood, and in particular in raising awareness of the leveraging of structural privilege and oppression as a potential form that abuse may take (Crenshaw 1991). Intersectionality scholarship and activism focuses on theorising and challenging the ways that systems of oppression and privilege interact dynamically and mutually constitute one another.

However, many legal systems and popular awareness campaigns continue to treat abuse as being characterised by physical violence (Candelas de la Ossa 2016; Estrich 1987), which has important consequences for how separation from an abusive partner is viewed. Because abuse tends to intensify and escalate around the time of separation, survivors/victims cope with and resist abuse through a broad range of strategies (Kelly 1988), which may include adopting harm-reduction strategies such as 'narrowing' their actions to try to prevent the escalation of violence (Kelly and Westmarland 2015; Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1999), disengaging from an abusive relationship, and establishing and maintaining separation and independence (Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1999:116). This process is often misunderstood by survivors' communities, and perceived as victims responding passively, inconsistently, or equivocally to abuse, and 'choosing' to 'stay' in abusive relationships, which in turn may be perceived as undermining victims'/survivors' credibility (see Dobash and Dobash 1992; Dunn 2005; Ehrlich 2001; Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1999). Such misperceptions may result in support being withheld from victims/survivors at crucial points in the separation process, which in turn may prevent survivors from being able to escape an abusive relationship and maintain their separation and independence. As Ehrlich observes, recognising victims and survivors as 'strategic agents' (Ehrlich 2001:152) in resisting and coping with abuse may therefore play an important role in ensuring that victims/survivors are able to access support and redress, and free themselves from abuse.

Guidance for victims/survivors

Because support texts are produced for a mass audience rather than a specific actual reader, they are shaped for a constructed or 'implied reader, an imaginary addressee with particular preoccupations, values, notions of common sense, and so on' (Talbot 1995:146), through practices of 'synthetic personalisation' (Fairclough 2001:52), that is, practices that make mass produced texts seem individualised. One way that personalisation may be synthesised in guidance texts is by simulating solidarity (Talbot 1995) between the implied reader, implied author, and a broader imagined community (Anderson 2006). Talbot (1995) argues that a powerful way of constructing solidarity with an implied audience is to simulate friendship and reciprocal discourse. *Simulated reciprocal discourse* is the use of questions and imperatives that create the impression of a mutual rapport (Talbot 1995:159). *Simulated friendship* is attention to the implied reader's positive face through use of first- and second-person pronouns to construct the implied author and implied reader as co-members of the same community; and the setting up of presupposed (Belnap 1966; Prince 1986; Russell 1905, 1957; Strawson 1950) or projected beliefs and experiences onto the implied reader and implied author, positioning the implied author as sympathetically sharing the implied reader's beliefs and experiences (Talbot 1995:154).

First-person plural pronouns have been a particular focus of research as a resource for doing relational and solidarity-building work in institutional discourse, due to the possibility of an inclusive reading meaning 'you and I (and maybe others)' (Pennebaker 2011; Skelton, Wearn and Hobbs 2002). However, personalisation does not invariably result in solidarity. Pennebaker observes that first-person plural pronouns can convey group membership, but when used in directives, such as 'we need to take out the trash' (Pennebaker 2011:41) if directed by a parent to a child reluctant to do their chores, first-person plural pronouns may sound artificial. Such a directive sounds even less imbued with solidarity if the speaker uses a second-person pronoun in a directive like 'you need to take out the trash', suggesting that first- and second-person pronouns may construct distance as well as solidarity, and must be examined in context. I therefore build on Talbot's (1995) framework to demonstrate ways that these practices can be used not only to construct solidarity, but also distance between the implied author, implied reader, and imagined community. I combine feminist discourse analysis of the corpus with collocation and dispersion analyses to discover where and how first-, second-, and third-person pronouns are used and whether and where solidarity or distance is constructed.

The data: guidance for women survivors

As part of a larger project on the construction of sexual consent in guidance for different sectors of the British public, a corpus was compiled from guidance produced by local and national UK institutions. This paper focuses on a 41,384-word subcorpus, comprised of *The Survivor's Handbook* produced by Women's Aid for women survivors of domestic violence.

Having grown out of the women's liberation movement, Women's Aid was founded in 1974 as an umbrella organisation for nearly 40 refuge services who supported victims/survivors of domestic violence (Women's Aid 2015a). As of 2014–15, Women's Aid consists of 220 member organisations who operate regionally across England and Wales (Women's Aid 2015b), providing a national helpline service, refuge accommodation, as well as information and online support. Although much of their work continues to be done through the helpline or community services, online support represents a substantial component of their work, as shown by the fact that, in 2014–15 they reached 43,698 people in their social media communities. In 2014–15, 52,229 calls and emails were handled by their helpline, and 203,300 women and 43,700 children were supported through community-based services, showing they have a considerable reach nationally (Women's Aid 2015b). Women's Aid also provides training to professionals who work with victims/survivors, and produces *The Expect Respect Educational Toolkit* (Women's Aid undated) for schoolteachers and other professionals to use in discussing consent with young people. At the time of writing, they are active in campaigning for legislative reform on issues pertaining to gender-based violence; and against austerity cuts to public spending on legal aid and domestic violence refuge accommodation.

