

## Stance and Engagement in Domestic Violence Victims' Narratives on Social Media

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### Abstract

The issue of domestic violence has become a subject of pervasive societal and academic attention. Notably, specific social media platforms have emerged as dedicated arenas for the discourse and documentation of domestic violence cases, serving both as support mechanisms for participants within these digital communities and as tools for broader public awareness and advocacy. This study therefore, investigates stance and engagement strategies adopted by narrators of domestic violence in their self-representations of abuse. In going about this, 18 excerpts were purposively selected from Domestic Violence Diary (1-4) and DomesticShelter.Org Victims and Survivor's Community. Findings from the study reveals that key stance and engagement features: boosters, self-mention, directives, and inclusive pronouns play significant rhetorical and psychosocial functions in domestic violence discourse. Boosters enhance the perceived truth-value of victims' statements, functioning as persuasive tools that amplify emotional intensity and strengthen narrative credibility. Self-mention foregrounds the victim's authorial presence and constructs a clear moral and emotional contrast between the in-group and out-group. Directives shift narratives from recounting to active guidance, fostering empowerment by encouraging victims to take specific steps toward safety and recovery. This positions survivor-generated discourse as an effective resource for support interventions.

**Keywords:** Stance and Engagement, Domestic Violence, Victims' narratives, Social media, Discourse, Boosters, Directives

### Introduction

This study operates within the comprehensive definition of domestic violence (DV) established by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1996) in European Commission (n.d.), which characterises it as any form of physical, psychological or sexual violence that affects subjects who have, had or intend to have an intimate relationship, couple or subjects who have within their family relationships of parental or affective nature. Consistent with this view, DV is conceptualised here as a multidimensional phenomenon that transcends physical assault to encompass psychological, emotional, and coercive forms of abuse. This behaviour is systematically utilised by perpetrators to exert dominance over partners or other nuclear family members.

DV can involve men, women, and children (Aragbuwa, 2021). Over time, the subject has attracted extensive scholarly engagement, becoming a focal point of interdisciplinary inquiry in fields such as: Health (Volpe, 1996), Psychology (Cordero, 2014), Legal (Ganley, 1998), History (Fox & Gadd, 2012; Hale et al., 2012) and even a subtle touch on it from the Humour perspective (Bamgbose, 2019). Also, considerable research has examined domestic violence from ideological, discursive, and corpus-based perspectives, however, limited attention has been directed towards analysing victim-centred narratives, particularly the ways in which victims strategise to take their stances and engage their audience through linguistic choices.

In response to the incessant DV issues cascading around the world, traditional, electronic and social media have continuously reported some of these incidents as they occur and their effects on children, education, environment, health, security among many others. Based on the numerous effects of DV, Facebook groups and blogs have been established to allow victims of DV to relate with one another as members with common interests, share their experiences and give an opportunity to victims and survivors to participate in a continuous educating and enlightening conversation with other members of the forum.

The theory of stance and engagement, developed by Hyland (2005), offers a nuanced framework for examining how language is used to position oneself in relation to subject matter and audience. Notably scarce in the existing body of literature is a focused application of stance and engagement theory to discourse domestic violence, particularly as it unfolds in digital public spheres. Social media platforms have become critical sites where victims, bystanders, activists, and even alleged perpetrators construct and contest narratives about domestic violence. These narratives are shaped not only by content but by rhetorical strategies, how speakers position themselves, invite solidarity, deflect blame, or seek empathy. The absence of robust scholarly attention to these forms of discourse represents a significant gap in the application of stance and engagement theory.

This study addresses that gap by examining social media discourse on domestic violence through the lens of stance and engagement. It investigates how language functions in these digital texts to express identity and solicit public response. Specifically, the study analyses the stances adopted by narrators in their representations of domestic violence, and examines how these narrators engage their readers or listeners through rhetorical choices. Consequently, the study not only extends the theoretical applicability of Hyland's model but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the linguistic construction of domestic violence in contemporary public discourse.

