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Multilateral Generation of Violence: On the Theorization of Microscopic Analyses and Empirically Grounded Theories of Violence

Susanne Nef & Friederike Lorenz-Sinai[*]

Abstract: *»Multilaterale Erzeugung von Gewalt: Zur Theoretisierung von mikroskopischen Analysen und empirisch fundierten Gewalttheorien«.* Using two phenomena of violence against children and intimate partner violence and based on two case studies, we explore the extent to which social processes of interpreting and negotiating violence contribute to further theorization efforts. The central unifying element is that both forms of violence are enabled and performed in power relations and have long been socially, legally, and politically legitimized. Therefore, our study's focus is not on violence as a subject but rather on the social negotiation and construction of meanings of actions framed as violent. This perspective is exemplified by two independent case studies and data material that illustrate how such microscopic arguments are developed empirically. The methods used for the two case studies include qualitative analyses of interviews and organizational documents. Hence, we also discuss the researchers' involvement and challenges in these processes. Based on our analytical findings, we argue for the use of an approach of a subject appropriated *theorizing violence* rather than a formal theory formation of violence. The procedural analysis of violence revealed its importance in making non-public and socially taboo forms of violence analytically accessible.

Keywords: Microscopic analyses, indexicality, context of discovery, violence against children, intimate partner violence.

1. Theory as a Journey, Not a Destination

Recent sociological research on violence has increasingly relied on video analyses due to a methodological focus. According to Collins (2011), emerging violent situations can be methodologically reconstructed primarily through film and video material. These analyses allow for a practically facilitated and

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economically favorable approach to researching the subject of violence; however, research risks include developing a visibility bias, both theoretically-conceptually and methodologically. If researchers of violence focus primarily on phenomena that are comparatively public and thus relatively easily accessible and audio-visually preserved, this affects their interpretations and explanations. Moreover, forms of violence and those affected by violence that are not public, visible, or observable remain unconsidered in violence research and theory building due to this visual and situationist limitation. Another risk could be that violence is reduced to a limited, observable situation. The possible consequence is that non-public, non-visible, and strongly taboo phenomena of violence are not considered due to bias.

We argue for developing an understanding of violence as indexical. Following Swedberg's (2014) and Hoebel and Koloma Beck's (2019) remarks, we emphasize Swedberg's proposal to shift the focus from the production and thus the goal of the theory – as the theory can be conceived as de-indexialization – to the process of theorizing. Our aim is to provide a reflexive awareness of the theorization's indexicality. This shift is particularly relevant in explaining the risk of visibility bias in violence research. It is precisely these less accessible forms of violence that induce the question of appropriate methodologies. The primary concern here is to trace the indexicality of violence: its concrete social situatedness and the contextual peculiarities of its respective reality of execution (Hoebel and Koloma Beck 2019). Here, (public) visibility is only one situational element among many; it is not constitutive for violence, per se. Therefore, violence cannot be reduced to (physical) interactions/experiences and/or situations; however, violence has a subsequent effect. Hence, violent productivity emerges, and violence should be reconstructed as a social process.

We will illustrate these claims using two case studies. In both studies, we did not adopt the process-oriented perspective from the start but rather occupied ourselves with discovering the material and negotiation processes that emerged alongside them, noting that a focus on violence as a phenomena and therefore formal definitions of violence are insufficient. Hence, we used the perspective of reconstructing social and temporal processes and multiple perspectives from the empirical material. This led to an indexical perspective on the studied cases (inspired by, for example, Koloma Beck 2011).

From this microscopic analysis perspective, we discuss the social dynamics of an incident perceived as violent based on the case studies. As a first step, we briefly outline the two case studies. Therefore, we mainly focus on the methods, problem horizons, and corresponding premises. For this framework, we derived the dimensions of the indexicality of violence. Along these dimensions – the context of discovery and construction performances – we outline the activities of theorizing in the two case studies in the next step. In the discussion, we argue how the approach of microscopically reconstructing

the social dynamics, or the interpretation of violence, allows us to relate and compare violence with the empirical occurrences of other forms of violence. Finally, we reflect on how the indexicality, and thus the contextuality of violence, can reflexively change the understanding of the subject matter: violence. We conclude our contribution with a statement explaining how context-bound statements on violence as a social process enable insights into analytical generality for research.

2. Two Case Studies: Methods, Problem Horizons, and Corresponding Premises

In this article, we draw on the discovery context and thus the theorization of two independent studies of intimate partner violence and staff violence against children with disabilities in residential care. Both case studies are characterized by forms of violence being in the foreground without being public or visible phenomena of violence. Additionally, both phenomena of violence are rather taboo in society: intimate partner violence mainly occurs in a private space and counteracts ideals of partnership and romantic relationships, and violence against children by professionals in institutions is performed in (partially closed) rooms in institutional spaces, counteracting the legal right to non-violent education and the protection mandate of the institutions and pedagogical professionals working in them.