The Survivor's Handbook consists of six chapters (listed in Table 1), and provides advice on practical matters, such as refuge accommodation, the welfare system, making child contact arrangements, and navigating the family court system. Because the focus of this paper is on how domestic violence is conceptualised, most of the examples I discuss in detail are drawn from the 'General information', 'Finding help' and 'Special circumstances' chapters, which discuss what domestic violence is, how it manifests in women's lived experiences, and practical coping strategies.

The Survivor's Handbook is available in HTML or as a downloadable PDF from the Women's Aid website, where it was first published online in 2005, though this study uses the 2009/2010 PDF edition, which was the most recent version available as a downloadable PDF at the time of data collection.

Table 1: Sources of consent guidance for women survivors of domestic abuse.

Chapter of *The Survivor's Handbook*	Word count
General information	6,571
Finding help	8,952
Your legal rights	7,064
Helping your children	4,586
Special circumstances	6,416
Health and well being	7,795
Total	41,384

Method

To prepare the data for analysis, it was converted from PDF to plain text. A close reading of the whole corpus was completed to identify definitions of consent and abuse, which were analysed using feminist discourse analysis. Additionally, reading the whole corpus helps to ensure that the entirety of the data corpus was taken into account. The corpus was then tagged with part-of-speech tags, using the automated CLAWS7 part-of-speech tagger implemented in Wmatrix3 (Rayson 2003), enabling the researcher to more easily track patterns and identify areas for further analysis.

Pronouns were then extracted from the tagged corpus and checked manually for tagging accuracy, and a small number of incorrectly tagged pronouns were excluded. In order to focus specifically on pronouns which refer to the implied reader, implied author, and broader imagined community, pronouns which had generic or inanimate referents were excluded. This yielded a data set of 1,767 pronouns, which were manually coded for referent, depending on whether they referred to a survivor, abuser, a survivor's child or children, agencies such as the police or mental health care providers, or friends and community who had a supportive role towards a survivor. Collocation analysis of pronouns was then carried out using AntConc (Anthony 2014). Collocation analysis examines the tendency of words to occur together and acquire shades of meaning in context. Using Wmatrix3, dispersion analysis was then carried out to discover how consistent a pattern is in the corpus; that is, whether a feature occurs at evenly spaced intervals, or whether it tends to cluster at certain points in the corpus. Feminist discourse analysis was used to analyse and interpret collocation and dispersion patterns.

Defining domestic abuse

The text adopts two key strategies for centring survivors' experiences. First, the text represents domestic abuse as characterised by a range of coercively controlling behaviours. Second, the text synthesises solidarity between the implied author and the implied reader. This section explores how domestic abuse is defined as being hallmarked by *a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour* within *an intimate or family-type relationship* (Extract 1), and then goes on to explore how this strategy is echoed by the use of first- and second-person pronouns. As shown in Extracts 1–7, abuse may manifest as a broad range of behaviours, which may include physical violence but need not necessarily be limited to overtly or extrinsically violent behaviour.

Extract 1

> What is Domestic Violence?
> There are a number of different definitions of 'domestic violence'. In Women's Aid's view, domestic violence is physical, psychological, sexual or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. ('General information')

Extract 2

> Domestic violence often includes a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are, in themselves, inherently 'violent' – hence some people prefer to use the term 'domestic abuse' rather than 'domestic violence'. ('General information')

By focusing on *a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour* (Extract 1) and *a range of abusive behaviours* (Extract 2) that need not be physically or extrinsically violent, the text presents an understanding of domestic and sexual violence that is in line with and centres survivors' experiences, and takes seriously the coercion exerted by non-physical behaviours. This text for survivors present domestic violence as characterised by a wide range of coercively controlling behaviours that may or may not be extrinsically violent, and may or may not be criminalised by themselves, such as financial control, controlling relationships with family or friends, *lying … about you*, or *sulking … unless you comply with his demands* (Extract 3). The inclusion of these behaviours constructs a broader ontology of the kinds of harms that can count as domestic abuse. This broader understanding of pressure and coercion is made explicit in Extract 3.

Extract 3

> Pressure tactics: sulking; threatening to withhold money, disconnect the telephone, take the car away, take the children away, or report you to welfare agencies unless you comply with his demands; threatening or attempting suicide; withholding or pressuring you to use drugs or other substances; lying to your friends and family about you; telling you that you have no choice in any decisions. ('General information')

The text emphasises the distinction between abuse and the kind of *arguments* that *everyone* might have by using the notion of *a consistent pattern*: by distinguishing between 'normal' arguments and domestic violence, the text resists the narrative of abuse being 'understandable' mistakes or supposed misunderstandings. Unlike common 'say no' discourse (Candelas de la Ossa 2016; Kitzinger and Frith 1999), the text for women survivors is also refreshingly free of discourse that shifts responsibility for abuse onto victims. Instead, the text explicitly places responsibility for abuse on abusers, and minimising or shifting responsibility is explicitly labelled *abusive.* As shown in Extracts 4–5, abuse is not framed as *arguments* or *disagree[ment]* (Extract 4), or as being something that victims/survivors can prevent.