## **Literature Review**

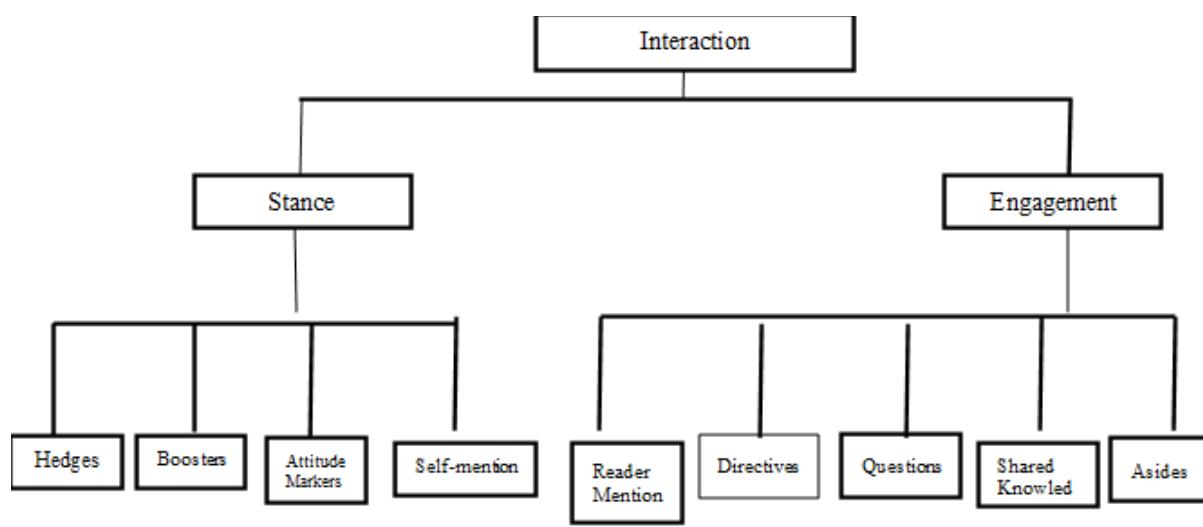
The theory of stance and engagement, as developed by Hyland (2005), offers a nuanced framework for examining how language is used to position oneself in relation to subject matter and audience through the use of hedges, boosters, self-mention and attitude markers. Stance reflects the writer or speaker's textual voice, while engagement signals the ways readers or listeners are invited into the discourse. Together, these elements reveal the interpersonal and dialogic dimensions of communication, enabling analysts to examine not only what is said, but how it is said. This theoretical lens has been extensively applied in the analysis of academic discourse, particularly in research focused on scholarly writing, student essays, and scientific communication. Previous studies have employed stance and engagement theory to examine how authors construct authority, align with readers, and position themselves within disciplinary conversations. However, the application of this framework has remained largely confined to formal academic genres, with limited exploration of its relevance to more dynamic, informal, and socially driven modes of discourse such as social media narratives.

Hyland (2005) conceptualises stance in academic writing as comprising three key components: evidentiality, affect, and presence. Evidentiality concerns the degree of commitment writers show towards the reliability of their claims, while affect reflects the emotional and

attitudinal tone embedded in the writing. Presence refers to how prominently writers project themselves into the text, which Hyland further breaks down into four rhetorical devices: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. Hedges are linguistic elements used to express uncertainty, thereby allowing writers to present statements as opinions rather than absolute facts. They help mitigate opposition by softening claims through modal verbs and adverbials like *might*, *suggest*, or *approximately* (Salager-Meyer, 1994). Boosters, on the other hand, serve the opposite function, they express certainty and assertiveness, reinforcing writer authority through terms like *clearly*, *must*, or *certainly* (Hyland, 2005; Moini & Salami, 2015). Attitude markers reveal the writer's evaluative stance toward propositions. These include words that show emotion or judgment, such as *unfortunately*, *prefer*, or *remarkable*, and can also involve punctuation or comparative constructions. Self-mention entails the use of first-person pronouns and possessives to assert authorship and authority, thereby combining both propositional and interpersonal dimensions (Hyland, 2001).

In contrast to stance, which centres on the writer's projection, engagement refers to how writers actively involve their readers in the discourse. Hyland (2005) identifies five main engagement strategies: reader pronouns, personal asides, appeals to shared knowledge, directives, and questions. Reader pronouns like *you* or *we* build a sense of community, while personal asides interrupt the main discourse to directly address readers and create rapport. Appeals to shared knowledge evoke common understandings, positioning the reader as a co-constructor of meaning. Directives invite readers to act, guiding them cognitively, textually, or physically. Questions function as rhetorical tools to prompt reflection, stimulate interest, and steer interpretation without demanding explicit responses (Hyland, 2005; Moini & Salami, 2015).

Together, stance and engagement are inherently dialogic, echoing Bakhtin's (1986) view that texts are shaped by the presence of real or imagined interlocutors. Hyland (1999) emphasises that these elements work in tandem to assert writer authority, sustain reader involvement, and enhance rhetorical effectiveness in academic discourse.



In their application of Stance and Engagement theory, Daniel and Unuabonah (2021) revealed the prevalence of directives among engagement markers in judicial texts. This reflected the normative nature of judicial texts and the intent to assert prescribed legal norms, contributing valuable insight into metadiscourse in the Nigerian legal context. While applying Hyland's Stance and Engagement model to analyse the rhetorical strategies in fifty Nigerian Supreme Court judgments, they discovered that judges primarily leveraged stance features over engagement features, frequently using self-mention devices to establish authorial presence.