Case Study 1, the study on intimate partner violence, is based on 18 interviews conducted throughout Switzerland from 2015 to 2019 (see Nef 2020). They were analyzed using qualitative reconstructive methods following the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2000). The 13 women and 5 men interviewed had all experienced intimate partner violence in various forms in heterosexual relationships. Their ages ranged from 20 to 72 years old, and they were in ongoing relationships or had ended the relationships before the interviews.

Case Study 2, the study on staff violence against children with disabilities in residential care settings in Germany, is based on 18 narrative interviews with (former and current) employees from the respective organization and two expert interviews with professionals from public authorities (see Kessl and Lorenz 2016; Lorenz 2020). We performed analyses of the behavioral group concept and 164 pages of the team's documentation as well as observation notes on the criminal process in which video records of the staff's abuse of children are shown. The data analysis of Case Study 2 was done by developing a cross-material coding system (Strauss 1998) and narrative analyses of the interviews (Rosenthal 2015).

2.1   Problem Horizons and Corresponding Premises

Using the example of these two phenomena of violence, we focus on the theorization process. Therefore, we focus on the indexicality of violence, particularly on the discovery context, such as observational and constructional performances in empirical research processes.

Indexicality is a concept with roots in ethnomethodology. It characterizes space and time boundness, meaning the context-dependency of linguistic and other expressions. It describes original statements that cannot be understood without knowledge of the person speaking and the situation of which they are speaking (Hoebel and Koloma Beck 2019). Indexicality means that categories and descriptions alongside facial expressions and gestures comprise the specifics of the interactional context (Bergmann 2019). Moreover, the concept indicates that the senses of social interactions are reflexive in two ways. In concrete terms, the persons involved assure and discuss what is at stake "here" and "now" (reciprocal) (Abels 2010; Bergmann 2019). Hoebel and Koloma Beck (2019) outline how indexicality is interesting for the sociological theory of violence: the concept reveals possibilities to examine violence context-sensitively without having to simply stop at the contingency of violence, which means that violence defies unambiguous empirical determination (Hoebel and Koloma Beck 2019).

There are various notions of the meaning of "violence," which has repeatedly triggered discussions in the sociology of violence regarding the "right" definition of the concept. Again, this discussion highlights the contingency of violence as a social phenomenon, and the readings of violence – even in scholarly thematization – are correspondingly context-bound. Concisely, "what" counts as violence is – contrary to everyday intuition – not empirically evident but bound to construction performances in everyday life and in scientific analyses (Hoebel and Koloma Beck 2019).

This leads us to the discovery context of research, as contexts of discovery in the sociology of violence theory are characterized above all by the contingency of violence. This context represents the circumstance in which all research projects and thus analyses have certain contexts of discovery; however, these contexts are hardly named – at least not (anymore) with the progress of theory – or even unnamed (Hoebel and Koloma Beck 2019).

### 3.	"Theory as a Journey": Reconstructing the Social Dynamics and Social Production of (Interpretations of) Violence

In this section, we present selected aspects of the theorization of the two case studies. We selected these aspects based on the dimensions presented in the previous chapter. In both case studies, we focus on different aspects with regard to the co-production of violence through research. In Case Study 1, we discuss the methodological implications that violence poses in a data analysis according to the grounded theory in relation to challenges, and we show methodical implementations. In Case Study 2, we discuss the meaning of different types of data in the theorization of violence. Our structure is as follows: we discuss the discovery context. We reflect on the observation and construction performances by outlining the process of reconstructing the social dynamics of our two cases. In both case studies, the context of discovery's importance can be illustrated with two examples: the dimensionalization of the research questions (Case Study 1) and how research contributes to the social process of defining violence (Case Study 2).

In Case Study 1, the study question was newly developed and continuously re-dimensionalized during the initial contacts and interviews. This was done because it became apparent during these surveys that a shift in the studies' object was required from intimate partner violence to the interpretation of violent action and its meanings for the interviewees embedded in their biography and social circumstances. In summary, the interviews revealed the intangibility of violence. This was already evident during the initial contact when the potential interview partners opened the conversation with statements such as, "I am not affected by real violence," "I am not a victim of real violence," or "I am not a real victim." [1] These statements were immediately supplemented by the question of whether participation in the study was possible.

In brief, the empirical findings of Case Study 1 reveal a complex relationship between the experience of "real" violence (i.e., physical violence, especially associated with visible injuries and hospitalization) and its disavowal and projection onto others (i.e., "real" victims). Because norms and stereotypes are embedded in concepts of violence, for the survivors,[2] violence remained an abstract but presumably essentialist concept to which they could not relate their own experiences. What constitutes "real" violence or "real" victims was not explained during the interviews, and the mentioned

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[1]	Source: protocols of initial contact recordings.
[2]	In Case Study 1, the term *survivor* is used. This term focuses on ideas of coping and resistance. However, if we address the dominant conception of victimhood, the term *victim* is used.