Extract 4

> Everyone has arguments, and everyone disagrees with their partners, family members, and others close to them from time to time. And we all do things at times which we regret, and which cause unhappiness to those we care about. But if this begins to form a consistent pattern, then it is an indication of domestic violence. ('General information')

Extract 5

> Who is responsible for the violence?
> The abuser is always responsible for the violence, and should be held accountable. There is no excuse for domestic violence and the victim is never responsible for the abuser's behaviour. 'Blaming the victim' is something that abusers will often do to make excuses for their behaviour, and quite often they manage to convince their victims that the abuse is indeed their fault. This is part of the pattern and is in itself abusive. ('General information')

The centring of survivors' experiences which can be seen in the discourse examined above, can also be seen in quantitative trends in the use and

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distribution of pronouns in the data corpus. The text directly addresses survivors as YOU (Extract 3), giving the impression of a direct and mutual rapport with survivors and knowledge of survivors' experiences. Table 2 shows the most frequently used pronoun is the second-person YOU, which accounts for 78.5% of all pronoun tokens.[1] YOU is used primarily to address survivors directly, which accounts for 99.4% of all tokens of YOU, and 78.0% of pronoun tokens overall.

The text also uses first-person pronouns to refer to survivors, which accounts for 68.3% of first-person pronoun tokens. First-person pronouns primarily occur in question–answer sequences used to present information about support resources and statutory services that survivors can make use of to actively and agentively cope with and leave situations of abuse, as shown in Extracts 6–7.

Extract 6

What is a refuge and how can I stay in one? ('Finding help')

Table 2: Frequencies of personal pronouns by referent in *The Survivor's Handbook.*

Person	Pronoun	Referent					Total
		Survivor	Abuser	Child(ren)	Agencies	Supportive community	
1st	I	30	2	0	4	1	37
	ME	9	0	0	0	0	9
	WE	4	0	0	11	0	15
	US	0	0	0	2	0	2
2nd	YOU	1379	0	0	0	8	1387
3rd	SHE	14	0	3	0	0	17
	HE	0	20	0	0	0	20
	SHE OR HE	0	3	0	4	0	7
	HER	22	0	0	0	0	22
	HIM	0	25	0	0	0	25
	HIM OR HER	1	6	5	0	0	12
	THEY	34	7	62	106	5	214
Total		1493	63	70	127	14	1767

Extract 7

> What can I do if the local authority won't help me? ('Finding help')

Question–answer sequences, such as those shown in Extracts 1 and 5–7, are a commonly used discursive strategy in texts that aim to prevent partner violence or support survivors (Candelas de la Ossa 2016). Question–answer sequences simulate reciprocal discourse, positioning survivors as engaged in mutual rapport with the implied author (Talbot 1995). The first-person pronouns in this simulated reciprocal discourse function as a footing device (Goffman 1979), positioning the implied reader as animating the questions and the implied author as animating information and advice, thereby positioning the implied author as a sympathetic and knowledgeable peer who is able to provide guidance to survivors about domestic abuse and practical options – such as refuge accommodation – that can help a survivor leave an abusive relationship.

First-person (I, ME, WE, and US) and second-person (YOU) pronouns are also used to refer to friends, supportive community, and supportive agencies. When a first-person pronoun refers to supportive community, it occurs together with the presupposition that the implied reader can help (triggered by the WH-clause *how can I help*), as in Extract 8, constructing solidarity with a broader community in which survivors and their supporters are co-members.

Extract 8

> How can I help a friend who is experiencing domestic violence? ('Finding help')

In this one subsection of the text, the first-person pronoun I and second-person YOU are used to address survivors' friends, constructing solidarity with a broader imagined community of supportive friends and service providers.

Looking at the discourse and distribution of pronouns together allows an analysis of the form that domestic abuse is assumed to take. While the text mentions the possibility that abuse may occur in other familial relationships as well as intimate partner relationships, the primary target audience seems to be survivors of abuse perpetrated by heterosexual male partners, rather than abuse in same–sex relationships or perpetrated by parents, caregivers, or other members of the family or household. This construction of implied readership is emphasised by

the gendered distribution of pronouns and their referents: HE and HIM are categorically used for abusers, while SHE and HER are used only for survivors or children, implying that abusers are male and survivors are female. However, coordinate constructions such as SHE OR HE and HIM OR HER can have a broader range of referents, including abusers (47.4% of third-person coordinate constructions), children (26.3% of third-person coordinate constructions), or agencies and service providers (21.0% of third-person coordinate constructions). The gender-neutral third-person pronoun THEY can also be used for a broad range of referents, including abusers (2.2% of third-person pronouns), children (19.6% of third-person pronouns), or agencies who support survivors (33.4% of third-person pronouns). The alternation between gender–specific and gender–neutral pronouns for abusers and survivors allows for the *possibility* that abusers may be men or women, and may be the same sex or a different sex from the intimate partners that they abuse, while still implying that male violence against women and girls/children is a locus of particular concern. This implication is reinforced by the possessive determiner phrases *your husband* and *their father*, which occur 5 times each in the text. Together with the possessive determiner phrase *your children*, which occurs 107 times, these determiner phrases use presupposition to construct an implied reader who has children and is experiencing violence perpetrated by an abuser who is both her heterosexual intimate partner or ex-partner and her co-parent.