In a like manner, Aragbuwa and Ayoola (2018) employed Haddington's and Hyland's models to analyse opposing gendered stances on Domestic Violence Against Men (DVAM) in Nigerian blog comments. The study found that female commentators expressed empathy for female aggressors, framing conflicts as mutual combat and implying male victims were initial aggressors. Male commentators countered this by arguing that women are inherently more violent and saw feminism as promoting aggression. The core finding is that while DVAM exists, the deep gender-based divergence in attitudes toward it complicates prevention efforts.

Osisanwo (2016) investigated the stance and engagement strategies employed by readers in the e-Punch newspaper's comment section regarding the former President Goodluck Jonathan administration's fight against Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria through the lens of Hyland's Stance and Engagement theory. The study qualitatively analysed 751 comments from six news articles published in 2014 and found that readers' stances were frequently influenced by underlying factors like religiosity, ethnicity, and political partisanship. These attitudes were conveyed through various engagement techniques, including questioning, shared knowledge, personal asides, and directives.

In a similar vein, Chiluwa and Odebutumi (2016) investigated online conversations on Nairaland regarding terrorist attacks in Nigeria, focusing on the negative evaluations of Boko Haram, Islam, and northern Nigeria. It utilises the appraisal theory to analyse the language used in expressing attitudes and emotions. The data were sourced from the Nairaland corpus, and the findings reveal that the consistent negative representations of Boko Haram and northern Nigeria could exacerbate religious and ethnic tensions in the country. The study also highlights Nairaland as a platform for Nigerians to engage in political debates about the nation.

While existing literature has effectively utilised metadiscourse models to analyse rhetorical strategies in diverse Nigerian contexts, ranging from judicial opinions and the expression of political/ethnic stances in online news commentary and forum discussions, there remains a significant gap in the specific linguistic examination of victim-centric domestic violence (DV) discourse. Though Aragbuwa and Ayoola (2018) addressed DV, their focus was on opposing gendered stances about DV against men (DVAM) by commentators, not the stance and engagement features employed by victims themselves as they narrate their trauma.

This study, therefore, fills a critical void by specifically applying Ken Hyland's Stance and Engagement theory to analyse how victims utilise these features, such as self-mention, boosters, and various engagement strategies to establish their subjective stances and actively engage their discourse participants within the sensitive domain of DV narratives, offering a novel, victim-focused sociolinguistic contribution.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to illuminate how victims of domestic violence (DV) construct and negotiate their experiences of abuse, analysing how their linguistic choices may influence public perception and response to DV. The analysis is guided by Ken Hyland's (2005) Stance and Engagement theory, emphasising the features present in the Stance and Engagement Schemata by Ken Hyland (Sayah et.al., 2014). The excerpts for the study were purposively retrieved from two distinct and highly interactive online platforms where DV narratives are shared by victims, ensuring a representation of both localised and global perspectives. The first source is Stella Dimoko Korkus' Domestic Violence Diary (SDK), which was specifically chosen for its localised relevance and dedicated focus on Nigerian female victims, thus providing narratives with cultural specificity and depth. The second source is the DomesticShelters.org Victims and Survivors Community (DSH) [<https://www.facebook.com/groups/DomesticSheltersCommunity/>], which was selected for its inclusive, multicultural context and global reach (over 4,000 members). This selection enriches the research with broader, non-Nigerian perspectives on DV, facilitating comparative insights beyond a single socio-cultural setting.

The data utilised consists of 18 purposively selected narratives shared by women DV victims: 10 narratives from DSH and 8 from SDK. This total, though not an even split, was deemed to be sufficient for an in-depth qualitative, close reading and comprehensive demonstration of the deployment of Hyland's Stance and Engagement tools, ensuring the excerpts are representative of the overall linguistic strategies utilised across the larger data set of victim accounts. The analysis is underpinned by Hyland's model, which categorises metadiscourse features into Stance, expressing attitude, certainty, or evaluation and Engagement. The analytical procedure involves a systematic close reading of selected narratives to identify, categorise, and interpret the rhetorical function of these features. This process illuminates how narrators establish credibility, assert the severity of abuse, and foster solidarity with their audience.

## **Data Presentation and Analysis**

### **Stance Features in Victims' Narratives**

The subsequent analysis categorises stance according to the features of Stance and Engagement theory of Hyland (2005), as it appears in the schema given by Sayah et.al. (2014)

### **Stance Markers**

#### **Hedges**

Slagar- Meyer (1994) describes hedges as "understatements used to convey (purposive) vagueness and tentativeness, and to make sentences more acceptable to the hearer/reader, thus increasing their chance of ratification and reducing the risk of negation. It indicates the writer's decision to withhold complete commitment to a proposition by making his information appear like an opinion rather than 'an accredited fact'. Rather than show certain knowledge, hedges present statements as that which is based on plausible reasoning. In this section we need you to illustrate with your data, not hypothetical examples

### **Excerpt 1**

Like all that sounds **like** someone, whether male or female, that someone was in my house and that they **likely** stayed the night because why else would someone be in there, right? DSH

In Excerpt 1, the victim employs the hedges *like* and *likely* as downtoners to mitigate the assertiveness of her claim that a stranger slept with her husband in their home during her absence. By using these linguistic devices, she strategically attenuates her commitment to the veracity of her statement. This linguistic strategy serves a dual purpose: it allows her to avoid presenting her claim as a definitive truth, acknowledging the potential for uncertainty or alternative interpretations. Simultaneously, it fosters a more inclusive and receptive discursive environment, inviting readers to engage with her narrative and offer their own perspectives.