characteristics were expressed without self-reference and were constantly re-adjusted. For example, some survivors trivialized physical abuse by noting that their injuries did not require hospitalization, or if hospitalization was necessary, by ascribing the injury to an "accident," such as an "unfortunate fall" (Ms. Novak, paragraph 202). It became clear that violent situations were not immediately interpreted as such but characterized as life's adversities: "accidents" or "unfortunate circumstances" for which "nobody" was to blame. Hence, possible violations were described as unintentional, and sexual violence was trivialized and legitimized in the context of intimate relationships, which were considered to provide a legitimate framework for sexuality. By objectifying violence as one of life's adversities and endowing it with a sense of legitimacy, survivors interpreted their experiences either as "not quite" violence or in comparison with "real" victims as not violence at all. In this search for interpretation, the interviewees began to deal with laws and read books. These laws and books are grasped in the analysis as artifacts that are agentivized. Through these laws and books, what is experienced is gradually stripped of its unquestionability and thus delegitimized. Notably, it is not the violence that is negotiated but rather the question of whether what is experienced is legitimate. These struggles to (re)interpret violence were evident across all cases to be the modus operandi. This finding formed the starting point for theorizing the interpretation of intimate partner violence as a social process.

In Case Study 2, due to the abundance of different stories of a violent constellation that had already been generated by employees, managers, and media reports on the case at the start of research in 2013, the challenge was determining which starting point to set in the reconstruction of the violence. Eventually, processes of shifts in interpretation and meaning were reconstructed from 2005, which is described in narrative interviews with staff from neighbor groups as the beginning of the constitution of the violent team constellation to the court judgment of the violent actions in 2017. From 2005 on, the team also began recording videos of its violent behavior; in the therapeutic self-image of the team at the time, these recordings were used for internal reflection on how it implemented the methods of the IntraActPlus approach developed by the psychologists Fritz Jansen and Uta Streit. Note that the beginning and end dates of the process are defined by research based on material such as interviews with observers and videos produced by the perpetrators. The victims might have set an earlier starting point, while some managers in the organization at that time might wanted to set a later starting point.

Another challenge in theorizing violence while including different perspectives was that the criminal trial was still ongoing during the research project. Consequently, the young people in the groups could not be asked for interviews. Their perceptions of violence as well as their definition of the

beginning and end dates remain void in these analyses. The triadic constellation concerns abused children and young people, professionals as perpetrators, and others involved as observers (Koloma Beck 2011), such as relatives or colleagues from neighboring groups and managers who perceived violence and prevented or enabled exposure. A methodological perspective of the team's documentation as collective storytelling (Slembrouck, Hall, and Sarangi 1997) helped with the understanding of how the team re-interpreted systematic abuse as a supposed therapy for the children and how the de-thematization of violent action was framed by the professional's identification with the behavioral IntraActPlus approach.

Finally, the question arose regarding whether the researcher became an observer by contributing to the construction of the story of the violent constellation in the reconstruction of the different stories from interviews with observers of the violence, by documents the perpetrators produced, or by reading descriptions of the videos from the detective inspector, who viewed all the videos found in the group and described in detail the violence against the children as evidence for the pedagogues' charges. The researcher viewed the files on the criminal trial at the beginning of the research in 2013, and the descriptions by the commissioner shaped her inner images of what the scenes of violence contained and the terms with which they can be described.

Both case studies illustrate the observation and construction performances in empirical studies by researchers. To explain these performances as among the discovery context, we outline the process of reconstructing the social dynamics – the interconnectedness and social production of (interpretations of) violence in our two cases.

Case Study 1: Problem Horizons-Sensitive Approach

The abovementioned observations on the initial contacts illustrate the main practical research challenge. Why have none of the interviewees experienced "real violence" and are not "real victims" and yet felt addressed by the study's announcement on intimate partner violence? How can these interpretations be reconstructed, analyzed, and applied to be understood without simply superimposing one's own/hegemonic (scientific) concepts of violence on the experiences and interpretations of those affected?

Explorative openness to new knowledge interest: The first step was the aforementioned reformulation of the research question and the new research interest by exploring: How do survivors interpret violence that they have experienced? What do they refer to? What can this differentiation of "real violence" from the "real victims" represent? In addition, what can it represent that in return no "false violence" and no "false victims" are constructed as a counterpart to the (as the interviewees explain) not experienced "real

violence" and the interpreted "not a real victim status"? How can this blank space be imbued into the narrative of the survivors?

Therefore, during the *investigation*, the analysis of the data increasingly focused on the emerging phenomenon of the search movements of the interviewees "struggling for interpretation," which became apparent in the "speaking about" and the accompanying construction processes of what was experienced. These struggles to (re)interpret violence indicate the importance of exploring violent interpretations following dominant conceptions and social expectations and the pressure to normalize it by the victims. Partly due to the violence of the interpretation: the violence that accompanies it when one has to deal with one's own openness to injury and the dominant conceptions and social expectations of the environment and society.