Domestic violence is therefore constructed as a problem that occurs within long-term heterosexual relationships and traditional nuclear family units, and in which the fabric of women's parenting relationships with their children is itself leveraged as part of the abuse. In the final section of this paper we will return to this point and see how the fabric of women's relationships with their communities may also be problematised.

Negotiating survivor identities

A key strategy used by the text in representing survivor identity is to construct survivors as active and agentive in how they navigate their situation, taking steps to reduce harm and resist abuse. The texts use both discursive strategies and pronoun distribution to achieve this representation. In this section, I use both qualitative and quantitative approaches to discuss the construction of survivors as agentive, as well as some possible risks of the strategies employed by the texts, especially in the section of the text that focuses on multiply marginalised experience.

'What can I do about it?' Agentive resistance discourse

The text constructs survivors as actively and agentively negotiating, resisting, and managing their situations. This discourse of agency projects motivations for victims'/survivors' responses to violence, framing them as making practical and rational choices within their constrained circumstances (cf. Dunn 2005). This section explores how the text centres survivors' experiences by presenting survivors as agentively coping with abuse, before turning in the next section to an example of how that agency is problematised.

   The presumption of an active and agentive response to abuse is made explicit in Extract 9, which presents survivors as *active[ly], resourceful[ly] and creative[ly]* resisting through, for example, reading support texts, rather than *passive[ly] accept[ing]* their situation:

Extract 9

   The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' are both used, depending on the context. 'Survivor' is, however, preferred as it emphasizes an active, resourceful and creative response to the abuse, in contrast to 'victim', which implies passive acceptance. If you are reading this, then you are – at least to some extent – a survivor. ('General information')

Extract 10

   Whatever coping strategies you have used – with more or less success – there may come a time when you feel the only option is to leave your partner. ('General information')

Extract 11

   I am experiencing domestic violence – what can I do about it? ('General information')

In Extract 10, *[w]hatever coping strategies you have used* implies that survivors have used *coping strategies* to negotiate their situation prior to leaving an abusive partner. In Extract 11 the wh-question *what can I do about it* triggers the presupposition that there is something a survivor can do about the abuse they are experiencing. The text encourages a range of resistance strategies, including harm reduction strategies leaving abusive relationships and reporting abuse to authorities:

Extract 12

> If you suspect that your partner is about to attack you, try to go to a lower risk area of the house – for example where there is a way out and access to a telephone. Avoid the kitchen or garage where there are likely to be knives or other weapons. ('General information')

Women's Aid text encourages a range of coping strategies, acknowledging constraints on survivors' actions and agency, and constructing survivors as making rational choices within their constrained circumstances. The text also validates women's *good reasons to fear* (Extract 14) post-separation violence and unsafe child custody and contact arrangements, as shown in Extracts 13–14.

Extract 13

> Sometimes abusers will increase their violence if they suspect you are thinking of leaving, and will continue to do so after you have left, so this can be a particularly dangerous time for you. ('General information')

Extract 14

> Many mothers have good reason to fear any ongoing contact between their children and their former partner, but they often find that family court professionals minimize or ignore these fears because they are convinced that ongoing contact with both parents is in the interests of the children in the long term. ('Helping your children')

Although the text acknowledges the barriers to leaving abusive relationships and the shortcomings of statutory systems such as family courts that are supposed to protect and support victims/survivors of domestic abuse, the text also uses explicit as well as subtler means to encourage women to lave abusive relationships and report abuse to authorities. In order to examine the extent to which these patterns are robust in the text, I now turn to corpus techniques.

Table 3 shows L5 to R5 collocates of pronouns YOU and THEY (i.e. collocates which occur within 5 places to the left or right of the pronoun), which relate to separation from or staying with an abusive partner. There are several ways to measure collocation[2] – I use *mutual information* (MI) – a measure of association. To ensure accuracy, I examine only collocates which have a minimum MI value of 3 and which occur at least 5 times within the search window – usually L5–R5, that is, within five words to the left or right of the node, or search term, unless otherwise specified. Apply-

ing a minimum MI of 3 and frequency cut-off of 5 provides confidence that a high mutual information score is not due to a highly atypical or one-off collocation.[3]

Closer examination of the discursive context of the collocates of YOU and THEY which are shown in Table 3, reveals that words which relate to separation from an abusive partner collocate with YOU while words which relate to continuing abusive relationships collocate with the more distal THEY. Examples of these collocates in context are shown in Extracts 15–19. In these extracts, the underlined words mark collocates of YOU and THEY identified in Table 3.