### **Excerpt 2**

**Some** Men will try to diminish your Self Worth/esteem -SDK

The narrator in this excerpt strategically employs the indefinite pronoun *some* to mitigate the assertiveness of her statement about men. By using *some* rather than a more definitive quantifier, the narrator avoids making a categorical claim and instead presents their viewpoint as tentative and open to interpretation. This linguistic strategy, often referred to as downtowner, serves to soften the impact of the statement on the listener, suggesting that her perspective is subjective and may not be universally shared. From the data, hedges were minimally used by victims in narrating their experiences when compared with other features of stance and engagement present in the study.

### **Boosters**

Hyland (2005) views boosters as "a tool which strengthen the claim by showing the writer's certainty, conviction, and commitment, helping the writers affect interpersonal solidarity".

Boosters allow writers/speakers to express their certainty about a claim. Salager-Meyer (1997) views boosters as those lexical items by means of which the writer can show strong confidence in a proposition. Therefore, a writer or speaker presents their work with assurance while affecting interpersonal solidarity.

### **Excerpt 3**

I'm **terribly** turned off by him because he just keeps showing me **over and over** that he doesn't want to actually be the person he says he can be. DSH

The victims' utterances in this excerpt employs the intensifier *terribly* to modify the verb phrase *turned off*, thereby accentuating the degree of her disappointment with her partner's attitude. This linguistic device highlights the emotional impact of his behaviour. Furthermore, the adverbial booster *actually* is used to emphasise the contrast between her partner's professed intentions to improve on his subsequent actions, thereby reinforcing the narrator's sense of disillusionment.

#### Excerpt 4

they are beasts of no nation! D (The) guy i wanted to marry was a **serial beater**, so handsome a guy but he can **punch a corpse to a pulp**, i had to run for my life, it was **like a thunderbolt** when he saw me walking away. SDK

The narrator in Excerpt 4 employs a range of linguistic devices to convey her attitudes towards domestic violence and her experiences of resistance. These devices, primarily adjectival modifiers and figurative language, serve to amplify the narrators' perspectives and strengthen her stance. The narrator characterises her abuser as a *serial beater*, utilising the adjective *serial* as an intensifier to emphasise the repetitive nature of the abuse. This characterisation is further reinforced through the hyperbole *punch a corpse to a pulp*, which hyperbolically foregrounds the severity of the violence inflicted upon her. This hyperbolic language functions as a rhetorical device to highlight the narrator's strong conviction and the desperate situation that compelled her to resist. The simile *like a thunderbolt* is used in the same excerpt to describe the sudden and decisive nature of the narrator's decision to leave her abuser. This figurative language serves as a metaphorical booster, amplifying the impact of her choice and the urgency with which she acted.

#### Excerpt 5

he **never** allows her family visit and the **worst** of all when I was 13 he abused me and kept it on till I got pregnant at 14, **most** nights she cries to sleep and all I can do is watch and pray for her as she sees it like her burden. Did I forget to tell u that my dad's family lived with him? **Oh! Yes!!!** She was brought to his family house where I can tell u that his family took turns to beat her- I'm not saying stories I didn't witness. I'm 26, I can remember events as early as 6years(they have destroyed my brain with evil memories) SDK

The narrator deliberately utilises a range of boosters to move beyond simple factual reporting, forcefully communicating the severity, duration, and emotional depth of the suffering endured by both herself and her mother. The use of the absolute negation "never" *he never allows her family visit* establishes a boundary of total isolation, emphasising that the pain is compounded by a lack of external support. This isolation is immediately followed by the superlative adjective "worst" *the worst of all when I was 13 he abused me*, which frames the subsequent revelation of personal abuse as the highest degree of betrayal and pain. Furthermore, the superlative adverb "most" boosts the frequency of the mother's despair, asserting that her suffering is a chronic, unrelenting reality rather than an episodic event. This extreme description is emotionally amplified by the exclamatory booster *Oh! Yes!!!*, which demands the reader's attention and conviction regarding the abuser's family joining in the beatings. Through this strategic deployment of intensifiers, the narrator successfully adopts a stance of undeniable certainty regarding the overwhelming and generational pain caused by the domestic violence.