Shifting the object of research: From violence to the interpretation of violence: We addressed the methodological issues that accompanied these challenges through an elaboration of context-sensitive heuristics. Methodologically, this was accompanied by a combination of epistemological perspectives: an interaction of theoretical, social constructivist, and social structural perspectives. As they are suitable for explaining the interconnectedness and social production of (interpretations of) violence. On the one hand, the social context organizes the human scheme of perception, thought, and action, and on the other hand, it has an organizing effect on the interactive negotiation and production of performances (Nungesser 2017), the latter being the object of investigation. From these perspectives, violence is a social phenomenon within the horizon of an order, where what is perceived as violence or what is considered and recognized as such is negotiated and defined (Staudigl 2014).

Theorizing: Ensuring that constructions of difference were continuously reflected upon: This context-bound approach involves reconstructing how the interpretations of the experiences of violence are embedded in the biographical narrative and what meanings they have based on the interviews. Charmaz's (2000) Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), with its analytical tools and perspectives, allowed for categories to emerge from the core concepts, revealing their connections. A sequence analysis was used for the final analysis of the selected core passages. The dense descriptions generated allowed for a reconstruction of overarching connections and opened access to the ambivalence of interpretations (Hitzler and Honer 1997). Due to the complexity of the research phenomenon, the heuristic concept of analysis interpretation/meaning of violence was successively elaborated from the material. Hence, at the beginning of the research process, it was already possible "to open up possibilities for seeing, organizing, and understanding experience" (Charmaz 2000, 515).

Part of this process was carried out in interpretation sessions. In these interpretation sessions, it became apparent how differently violence or related

actions/coping strategies were interpreted, such as depending on the (assumed) gender identity and/or the (assumed) social class affiliation of the interviewees. For example, coping strategies were interpreted quite differently as expressions of passive suffering (female read gender identity of the interviewee) or as active choices of being nonviolent (male read gender identity of the interviewee). Following Neuber (2011) and her methodological reflections on how to deal with the gendering of the readings of the empirical material, we obscured or "exchanged" features such as gender or other aspects in the transcriptions during the interpretation sessions. With the aim of capturing the different readings depending on the attributed categories.

Based on these findings, ensuring that constructions of difference were continuously reflected on was central throughout the research. Thus, no comparative perspective (men/women) was applied, and differences were not simply set. Rather, it was determined where and to what extent gender makes a difference in the narration: "gender" was to be viewed as a category of conflict that takes effect in the interplay of inter- and intrasubjective meaning (Bereswill 2014). For Case Study 1, "gender" was framed as a narrative stance from a social constructivist perspective. The gendered interpretations underlying "gender knowledge" could be unmasked. From this perspective, it is possible not to assume "a difference" between genders as a basic attitude or normal state. Rather, the experiences of women and men play a role situated in gendered contexts of experience (Grubner 2014).

Finally, for the theoretical coding, the findings were viewed from the outside with heuristic lenses to examine the relationships between concepts by broadening the perspective. Memo writing and ongoing theorizing had a sensitizing effect on the researchers' view of the object of study, as an attribution of "violence" or "typically female" or "typically male" interpretations and patterns of action was avoided. Rather, the contexts, spaces of experience, and interpretations as well as attributions that structure them were elaborated. Using the concept of degendering, the analysis process determined the role language plays in relation to what interpretations/meanings are produced, who "falls out" of the realm of the linguistic so to speak, and who is "in" this realm but does not want to be there, etc. (Grubner 2014). Of interest here was who had to qualify and how to conform to social knowledge (e.g., dominant conceptions of victims and violence). This approach prevented gendered readings of the material from failing to correspond to the complexity and multidimensionality of gender and from merely reproducing power relations and stereotypes through formulations. Accordingly, it was necessary to unravel apparent linkages and to examine supposedly unambiguous patterns of actions and interpretations for their latent and opposing dimensions of meaning (Bereswill 2014).*Conclusion:* Despite – or precisely because of – the sensitivity to the mutual encoding of gender and violence, or the basic assumption that violence is gendered, it was important not to make any rash

assumptions. "Gender" was not associated with or charged with typically male or female interpretations and patterns of action. Rather, gender was understood as part of social identity and self-identification (Bereswill 2014). This approach, which requires gender and violence to be assigned and at the same time suspended, was intended to prevent the categories from being reproduced in one's own interpretation as well as in research (Hagemann-White 2001; Neuber 2011).

Due to the way the category of gender or the gendering of violence is dealt with, and the way violence and coping strategies are gender-culturally (and social class-culturally) shaped as cursorily illustrated in Case Study 1, an example of the problem horizon of the discovery context is briefly outlined. With a focus on theorizing, it is necessary to question these assumed clear (gendered) readings, hegemonic concepts, and contexts. Consequently, the normative images of violence and victimization can be unmasked as social constructions.