Extract 15

> You may decide to return with an injunction. ('Finding help')

Extract 16

> Is there a neighbour you <u>could</u> trust, and where you <u>could go</u> in an emergency? ('General information')

Extract 17

> There are some suggestions below for what you need to take with you <u>when</u> you <u>leave</u>. ('General information')

Extract 18

> Protecting yourself after you have <u>left</u>
> If you <u>leave</u> your partner because of abuse, you may want not want people to know the reason you <u>left</u>. ('General information')

Extract 19

> Women stay with their abusers because they still love them. ('General information')

A strategy used in the text is to present practical strategies for separation, as in Extracts 15–17. Words such as *decide* (frequency = 30, MI = 5.71) and *could* (frequency = 55, MI = 5.47) are used in constructions that do not explicitly tell women to leave abusive relationships, but instead present a separation as one of a range of possibilities. At first glance *return* (frequency = 12, MI = 4.90) might seem ambiguous, but on closer examination of the

concordance lines, these refer to obtaining an injunction in order to live in one's own home or local area post-separation without an abusive ex-partner (Extract 15), or they occur within the scope of negation to talk about *not* going back to an abusive relationship. Another strategy, is to presuppose separation. The collocates *left* (frequency = 21, MI = 5.35), *leave* (frequency = 20, MI = 4.61), *return* (frequency = 12, MI = 4.90), *when* (frequency = 31, MI = 4.71), and *go* (frequency = 22, MI = 4.65) are used in sentences that presuppose separation from an abuser, as in Extracts 17–18. In contrast to the collocates of YOU which are used to background the assumption of separation, the collocate of THEY – *still* (frequency = 5, MI = 5.94) – is used to talk about ongoing factors that keep women in continuing abusive relationships (Extract 19).

Table 3: Collocates of YOU and THEY which relate to leaving or staying in an abusive relationship.

Collocate	Frequency	Mutual information
L5 to R5 collocates of YOU		
decide	30	5.71
could	55	5.47
left	21	5.35
return	12	4.90
when	31	4.71
go	22	4.65
leave	20	4.61
L5 to R5 collocates of THEY		
still	5	5.94

As can be seen from the high frequencies and mutual information scores in Table 3, the patterns shown in Extracts 15–19 are robust through the text. The text's differential use of YOU and THEY suggests that the text uses practices of simulated friendship with survivors who leave abusive relationships, and adopt a more distal stance towards survivors who are in continuing abusive relationships. This would appear to be in tension with the text's discourse of validating a range of ways of coping with abuse, including seeking support and minimising harm and acknowledgement of the barriers that many women face in trying to leave situations of abuse, potentially including post-separation violence, or practical barriers such as the risk of homelessness. These concerns are made explicit in Extract 20.

Extract 20

> One question that is often asked is: 'Why didn't you leave?' or alternatively 'Why did you stay so long?' If you haven't been in this situation yourself, leaving may seem the obvious answer. But there are all sorts of reasons why women stay with their abusers – and it is also important to know that leaving does not always end the abuse (and sometimes, at least for a time, it may get worse). ('General information')

By focusing on coercive control rather than solely on physical violence, the text is also positive in its centring of survivors' experiences, and the weight and seriousness that they attribute to experiences of non-extrinsic violence. *The Survivor's Handbook* characterises *patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour* (Extract 1) in terms of a broad range of non-extrinsically violent behaviours, including *threatening to withhold money*, *take the children away* and *lying to your friends and family about you*, to force a person to *comply* with an abuser's *demands* (Extract 3), which frames a broad range of behaviours as coercive, regardless of whether they are criminalised or extrinsically or non-extrinsically violent.

Exceptionalising intersectionality

The fifth chapter of *The Survivor's Handbook*, titled 'Special circumstances', focuses specifically on multiply oppressed survivors, for example, survivors who are Black, have uncertain immigration status, are lesbian or bisexual, or are disabled. In this section, I will show that responsibility is shifted from the perpetrator to the individual survivor, and from the survivor to multiply marginalised communities, problematising the agency that was discussed in the previous section.

As in the other chapters of *The Survivor's Handbook*, the 'Special circumstances' chapter alternates between YOU and THEY to directly address the implied reader and describe the impact of abuse by giving examples of ways that domestic violence may manifest in contexts of intersecting oppression, as shown in Extracts 21–23. These examples reflect and center the experiences of survivors themselves (Donovan, Barnes and Nixon 2014; Munson 2011; Thiara 2015), but by specifically marking certain kinds of experiences as racialised, disabled, and sexed, they also centre white, heterosexual, non-disabled, non-immigrant experience as 'default', and frame intersectional experience in terms of an unmarked white, British, heterosexual, non-disabled gaze. This is made explicit in the framing of intersectional experience as a *special* or exceptional circumstance, begging the question of from whose perspective is intersectional experience 'special'.