#### Excerpt 6

But trust me, he is **so** loving to outsiders no one will believe he talks or treat me like a house mate at times and not his wife. SDK

The use of the adverbial booster “so” in, *he is so loving to outsiders* is a crucial stance feature that serves to linguistically amplify the abuser's positive public image, creating an extreme and hyperbolic contrast with his private cruelty *treat me like a house mate*. This linguistic emphasis effectively exposes the abuser's calculated manipulation and two-faced nature, which is a common tactic in domestic violence. Simultaneously, by highly boosting the abuser's public persona, the narrator justifies her internal pain and the extreme difficulty of her situation, as confirmed by the phrase *no one will believe*. This consequence functions as an implicit booster of the victim's isolation. Thus, the narrator's pain is amplified not just by the abuse itself, but by the knowledge that the abuser's successfully manufactured public image makes her experience unbelievable to outsiders. Ultimately, the booster “so” is a powerful tool for adopting a stance that simultaneously condemns the abuser's deceit and validates the narrator's lonely struggle for credibility.

### **Self Mention**

It refers to ‘the presence of the writers' identity, style and interpersonal information Hyland (2001). This is achieved through the presentation of 'propositional, affective and interpersonal information with the use of first person pronoun and possessive adjective.

### **Excerpt 7**

He is here, **my** crazy criminal mind husband is here, **I** ran away from him since one year after being in abusive relationship for 22years **I** can't remember any day passed without being beaten, spit on, or humiliated. When **I** came to US **I** was so weak and fragile, **I** went to a therapist whom she helped me to move on and get stronger everyone here told **me** to stop remembering him as he is in another continent, **my** life started getting better **I** became stronger **I**'m starting more than one business and life stated to be good again. And now this happened he's here **I** didn't see him yet but **I** am sure he's coming to kill me as he has no business here to do. So please ladies tell me what can **I** do **I** can't hide in **my** house forever. Shall **I** call the police report him you think they'll take action. God **I**'m so scared  **I** thought **I** am done with him – DSH

In Excerpt 7, The use of first-person pronouns and autobiographical detail, as seen in expressions such as “*I ran away...*,” “*I can't remember any day...*,” and “*I'm starting more than one business*,” serves a crucial rhetorical function. By weaving personal experiences through the personal pronouns in both objective and subjective cases, the writer projects a distinct identity and builds credibility through lived reality. This strategy positions the narrator simultaneously as a witness recounting past trauma and as an active participant charting a path from victimhood to survival and eventually to empowerment as an entrepreneur. The effect is a strengthening of ethos: the speaker's claims about fear and abuse are anchored in authentic personal history, which foregrounds the seriousness of the threat and also compels empathy and trust from the reader.

### **Excerpt 8**

For **me**, it means letting go of all the toxicity endured by a narcissist. **I** wave goodbye to the hurtful words you spoke, the flashback of abuse in every form, the public humiliation, the lies you told and still to this day tell others about **me**. **I** kick down the pedestal you put yourself on. You don't deserve any more of **my** energy or tears, **I** pity the next poor soul you pretend to love. Finally, **I** am free of you, **I** will continue to love me and do what makes me happy. **I** am gorgeous, smart, confident, witty, fun to be around, **I**'m a great person and still believe in true love. **I** was buried in shame and tears, **I** tipped toed so much to keep peace, that **I** ultimately silenced **myself**. **I** am brave now in sharing with others about what happened to **me**. Hmmm, **I** win by finally letting your ass go -DSH

In Excerpt 8, The pervasive self-mention is deployed to establish the narrator's agency and positive self-identity, moving the stance from past victimhood to present self-mastery. The continuous affirmation: *I am free of you, I will continue to love me, I am gorgeous, smart, confident, witty*, and the definitive *I win*, functions as the linguistic core of the in-group. This construction establishes a powerful identity rooted in self-worth that was previously denied by the abuse. This empowered self is then defined in direct opposition to the abuser, who is consistently assigned to the out-group using the confrontational second-person pronoun "you." The "you" is associated with all toxicity and harm ("hurtful words you spoke," "the lies you told"), which the narrator explicitly rejects and waves goodbye to. Thus, the narrator strategically leverages self-mention to build an unassailable sense of self, using the resulting clarity to linguistically isolate and condemn the abuser, effectively solidifying the boundaries between the virtuous in-group (the self/survivor) and the toxic out-group (the abuser).