A text-based analysis makes it possible to address the complexity of violence in concrete terms because the inclusion of individual experiences increases the complexity of violence and its structural embedding. In principle, the socially inscribed gender logics, with which patterns of interpretation and action go hand-in-hand, are available for disposition, which increases the scope for interpretation rather than narrowing it. Space must be given to life-historical experiences and couple relationships as the context of the experience of violence. In particular, (unresolved) ambivalences can be worked out by taking into account the contradictory relationships of dependence and independence and power and powerlessness in life history in general and in relationships in particular (Hagemann-White 2001).

Process of Classifying Violence (Case Study 2)

For Case Study 2, the social negotiation of the video records the staff produced of its abusive actions is a central discovery context. It is important to note that the recordings are not neutral documents: they are filming the abuse from the perspective of the perpetrators and their decisions in the recorded moments and camera angles. Managers who found and viewed the videos as part of the disclosure, the detective inspector who viewed the videos and wrote detailed protocols, the researcher who read these minutes in the files, and the judge, lawyers, and the public became observers of the violence. As the recordings shaped the team's self-image as well as the disclosure of violence, they became data material dominating the social interpretations and classifications of violence in different contexts. The visualization of the actions against the children had a collectivizing effect at various points for the team that made the recordings join together as an alleged reflection, as a reference

point in the interviews between employees and the researcher, and in the public trial, where some video sequences were shown.

For the team, the video records served as a collectivization and reassurance through the therapeutically labeled actions against the children; however, in the disclosure and in the criminal proceedings, the video scenes of children screaming in pain and fear and the actions of the team produced shared outrage among the observers of the videos. The researcher referenced the videos with other researchers, such as during research workshops, to determine how the violence could be proven. The visualized violence became a particularly credible document, although it only conveys one perspective: the filming of the perpetrators of violence. Situationally visualized violence quickly seems to be viewed as evidence, even within qualitative research. This indicates how important it is to critically reflect on the production and social effects of such video sources in violence research.

Possibly, theorizing violence can make the narratives on violent actions more explicit. For the videos, this perspective clarifies that actions were documented by the perpetrators who did not classify them as violence at the time of recording but as a legitimate therapeutic intervention. This reinterpretation process only became accessible to the researcher through other documents. The next section therefore closely examines the interactive processes of the reinterpretation of violence by the team.

Theorizing violence from different data material: While we classified the narrative interviews with observers (former and current employees and managers of the residential care institution) as possible narratives of the violent constellation, we positioned two documents created by the perpetrators as relevant for the analysis of the social legitimation of violence within the team and to the public: the daily documentation and the official group's concept.

The perpetrator document of the daily documentation enabled the researcher to access the internal legitimation processes among the violently acting employees, while other levels of theorization remain inaccessible, particularly the experience of the children.

The re-interpretation of violence as therapy is clearly shown in entries in the professional storytelling of team members in their documentation. We continuously found the re-interpretation of violence as therapy and coercion as a necessary consequence and part of the training program. Staff members re-interpreted fixation under duress as a supposed "offer of relationship" and "holding." A professional communicates punitive measures in the team documentation:

> We always have to see if we have to consider another strategy if that doesn't work with the chair, for example. For example, we can then take the "water syringe." (Team documentation)

In the team's language, "the chair" is a punishment practice where children are pushed off the chair, and the "water syringe" is a practice of painfully

injecting water into the noses and eyes of children. The researcher and other observers received this context information from the videos produced by the perpetrators. These videos socially function as proof of how the team abused children for more than three years and legitimized the acts of violence externally and within the team regarding a behavioral approach as "therapy."

Officially, the residential care group was considered a successful project by managers, and authorities. However, the team's ideological orientation toward the IntraActPlus approach and the self-portrayal as successful therapists were perceived by neighboring groups as sect-like. This criticism did not intervene in the system of violence. Instead, actions that were perceptible from the outside were criticized as non-pedagogical but for a long time not classified as illegitimate violence within the organization. For this dominant organizational interpretation, it was crucial that the team was seen by the management as a "success group" with an innovative concept.

In addition, parents became part of the self-narration of the team. A legitimizing framework was conceptually defined by categorizations used to justify the accommodation of children. This included narratives that discussed "difficult" residents with whom the family of origin were overwhelmed. In the group concept, parents became homogenized into "parents of difficult children." The use of the IntraActPlus approach was justified conceptually through the general statement that "parents of difficult children often reach their limits" (group concept).

Overall, through promises of change, parents were told that staying in the group was in the interest of their children and that the supposed therapy could overcome their children's impairments. Such promises function based on goals of normalization simultaneously with the devaluation of impairment instead of their acceptance and adaptation of the environment to the children's needs. They were part of the re-interpretation of violence as an alleged therapy.

A process of re-interpreting the practice of violence in the groups began in May 2008 when three employees informally exchanged views on their discomfort dealing with the children and closed a detailed report to the management. This was followed by a multi-year process of discoveries, including criminal proceedings at the Duesseldorf Regional Court in 2016–2017.