Extract 21

If you are disabled, you may have particular concerns about moving out of your home: it may have been specially adapted for you; or perhaps a care package has been organised, and you are worried that you will lose your current level of independence if you are forced to move elsewhere. You may be reluctant to report domestic violence from a partner whose care you depend on, and which you believe enables you to stay out of institutional care. ('Special circumstances')

Extract 22

If you are a black or minority woman trying to escape from domestic violence, your experiences may be compounded by racism, which is pervasive in the UK. You may be unwilling to seek help from statutory agencies – such as the police, social services, or housing authorities – because you are afraid of a racist response. ('Special circumstances')

Extract 23

If you are making a separate application for asylum, the Border and Immigration Agency should – in addition to your grounds for asylum – take into consideration the risk of your return to your country of origin as a woman alone. For example, you may be subject to social rejection, stigmatization, loss of status or economic resources (and in some cultures may even be at risk of an 'honour killing'). ('Special circumstances')

Although the texts acknowledge that *racism, which is pervasive in the UK* and fear of *a racist response* act as a barrier to support, that experiences of abuse *may be compounded by racism* (Extract 22), and that material consequences of reporting may include losing independent living support and the risk of institutionalisation, deportation or violence (Extracts 21–23), the texts also present intersectional support as a matter of personal preference in Extract 24.

Extract 24

You may prefer to get support from someone from the same ethnic, religious, or cultural group as yourself. There are a number of specialist services for women from black and minority ethnic communities. ('Special circumstances')

Unlike the other chapters of *The Survivor's Handbook*, which present survivors' communities as supportive, and discuss conflict primarily in the

context of partner abuse or potentially with service providers who *minimise or ignore* fears about domestic abuse (Extract 14), texts that address intersectional experiences also focus on potential conflicts with ethnic communities (Extract 22) and within families or religious communities (Extract 25). Sections of the text that address intersectional experiences present survivors' communities as unsupportive, especially ethnic minority and faith communities, and as playing a key role in victimisation, as shown in Extract 25.

Extract 25

> If you are lesbian or bisexual, you may have experienced abuse from another woman; or you may have been abused by a male partner or former partner, or by other family members. If you are from a black or minority ethnic community, you may – as a lesbian or a bisexual woman – face particular hostility due to cultural reasons. Some religious communities are also very hostile to homosexuality, and may ostracise or abuse you if you form a close relationship with another woman. ('Special circumstances')

Focusing on lesbian and bisexual women's and ethnic minority women's presumed conflicts with communities invokes what Baker calls 'difficult minorities' discourse in which members of marginalised groups are represented as divisive and in conflict with one another and with the values of the presumed mainstream (Baker 2005; cf. Jaworska and Krishnamurthy 2012); as well as 'collectivisation and differentiation' discourse, in which marginalised groups are represented as constituting homogeneous and monolithic communities, which are separate from the presumed mainstream (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013). Although the texts acknowledge that *racism … is pervasive* (Extract 22) and shapes and compounds experiences of abuse, attributing presumed *particular hostility* faced by lesbian and bisexual women from marginalised backgrounds to *cultural reasons* (Extract 25) frames marginalised groups' 'cultures' as having less egalitarian values than the presumed mainstream (cf. Puar 2007).

I argued above that one strategy for creating solidarity with the implied reader is the use of first-person pronouns to refer to survivors and project beliefs and experiences onto the implied reader. As shown in Examples 6–8, other chapters of *The Survivor's Handbook* use first-person pronouns to refer to survivors, positioning the implied reader and implied author as co-members of a supportive community, who share certain experiences. In order to examine the extent to which pronouns are used to synthesised solidarity for multiply marginalised survivors I now return to a quantitative analysis of pronoun distribution.

The dispersion plots in Figures 1–3 show the distribution of pronouns through the corpus. Dispersion plots treat corpora as a string of text, and display a black line where each pronoun token occurs in the string. As can be seen from the dispersion plots in Figures 2 and 3, YOU and THEY are evenly dispersed through the corpus, but as shown in Figure 1, the first-person pronouns I and WE are not.

No. of hits = 53
File length (in chars) = 371,291

Figure 1: Dispersion of I and WE in *The Survivor's Handbook*.

No of hits = 1387
File length (in chars) = 371,291

Figure 2: Dispersion of YOU in *The Survivor's Handbook*.

No. of hits = 225
File length (in chars) = 371,291

Figure 3: Dispersion of THEY in *The Survivor's Handbook*.

Using a statistical measure of dispersion, this difference in distribution which can be seen in the dispersion plots can be quantified. To measure dispersion, I use Gries's 'deviation of proportions' measures, DP and DP_{norm} (Gries 2008; Lijffijt and Gries 2012).[4] A value closer to 0 indicates that a feature is evenly distributed through the corpus, and a value closer to 1 indicates uneven distribution. Some dispersion measures are based on theoretical maximal or minimal values[5] – DP is not, and DP_{norm} is – so I quote both the DP and DP_{norm} values (Gries 2008).