### **Excerpt 9**

no more beatings oh ... but he used every tool he had in him to finish **me**... Used every resource and was never satisfied .... He now will bring all of us **me** and the children to the table and report their "useless mother" to them... He withdrew the whip and replaced it with words....abuse....curses...financial and emotional starvation.....called a meeting and told those present that he will never sleep with **me** again...(he said he didn't have a reason)... he claimed his business had gone bad....while mine now chose that time to flourish..that **I** am a witch....a power.....that **I** want to bring him down.... (Yes **I** couldn't leave... He literally came to re do his vows with me when he came to appeal to my parents, so how do **I** go back and say the wahala started from the night **we** moved back in) -SDK

The core of the analysis rests on the subtle but powerful use of self-mention ("me," "I") as the narrator's focal point. While the abuser dominates the action, the victim's limited self-mention anchors the entire sequence of events to her subjective experience of pain ("finish me," "how do I go back..."). This focus on "me" ensures the psychological torment described through non-physical abuses like *words... abuse... curses... financial and emotional starvation* is understood as a targeted

campaign aimed at the annihilation of her person, moving the discourse beyond physical assault into the realm of coercive control.

This linguistic division constructs the out-group through the pronoun "he," who is presented as the singular agent of malice ("he used every tool he had in him to finish me," "he withdrew the whip and replaced it with words"). In direct opposition, the narrator establishes the in-group through self-mention, "me/I/us" (including the children), which defines the victims as the collective enduring the abuse. This narrative uses the contrast between the third-person pronoun "he" and the first-person pronouns "me/I" to establish an agonising discourse of psychological pain and to solidify a clear out-group/in-group categorisation.

### **Excerpt 10**

I hate that tonight he sent **me** a fb msg and violated the restraining order. **I** had to report it because we still have a domestic violence and court hearings in the future. Why do **I** feel so guilty and torn? It's good **I** report him but **I** feel so terrible. My kids will be proud and happy he's going to jail but **I** feel awful and guilty **I** am doing this. Any insight and support is welcome. **I**'ve never reported from previous restraining orders and **I** don't know how to carry these mixed emotions. Thank you for listening DSH

Similarly, the self-mention (the pronoun "I") in Excerpt 10 functions as a powerful discourse of pain by providing unmediated access to the narrator's agonising internal emotional conflict. The copious use of the first-person pronoun in this narrative serves to centre the victim's subjective experience of the aftermath of the abuse. Self-mention is used to articulate the painful tension between necessary action and psychological turmoil, as seen in the statements: *I hate that, I had to report it, but I feel so guilty and torn, and I feel awful and guilty I am doing this*. This frequent appeal to personal feeling highlights the core trauma of coercive control: the victim feels intense guilt and emotional pain for taking the protective, correct action of reporting the abuser. The narrator takes ownership of actions like reporting the violation *I had to report it* but simultaneously foregrounds the isolation and despair inherent in managing the emotional fallout *I don't know how to carry these mixed emotion*). By focusing the entire account on the "I" and its associated complex feelings (guilt, hatred, being torn), the narrative transforms from a factual report into a raw document of psychological suffering, making the pain palpable to the reader and urgently soliciting support.

### **Attitude markers:**

Attitude markers signal the writer or speaker's affective rather than epistemic attitude. Attitudes such as surprise, frustration, agreement are displayed through markers, such (e.g. prefer, agree, unfortunately, hopefully, logical, remarkable, etc.). Other attitudinal markers are punctuation, subordination, comparative, progressive particles

### Excerpt 11

I just left my **psychologically, emotionally and physically** abusive husband about 2 months ago! After 13 years of trying to endure!! Better to be alive to take (take) care of your kids SDK

The speaker characterises her former partner as “psychologically, emotionally, and physically abusive.” The use of these adverbs functions as attitude markers, signalling the narrator’s negative evaluation of her abuser’s behaviour. The series of adverbs emphasises the multifaceted nature of the abuse, highlighting its impact on multiple dimensions of her well-being. The exclamation marks following the first two clauses, *I just left my psychologically, emotionally and physically abusive husband about 2 months ago! After 13 years of trying to endure!!* serve to amplify the emotional intensity of her statement. These punctuation marks convey a sense of shock, disbelief, and perhaps even relief. The exclamatory construction, *After 13 years of trying to endure!!* highlights the duration and intensity of the abuse she endured. This suggests a sense of incompleteness, implying that the full extent of her suffering cannot be fully captured in words. Despite the adversity she has faced, the narrator’s ultimate goal is to keep alive to be able to nurture her children. This statement reveals her unwavering commitment to her children’s well-being, even in the face of immense personal hardship. They made use of attitude markers to express shock, disbelief

### Excerpt 12

I was **frustrated, depressed and angry** each time prior to it happening. I’m about 9years in from where I started moving into intentional and conscious healing (healing is ongoing and nerverendering DSH

The verbs *frustrated, depressed* and *angry* function as **attitude markers**, indicating the emotional impact of the domestic violence experienced by the narrator. These lexical choices reveal her negative affective attitude towards the abuse, reflecting the psychological distress it caused. Despite having embarked on a healing journey nearly nine years ago, the narrator asserts that the process is ongoing, suggesting the enduring nature of trauma.