The disclosure phase included dynamic social negotiation processes of violence. The analyses enabled the reconstruction of two organizational narratives on the history of violence: one implied that the therapy itself was not problematic but was implemented incorrectly, and the other implied the causes for the violence were in the broader organizational culture.

During the trial, the violent scenes in the videos were classified in the courtroom as grievous bodily harm in the area of torture. Outside the former institutional framework and routinized legitimation practices, the actions would be classified in a legal frame as violence. The constellation of supposed

"difficult children" versus the successful, therapeutic team shifted to the perception of a constellation of victims versus perpetrators.

Conclusion: This process of classifying violence includes the re-interpretation of violent acts as supposed therapy by a pedagogical team through internal organizational processes of negotiating whether the therapy was just misinterpreted or was about staff violence in the criminal proceedings, classifying the acts as violent based on the perpetrator visualization of violence via videos for other aims. These are different contexts of discovery, each of which stands in a specific temporal context of the classification of violence.

As research on a longstanding institutional constellation of violence, Case Study 2 shows the challenges of how a narrative is centered by following perspectives, while further narrations are grouped around it. Associated with this are research decisions about what constitutes violence, what constitutes suffering and being affected, and what does not. This becomes complex with a phenomenon typical of violence research in institutions, namely when employees see themselves as victims of institutional exposure and processing. We noted this self-positioning of the victim position in the interview; however, in the further evaluation process, we no longer classified the interview description as an experience of violence but decided what is violence and not violence and positioned the concerned employees more as observers. It became clear that violence research actively negotiates the question of what violence is and what is not through the classification of interviewees and interpretation of documents.

4. Context of Discovery: Characterized by Subjectivity and Observational and Constructional Performances

This paper examines the multilateral generation of violence. In previous explanations, the observation and construction performances became clear. Hence, it became clear that research is also part of these processes. We focus on these aspects during the discussion. Furthermore, by synergizing two studies on different phenomena and contexts of violence, this approach of microscopically reconstructing the social dynamics, or the interpretation of violence, allows us to relate and compare them.

Violence as a social phenomenon within the horizon of an order: At first glance, intimate partner violence and violence against children by professionals in institutions are two different phenomena. At second glance, they share several structural features. Both forms of violence were criminalized in Switzerland and Germany only a few decades ago and are still widespread today. Both forms of violence are embedded in patriarchal and/or generational

power relations and are taboo and legitimized within them (e.g., Dackweiler and Schäfer 2002). These power relations form the normative framework along which those affected by violence (in partnerships and educational institutions) are (a)shamed: violence and its concealment and legitimization are connected with *shame* and *shaming practices* against the background of powerful concepts of how spouses in partnerships and children should behave and be (Demant and Lorenz 2020; Nef 2021).

Regarding Case Study 1, the micrological reconstructions of the transitions between normalization, denormalization, and delegitimization of violence considering the agentivation of artifacts made it possible to determine that the shift of interpreting violence via delegitimization induces a renewed normalization of violence and thus a normalization loop: violence is still constructed as non-violence even in retrospective narratives or is deprived of meaning attribution by silencing. This is because the interpretation of violence unfolds violent productivity; those affected are confronted with the externally determined violence of the interpretation. The confrontation with normatively charged and polarized attributions, such as "victim/perpetrator," "weak/strong," "innocent/guilty," or "responsible/not responsible," induces the normalization and trivialization of the experience, even after the violence has been delegitimized by those affected.

A central aspect that became clear in the comparison of the theorization is vulnerability. In both case studies, the negotiation and definition of who is/can be considered vulnerable is central. In Case Study 1, for example, one respondent did not press charges because she "wouldn't let them make her a victim after all," representing the re-interpretation or the question: do I become a victim by being affected by violence or by the social recognition of my vulnerability? The interviewee wrestled with this against the backdrop of dominant conceptions of victimhood. She could not be a victim in her own eyes because according to her self-positioning, she was strong, emancipated, and among the majority society (in distinction from the socially accepted "victim group," which was constructed across cases as "migrant, uneducated, female, socially deprived, and weak").

In Case Study 2, it became clear that the children with disabilities who had previously been interpreted as uneducable, difficult, and aggressive were reinterpreted in the course of the public media disclosure and the trial as victims who were weak and defenseless. For these social dynamics of re-interpretation, the institutional context of residential care must be considered. Social work can be considered an "invisible trade" (Slembrouck, Hall, and Sarangi 1997) due to the high degree of autonomy and privacy in which contact between clients and professionals often occurs. To address this invisibility, social workers produce institutionally ratified narratives that make their work visible and audible (Slembrouck, Hall and Sarangi 1997). In the case studied, the team obtained permission from the organization's managers to

implement their supposedly therapeutic concept mostly autonomously and without oversight. The team's self-narration was backed by the management and the public authorities, who were interested in an innovative group concept and in opening up a new group for so-called "difficult" residents.