In order to test whether the 'Special circumstances' chapter was substantially different in its use of synthetic solidarity practices, I compared the 'Special circumstances' chapter to the chapter which is thematically most like it – the 'General information' chapter – since both chapters use examples to describe how domestic violence might manifest. Table 4 below compares the dispersion of pronouns between these two chapters. As can be seen from Table 4, YOU has comparable relative frequencies across both chapters, with a relative frequency of 400.96 per 10,000 in the 'General information' chapter, and 417.45 per 10,000 in the Special Circumstances chapter; as does THEY, with a relative frequency of 57.02 per 10,000 in the 'General information' chapter and 50.32 per 10,000 in the Special Circumstances chapter. In addition to having similar relative

frequencies across both chapters, the two pronouns YOU (DP = 0.01, DP_{norm} = 0.02) and THEY (DP = 0.07, DP_{norm} = 0.13) are evenly dispersed across the two chapters.

By contrast, first-person pronouns are unevenly dispersed through the text. I and WE both have a relative frequency of 22.07 per 10,000 in the 'General information' chapter but do not occur at all in the 'Special circumstances' chapter which addresses intersectional experiences of domestic violence, and so have a DP of 0.49 and DP_{norm} of 0.97. Put another way, the use of first-person pronouns to construct solidarity by simulating friendship and reciprocal discourse with survivors is not employed as a strategy to create solidarity with survivors of domestic violence who experience intersectional oppression.

Recall that first-person pronouns are used primarily within question–answer sequences, such as those shown in Extracts 6–7 above, where they function as a footing device (Goffman 1979), positioning the implied author as a sympathetic peer who animates information about how domestic violence may manifest, and advice about coping with and leaving abusive situations. By embedding first-person pronouns within question – answer sequences, which simulate reciprocal discourse (Talbot 1995), the implied author/animator is also positioned as taking part in a mutual rapport with the implied reader, constructing solidarity between the implied author and implied reader. However, these footing and simulated reciprocal discourse strategies are not employed in the 'Special circumstances' chapter which address multiply marginalised survivors' experiences of domestic violence, even though both chapters are thematically similar and discuss what domestic abuse is and the range of ways abuse may manifest. By using first-person pronouns to refer to survivors in the 'General information' chapter, the text centres (some) survivors' voices and experiences. However, by shifting from first-person pronouns to the third-person THEY in the 'Special circumstances' chapter, the texts construct multiply marginalised survivors more distally.

Implications and conclusions

Despite the prevalence of 'just say no' discourse in public opinion (Cameron 2007; Kitzinger and Frith 1999; Amnesty International and NUS Wales Women's Campaign 2008), adjudications (Ehrlich 2001, 2007), and violence prevention materials (Candelas de la Ossa 2016), it is refreshingly absent from *The Survivor's Handbook*. Unlike much previous research on language and sexual violence, which has found a tendency to place responsibility on potential victims to prevent violence by altering their communication

Table 4: First- and third-person pronoun frequency, relative frequency, and dispersion, in two chapters of *The Survivor's Handbook*.

Person	Pronoun	'General information'		'Special circumstances'		Total		Range	Log likelihood	Dispersion	
		Freq.	Relative freq. (per 10,000)	Freq.	Relative freq. (per 10,000)	Freq.	Relative freq. (per 10,000)			DP	DP_{norm}
1st	I	12	22.07	0	0.00	12	11.18	1	16.32	0.49	0.97
	ME	3	5.52	10	18.89	13	12.11	2	4.17	0.28	0.54
	WE	12	22.07	0	0.00	12	11.18	1	16.32	0.49	0.97
	US	20	36.78	4	75.56	24	22.37	2	11.22	0.33	0.64
2nd	YOU	218	400.96	221	417.45	439	409.10	2	0.18	0.01	0.02
3rd	THEY	31	57.02	23	43.45	54	50.32	2	0.99	0.07	0.13

style to supposedly prevent misunderstandings (Cameron 2007; Ehrlich 2001; Kitzinger and Frith 1999), this text does not recommend particular communication styles or any other strategy to try to prevent abuse, and explicitly places responsibility for stopping or preventing abuse on perpetrators. In sharp contrast to discourses that present responsibility as 'zero sum' (Archard 1998) – in which certain actions on the part of the victim such as drinking alcohol are perceived to attach responsibility to the victim, and responsibility that is attributed to the victim is perceived as being taken away from the perpetrator – this text for survivors does not attribute responsibility to victims/survivors, and instead represents blaming victims/survivors, or minimising of perpetrator responsibility, as itself constituting part of the abuse. Since misperceptions about what resistance to abuse may look like, and in particular the challenges that victims/survivors encounter in being recognised as 'strategic agents' (Ehrlich 2001:152) can affect survivors' access to redress, the text's ability to sympathetically represent victims'/survivors' agency has the potential to play important roles in public discourse, particularly in offering a way to talk about survivors' agency while still keeping responsibility for abuse where it properly belongs – namely on perpetrators, and not on victims/survivors.