### Engagement Strategies in the Narratives

Apart from taking a stance as described above, domestic violence victims engage their victims in a number of ways, ranging from the use of reader pronouns, asides, questions, and directives to reference shared knowledge. Through these strategies, narrators bridge the gap between their readers and themselves, by ‘anticipating possible objections and guiding their thinking’ (Hyland 2011, Pg.200)

**Reader Pronoun:** The reader pronoun is the most explicit strategy the narrators use to engage discourse participants and the surest way of doing that is through the second person pronoun ‘you’ and the possessive adjective, ‘your’ (Hyland, 2005). They help the writer or speaker to acknowledge the presence of his discourse participant over a given proposition

### Excerpt 13

After he kicked us out... And all the drama that went with it, we came back....again..... **You** wonder why I kept coming back... And I would want **you** to read my earlier posts... Some factors had not been sorted... Finances being a major aspect...plus the fact that He is such a charismatic person that when he begs.... He goes all the way... This time round he brought extended family to come....wrote an undertaken that he will never hurt me.... Pledged love and all... And we got back again. SDK

The narrators in Excerpts 13 employ personal pronouns and possessive adjectives such as “you” and “your” to engage the reader in their narratives. This technique, known as **reader pronoun usage**, serves to create a sense of intimacy and shared experience between the writer and the reader. For instance, in the statement *If someone is causing you great anguish, you need to stay away from them*, the narrator offers advice to the reader, fostering a sense of connection. By using reader pronouns, the narrator acknowledges the presence of the discourse participant and create opportunities for dialogue. This linguistic strategy enhances the reader's engagement with the text and facilitates a deeper understanding of the narrator's experiences.

**Personal Asides:** Personal asides a key reader-oriented strategy that allows writers to address readers directly; hence, by turning to the reader in mid-flow, the writer acknowledges and responds to an active audience, often to initiate a brief dialogue that is largely interpersonal. Personal asides concentrate more on building the relationship between the narrator and the reader or listener as the case may be. ‘It is an intervention simply to connect: to show that both reader and narrator are in the same game and are in a position to draw on shared understandings. (Hyland, 2005).

### Excerpt 14

Was a victim of DV for about 5 years from the first day i got married. I am an educated girl who worked hard but because of his own style of abuse, i was practically solely responsible for my 2 kids and i. **This is for those ladies who keep saying they dont have enough money to leave an abuser.** When my husband kicked me out, because in his words he didnt want to kill me, i had 7k in my account. He was the one that told me the amount because i had a bank account in the bank he worked. SDK

In Excerpt 14, the narrator pauses her narrative to address the reader directly, stating, *This is for those ladies who keep saying they don't have enough money to leave an abuser.* This aside serves as a form of direct address, inviting the reader to reflect on their own experiences and empathise with the narrator's situation. This technique of using personal asides, as suggested by Hyland (2005), allows the narrators to acknowledge and respond to an active audience, initiating a brief, interpersonal dialogue.

## Appeals to Shared Knowledge

Appealing to shared knowledge is a technique employed by writers to engage their readers by referencing experiences that are presumed to be familiar. By invoking shared knowledge, writers can create a sense of connection and understanding with their audience, fostering a more effective and persuasive discourse. The concept of shared knowledge is highly contextual. By recognising and tapping into this shared knowledge, writers can streamline communication and enhance the overall impact of their message.

### Excerpt 15

I am really proud of myself. And I am really sick to my stomach that things still trigger that response. I just want people to see that it may never end, but it does get better. I know we are all in different stages of healing. Telling our stories helps everyone in this group. DSH

The narrator in Excerpt 15 utilises the inclusive pronoun *we* to create a sense of shared knowledge and understanding between themselves and their readers. By employing this linguistic device, they position the reader as a co-participant in the discourse, inviting them to engage with the topic at hand. In the excerpt, the narrator acknowledges the diverse stages of healing that readers may be experiencing. By using *we*, the narrator creates a sense of solidarity and shared experience, suggesting that both she and the reader are part of a collective journey towards recovery. The use of the inclusive *we* in these excerpts enhances the reader's engagement with the text and fosters a sense of empathy and connection. By positioning the reader as a co-participant in the discourse, the narrators create a more intimate connection.

## Directives

Directives deal with instructing the reader to carry out an action as determined by the writer through the use of imperatives. Hyland (2002) notes that readers can be directed to engage in three kinds of activity; namely, textual acts, physical acts or cognitive acts.