Inclusion of additional sources in the negotiation of the interpretation of violence and the attribution of meaning: Another central aspect that became clear in the theorization comparison was the inclusion of additional sources in the negotiation of the interpretation of violence and the attribution of meaning. In Case Study 1, artifacts were agentivized across cases. In Case Study 2, this included pedagogical concepts.

For the agentivation of artifacts in Case Study 1, the artifacts can be read as a figure of the third. Figure of the third can be understood as a theoretical figuration: how interpretive hegemony is attributed to artefacts (i.e., hegemony over whether what is experienced is legitimate or not, violence or not). That is, to theorize social bodies of knowledge (such as norms that manifest themselves in laws, the social practices of recourse to these very artifacts), which in Case Study 1 are formed by the dyad of the couple relationship and in Case Study 2 in the pedagogical concepts, and afterward, in the court hearings into a triangle for historically and socially preconfigured processes of interpretation and evaluation that emerge as a commonality of the reconstructed social dynamics.

These artifacts illustrate how contingent violence is and how the interpretation of violence occurs against the background of the social norms manifested in artifacts. The comparison clarifies that the understanding of violence as a phenomenon that does not exist fixedly but is classified in social processes of negotiation and interpretation and embedded in power relations (Staudigl 2012) entails methodological implications. The basic foundation that violence not only refers to (physical) experiences but also to social and intersubjective processes of interpretation causes a change of the research object from violence to the social dynamics of violence. Consequently, violence must be understood as a social construct that society constantly renegotiates (Staudigl 2012). In these negotiations, dominant conceptions represent value judgments and norms. Regarding the two studies, these can be, for example, dominant conceptions about what a couple relationship must be like or the effective power of pedagogical concepts.

Epistemological framing of existing concepts of violence: Because the researchers are part of the process of interpreting violence, it is important to define violence broadly, to make one's own concepts transparent, and to reflect on them. The broader framing of violence can be illustrated by the epistemological framing of existing concepts of violence. This framing allows for an analytical view of violence and of how to handle existing concepts. Central to this is that access occurs through narratives. Following Presser (2009), narratives are understood as supra-individual, cross-contextual rationalities of

storytelling that also affect actions as phenomena constitutive of reality. Thus, deconstruction as the perspective of the present study begins. From a deconstructivist perspective, meanings never penetrate directly and unmediatedly to the surface of language. Rather, they have to "compete" against each other to indicate their meaning in their demarcation from each other (Feustel 2015). Regarding the concept of violence, for example, its meaning shifts depending on the signifier in question ("domestic violence," "psychological violence," "physical violence," "sexual violence," "false violence," etc.), with which further signifiers are associated. What needs to be analyzed is how things acquire their meaning (Feustel 2015). Thus, when talking about "non-violence," it is necessary to ask how this acquired meaning and (how) the dichotomy arose between "violence" and "non-violence."

For example, radical constructivism focuses on the individual and thus on subjective attributions and evaluations that are dependent on the person and the location (Knorr Cetina 1981). In Case Study 1, intimate partner violence and related constructions, such as "victim" and "perpetrator," are to be detached from a "rhetoric of naturalness" (Feustel 2015, 72) via the perspective of social constructivism and deconstruction as an epistemological foundation. Instead, from a deconstructivist perspective (see 4), it breaks down how interpretations are socially produced. This grounding and focus were developed based on the initial empirical findings, which suggest that the concept of violence was formed based on negative foils ("not real violence"), for example.

Methodological questions/implications: From the perspectives of our two case studies, violence is a social phenomenon within the horizon of an order, where what is perceived as violence or what is considered and recognized as such is negotiated and defined (Staudigl 2014). This phenomenological view of Staudigl (2014) is adopted in Case Study 1 in a way that although situatedness remains the focus of the analysis, it is not violence as a social phenomenon that is of interest but rather the knowledge of those affected by intimate partner violence and their experiences that are to be considered situated and context-bound. Based on the interviews, it is to be reconstructed how the interpretations of the experiences of violence are embedded in the biographical narrative and what meanings they (thereby) have for those affected.

Moreover, violence is understood more broadly regarding relations of violation (see 3), although these are not the focus. Rather, the heuristic concept analyzes how respondents interpret the violence they experience and what meaning they ascribe to it. This approach also makes it possible to identify ambivalences and ambiguities in the interpretations and meanings of violence and to subsequently analyze and theorize them (Nordmann 2011).

The aspect of deconstruction also has methodological implications: According to Derrida (2009) these positings emerge only in a particular social context where they are understood as such. The goal of deconstruction is not to

understand these dualities as given opposites but rather to ask how it comes about that these binaries are socially accepted as such and how they are (re)produced. Deconstruction allows for uncovering the (re)production of interpretations/meanings within their social framework. Using the epistemological perspective of deconstruction, the social order in which the negotiation is processed and thus the interpretive practices are embedded becomes accessible (Rodríguez 1996).