   The second-person pronoun YOU collocated with discourse of separation from an abusive partner, while third-person THEY was used in discourse about continuing abusive relationships. This suggests that the texts seem to take a more proximal stance towards survivors who separate from abusive partners, and a more distal stance towards survivors who are in continuing abusive relationships. Many survivors say that professional and lay supporters see aspects of their separation processes as 'unacceptable' – for example, they may see living with an abusive partner or the iterative elements of breaking free from an abusive partner and living apart for a time as diminishing a survivor's credibility, with the result that support may be withheld at crucial points during or after the separation process, making it harder for survivors to leave abusive situations permanently and live free of violence (Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1999). While multiple readings of the texts are possible, one risk of the adopting a more distal stance in discussion of continuing abusive relationships is that it may be perceived as weakening the texts' framing of survivors as making agentive choices within constrained circumstances, or that it may be perceived as constructing an 'ideal' victim/survivor identity who is deserving of protection and support in overtly resisting and leaving situations of abuse. Such a construction of 'ideal' victimhood might be alienating for survivors who might otherwise reach out for support.

The text excels in centring many survivors' lived experiences by defining abuse in terms of patterns of coercive control – an understanding of abuse that is in line with feminist conceptualisations of domestic abuse as violating women's autonomy (Stark 2007). By representing abuse as occurring primarily within women's families and communities, and in which systemic power and the fabric of women's relationships – particularly with their children – may be leveraged as part of the abuse. This centring of the relational aspects of abuse are important in highlighting the psychoemotional coercion and control (Stark 2007) that many survivors experience, and this emphasis distinguishes the texts from much legal discourse and other public awareness campaigns which frame abuse as being perpetrated primarily through extrinsic physical force (Candelas de la Ossa 2016; Ehrlich 2001; Estrich 1987).

However, the focus on relationality and systemic injustices in the 'Special circumstances' chapter – where the text engages with how experiences of violence may be qualitatively different and shaped by social experiences of ethnicity, religion, immigration status, sexuality, or disability – are double-edged. The text uses examples that challenge what Spelman (1988) calls the 'ampersanding' problem of intersectionality that is powerfully critiqued by Crenshaw (1989): the (mistaken) perception that the social experiences of Black women are the same as those Black men and white women. At the same time, they also stereotype intersectional experience, and in particular the experience of being LGBTQ from a marginalised background, as an experience of rejection from one's ethnic or faith community due to 'culture', framing intersectional identities and multiply marginalised communities as 'the problem'. Although the text acknowledges racism as a barrier to support, survivors' need for support that is free of these barriers is attributed to individual preferences, which individualises the structural injustices faced by survivors and presents these injustices as individual attitudes (Crenshaw 1991; Connell 2005; Dobash and Dobash 1992); and may be unintentionally perceived as shifting responsibility from perpetrators to marginalised communities, and from communities to multiply oppressed survivors. This brings us to the theoretical implications of this paper. The examples of multiple marginalisation presented by the text examined in this paper show that listing multiply marginalised experiences is insufficient for achieving an intersectional perspective. Instead, intersectional perspectives can only be achieved by 'recentring' intersectional experiences (Smith 2006).

The texts could be strengthened and clarified by 'recentring' intersectional experiences (Smith 2006) rather than presenting them as 'special' or 'exceptional' circumstances, framing the barriers that survivors face

in accessing support as social and structural problems rather than individual preferences, and using practices of synthetic solidarity with survivors of all backgrounds, regardless of whether they have separated or plan to separate from an abusive partner. The text would also benefit from explicitly conceptualising coping, resistance and separation as stages in the same longer-term process, regardless of what stage survivors are at in that process. Given the focus on coping strategies and harm reduction, which Kelly and Westmarland (2015) observe may involve a survivor 'narrowing' their actions to avoid an abuser's negative reactions, the texts may also benefit from contrasting the characteristics of an abusive relationship with those of consensual, equal, respectful relationships, in line with Kelly and Westmarland (2015)'s recommendation that survivor support and violence prevention organisations shift their focus to survivors' 'space for action' (Kelly and Westmarland 2015:14) – that is, the liberty to make choices, act autonomously, and feel heard and respected.

About the author

Abigaël Candelas de la Ossa is an educator, researcher and policy advocate working on language use in violence prevention and survivor support, and media representations of bias-motivated gun violence. Making policy recommendations and advocating for improvements to violence prevention and survivor support programs is an important component of her work. For more information about her research and activities, see https://acandelas.gitlab.io.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   Percentages are quoted to one decimal place. Relative frequency per 10,000 and mutual information and dispersion measures are quoted to two decimal places.
2   A full discussion of this topic is outside the scope of this paper, but see Brezina, McEnery and Wattam (2015) and Evert (2005) for detailed discussions of this topic.
3   A minimum mutual information score of 3 and minimum frequency of 5 is consistent with corpus linguistics convention for filtering out one-off or highly atypical

co-occurring strings. For a more detailed discussion, see Brezina et al. (2015) and Evert (2005).

4   The appropriateness of a dispersion measure may depend on the internal structure of a corpus, and whether it consists of parts that are equally sized. Since the chapters in *The Survivors' Handbook* are of comparable but not exactly identical sizes, I selected a measure which does not require corpus parts to be equally sized. For a more detailed discussion, see Gries (2008).

5   The debate in the field over whether theoretical maximal or minimal values should be used is outside the scope of this study. For a detailed discussion, see Gries (2008).

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