### Excerpt 16

Pick one thing to work on intentionally healing and when you start working on one thing, other things will follow. DSH

The speaker employs directives as an engagement strategy that involves instructing or advising the reader to perform a specific action. These directives serve as a form of empowerment for victims of domestic violence, encouraging them to take control of their situation and seek help. The directives found in this set of data can be categorised into two main types: cognitive directives and physical directives. Cognitive directives aim to influence the reader's thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes. For example, the narrator in excerpt 16 offers a cognitive directive by suggesting a practical approach to healing: *Pick one thing to work on intentionally healing and when you start working on one thing, other things will follow.* This directive encourages victims to break down the healing process into smaller, manageable steps, making it less overwhelming

### **Excerpt 17**

Run, don't walk, AWAY from this man. They do NOT change. (a woman pointing a gun at her own head because of DV DSH

Excerpt 17 offers a direct physical directive: *Run, don't walk, AWAY from this man*. This instruction is provided to a woman who, overwhelmed by trauma inflicted by her abuser, has resorted to threatening self-harm. Through the directives which come in the form of advice, narrators foster empathy and connection with their listeners/readers. This emotional resonance can empower readers to take action, both for their own benefit and for the benefit of others. The cognitive and physical directives found in this data offer clear and actionable advice. By providing specific steps or strategies, they help readers to navigate difficult situations. This points to the fact that directives can be a powerful tool for engaging readers and motivating them to take action.

### **Questions**

It functions as a strategy to involve the reader in an engaging dialogue which brings the interlocutor into an arena to be led to the writer's viewpoint (Hyland, 2002). It is an 'excellent dialogic tool' that performs the function of arousing the interest and curiosity of the readers over an argument, hence, it serves as an engagement and rhetorical marker to strategically position the reader such that he is not given the opportunity to answer the question posed because the writer immediately answers it and allows the reader to follow where the argument leads.

### **Excerpt 18**

Once is one time too many...trust me!! Let's look at this another way...what are you needing that you feel you need to get high?? What need is that filling? You are a new mother...your behavior should evolve around what's best for baby...if you continue on this path, you and your baby will suffer the consequences...is getting high worth an accident or having your child taken from. you? DSH

In Excerpt 18, the question, *What are you needing that you feel you need to get high? What need is that filling?* is posed not to elicit a response, but rather to offer guidance to a new mother struggling with drug addiction. The subsequent advice, *You are a new mother...your behaviour should evolve around what's best for baby...* reinforces the speaker's intent. In this instance, the narrators strategically utilise questions as an engagement marker to position the reader to engage them and/or accept their perspective, limiting the opportunity for alternative viewpoints.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from the analysis reveal that the stance features serve a function of rhetorical empowerment and persuasion. In a social context often marked by scepticism, these devices, especially boosters function as a strategy to strengthen the truth-value of the victims' assertions. By amplifying their emotional pain, narrators aim to foster empathy and alignment with readers, making their narratives effective tools for raising awareness and promoting action against DV. Ultimately, analysing the stance features offers a micro-linguistic window into the macro-

phenomenon of domestic violence, illustrating how language is deployed to assert truth and communicate the depth of suffering. Also, the pervasive use of self-mention (the pronoun “I”) in domestic violence (DV) narratives is crucial for establishing the victim’s authorial presence and narrative credibility, a vital function in a context often marked by scepticism toward victims. Linguistically, the “I” foregrounds the subjective experience of trauma, allowing narrators to express complex internal conflicts and suffering “*I feel so guilty and torn*”, thereby enriching the understanding of psychological responses to abuse. Furthermore, self-mention is instrumental in delineating the in-group/out-group dynamic, positioning the victim’s agency and feelings in direct opposition to the abuser’s actions, thereby solidifying the clarity and emotional force of the account.

Similarly, the analysis of the engagement features reveals that directives, which manifest as explicit instructions or counsel, serve as a crucial engagement strategy, shifting the narrative focus from mere testimony to active empowerment. They encourage victims to take concrete steps toward control and recovery. This analysis yields several key implications for DV research and intervention. Firstly, identifying the specific, effective linguistic phrasing of these directives can directly inform the development of more relatable and effective intervention materials (such as guidance for shelters or hotlines). Finally, the prominence of directives underscores the power of peer-to-peer communication in online support communities, suggesting that survivor-generated language is a highly effective tool for motivation and change

The primary implication of appealing to shared knowledge through the inclusive pronoun “we” in domestic violence (DV) narratives is its function in linguistically constructing collective identity and therapeutic solidarity. This discursive strategy immediately forms an in-group of survivors, effectively countering the isolation central to abusive tactics by affirming that the reader is not alone, thereby validating their ongoing struggle and normalising the long-term impact of trauma. This rhetorical positioning fosters intimacy and empathy, framing the entire communicative act as a shared therapeutic effort where both the narrator and reader are co-participants in recovery. Consequently, this linguistic feature underscores the effectiveness of peer-to-peer communication in online support, providing crucial insight into the common challenges and milestones recognised by survivors, which can ultimately inform and refine professional intervention and therapeutic models.

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