Summary: On the level of theorization in the comparative perspective, these cases clarify the following main points. Because meaning is deferred endlessly, as Derrida (2009) pointed out, concepts are defined by what they are not. Types of violence are thus defined by the tension between concepts that creates narratives. Consequently, considering a theory of violence and how such narratives may impact perceptions of (different forms of) violence is imperative. Moreover, they are reproduced in research through the dimension of subjectivity and how to address it. This highlights the social conditionality of the subject, which can be read as a characteristic expression of social order.

Considering the aspect of social order, it is important to note that research approaches that can be assigned to Collins's (2011) situational paradigm do not explicitly attribute explanatory character as causes of (social-structural) contextual factors, such as age or gender, to explain violent situations. This is an aspect that also needs to be considered with questions of subjectivity in processes of theorizing. It is in research and theorizing as such – in the process of discovery and construction – that violence is multilaterally generated. That is, research is also formed by age, gender, etc., and questions about their unvalued judgments – nothing else is the determination of violence – are embedded in these structures and contexts of experience.

Based on the explanations of the contingency of violence, it can be exemplified to what extent a shift of focus from theory to theorizing – that is, to the activities that researchers perform in the discovery context of research – is relevant for research on violence. Thus, outlining the development and application of context-sensitive heuristics of violence can help transparently trace how findings have incorporated their constructions of elicitation and analysis, for instance. This includes how violence is conceptualized in the field access, and the interview situation and as an analytical heuristic in the analysis, decisively shaping the production of knowledge and thus the findings (theory). The context of discovery is thus characterized by subjectivity and observational and constructional performances, which are also reflected in empirical (qualitative) social research; however, as explained, these reflections as a specific context of findings are relevant to flow into the sociological theory of violence (Hoebel and Koloma Beck 2019).

5.   "Journey Itinerary": The Process of Socially Doing/Producing (Theories/Interpretations of) Violence

The comparative perspective allows for making the contingency and contextuality of violence analytically productive. This became clear via the comparison of the theorization of the levels across contexts and phenomena statements of which violence is possible: the process of interpretation/evaluation, the classification of violence, the agentivation of artifacts and thus on a superordinate level to violence as a social phenomenon within the horizon of an order, the inclusion of additional sources in the negotiation of the interpretation of violence, the attribution of meaning, the epistemological framing of existing concepts of violence, and finally the methodological questions regarding implications (see discussion).

If these aspects are read as indexicalities of violence, the overarching process perspective is analytically productive for the sociology of violence. On the one hand, it is through this process perspective that it becomes clear how violence is multilaterally generated. On the other hand, this analytical generality makes it possible to reflexively change the understanding of the object. Thus, with the perspective of *theory* to *theorization*, the perspective shifts from the object of violence to the object of the negotiation/social production of violence. Following Braun (2020), we read these shifts toward discovering *how*-questions as a relevant endeavor of further theoretical-analytical developments for researching the complex phenomenon of violence. This is because the context of discovery allows for a methodologically (self-)reflected sociology of violence theory building. Thus, it should be situated in the current change in the broad sociology of violence (Hoebel and Malthaner 2019). Moreover, with the explicit focus on the context of discovery, which we have included in our contribution from a comparative perspective, we take the principle of comparison as a basis for our considerations of theorizing development potentials. The relevance of this perspective became clear in the two case studies. In particular, it outlines the contexts of discovery and the role of (inter)subjectivity because researchers, too, are significantly involved in producing hegemonic interpretations of violence by determining the perspectives of violence and the object of research, as could be illustrated.

In concrete terms, according to this perspective, violence is not to be reconstructed as a pure (situational) power dynamic whose goal is to establish an asymmetry between a person who exercises violence and a person who suffers violence but as a multilateral constellation and generation in which processes of interpretation are of constitutive importance. Whether, for example, a rape that occurs within marriage is considered a legitimate right of the spouse or an act of violence is not solely derived from the (physical)

confrontation of two persons but is rather decided in historically and socially preconfigured processes of interpretation and evaluation. The same became clear in violence against children in pedagogical institutions for the disabled: whether an act of violence can be legitimized pedagogically or is interpreted as social aggression is embedded in historically and socially preconfigured processes of interpretation and evaluation (Koloma Beck 2015).

Against the historical and social framework in which violence is classified in social processes, we argue that an empirical and analytical approach to violence cannot only occur as an object of (physical) experience and as a specific violent situation but also as an object of social and intersubjective processes of interpretation and negotiation. Because violence is embedded in specific context-related relations of power and domination, certain forms of violence are not considered violence, as they are legitimized or linguistically veiled. These can vary, such as depending on the social position of those affected by violence, the institutional and legal context, possible "observers" (Koloma Beck 2011), such as witnesses to the violence, and researchers examining the phenomenon. Therefore, classifying violence by those directly affected by it and by third parties observing and reflecting on it is an essential prerequisite for any further violence processing.

Our contribution supports the recommendation to focus on contexts of discovery in empirical terms for further theorization of violence as attempts to work on a general theory of violence also risk being merely theories of visible violence – not the process of socially doing/producing (theories/interpretations of) violence.

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